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THAT WILD
WHEEL—



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“Miss Judith sat nervously awaiting her opportunity, with the letter from Switzerland held between thumb and finger.” [See p. 20.]

THAT WILD WHEEL

A Novel

BY

FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE

AUTHOR OF "AMONG ALIENS" "THE SACRISTAN'S HOUSEHOLD"
"LIKE SHIPS UPON THE SEA" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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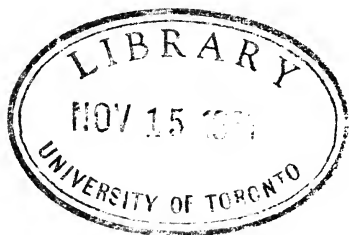
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THAT WILD WHEEL.

“Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.”

TENNYSON'S "Idylls of the King."

CHAPTER I.

It was the middle of September. Tyburnia and Belgravia were doubtless duly depopulated, and blankly fronted, with shuttered windows, such unfashionable individuals as might occasionally wake the sleeping echoes of their pavement. But in a certain London thoroughfare, on a certain Saturday evening, the life of the great city roared and rushed as usual; unconscious of the absence of a few thousand individuals, as the main body of a mighty river is unaffected by the ebb and flow that periodically fills and empties some shallow creek.

The air was mild and soft; and jets of gas flaring nakedly in butchers' shops and above greengrocers' stalls made blurs of coarse yellow light in the hazy dusk. The brassy voices of the venders shouting their wares seemed to bear a queer analogy to the flaring lights, and to offend the ear with much the same sort of unpleasant sensation as the crude glare inflicted on the eye.

Certainly none of the senses were caressed by the sights, sounds, and scents of that crowded street. Stalls filled with heterogeneous lumps of raw meat, vast piles of cabbages in various stages of staleness, apples, oranges, onions, fish, mingled their odors with the smell of gas and sawdust, the hot steam from

cookshops, and sickening whiffs from the public-houses, whose doors were swinging backward and forward with ceaseless movement of a pendulum, as the human tide poured in and out at those gaudy, gilded portals. Poverty decent and poverty dirty, poverty defiant and poverty depressed, frowsy rags, flaunting mock velvets, and dog's-eared artificial flowers, jostled each other on the filthy pavement, and were impartially appealed to by the leather-lunged butcher in a stentorian yell to "Buy, buy, buy!"

And what a nightmare of faces as they streamed into the quivering glare of the gaslights! Drunken faces, hungry faces, sick faces; brutal, timid, anxious, reckless, smiling faces, in endless variety. Very few with any trace of beauty; for the throng at that time and place was largely composed of a class so poor as to be often insufficiently fed, and seldom wholesomely fed. Starvation streaked with gin is not a regimen favorable to bodily perfection; neither has the pallor induced by foul air that cream-tinted whiteness admired by some poetic minds.

Nevertheless, a figure belonging to some higher social stratum would now and then come from the crowd into the hazy halo around a gas-jet, pass across it, and recede into comparative dimness. Just as the most energetic of the salesmen outside a large butcher's shop divided the shuddering air with a tremendous yell, there appeared, strongly illuminated by the meteoric glare of his lights, a face which differed from the faces around it, as the stars differ from the gas. It was rather pretty than beautiful, but its charm lay in its exquisite refinement of expression. It affected one at first sight with a sense of infinite delicacy, sensibility, and purity. Since, however, these qualities are far from being universally attractive, the owner of the face in question passed along without incurring any special attention or admiration.

She was a girl of about twenty years of age, very poorly dressed, and evidently well accustomed to walk about alone. She moved with a swift, steady pace, threading her way composedly through the crowd, and apparently undisturbed by the many repulsive sights and sounds which assailed her senses. It is said that use can harden one to almost anything. But certain very sensitive souls have a peculiar way of retreating within themselves. It is not that they are hardened against coarse impressions; but they hide from them, and take refuge, like a beleaguered garrison, in



“Just as the most energetic of the salesmen outside a large butcher’s shop divided the shuddering air with a tremendous yell.”

the innermost citadel, leaving an inferior kind of bodily perceptions to man the outward walls.

Presently the girl turned out of the great thoroughfare into a side street that was comparatively dark and quiet, and stopped at a door with a brass plate bearing the words, "Miss Hughes. Day School for Young Ladies." The house, like all its neighbors to right and left, was shabby with a positive and hopeless shabbiness—distinctly below anything which could justify the compound epithet "shabby-genteel." This was shabbiness simple and ungenteeled; and yet the house was marked by one characteristic redeeming it from absolute squalor, and distinguishing it from its neighbors—all those parts of it which could be cleaned by the personal efforts of its inmates were clean. The window-panes glittered without a smear; the brass door-plate was burnished until it shone like gold; the stone steps leading down into the miserable little area had been carefully swept. That the bricks of which the house was built were incrustated with a deep layer of grime, and that the paint was so dingy as to make its original hue a mere matter of conjecture, gave a peculiar value to these evidences of neatness, which gained a charm by contrast, like the flash of ivory teeth out of a swarthy face.

The girl whose footsteps we have been following rang at the bell, and almost immediately the door was opened by an elderly woman servant, who, saluting the young lady by the name of "Miss Barbara," observed that she was a bit later than usual.

"No; I think not, Larcher," answered Miss Barbara. Her speech was in delightful harmony with her face. It was pleasant in tone, and had that finished, clear-cut simplicity which denotes culture. Refined gold is a much simpler substance than the rough ore.

"Ah, well, perhaps it was mistress being impatient to see you made her think you late," answered the woman.

"I hope Aunt Judith has not been uneasy about me?" said Barbara, taking off her cloak, which she hung on a peg in the narrow passage.

"Oh no, Miss Barbara; not to say uneasy. But she's been fidgeting for you to come home." Then, dropping her voice, Larcher added, "She's had a letter; but of course you'll hear all about it."

Without waiting for any further parley, Barbara entered the

front room, which was the sole sitting-room of the family. Here a round table was spread for tea, and, in spite of the mild temperature out of doors, a glowing fire burned in the grate. A square of dark drugget covered the middle of the floor, the rest of which displayed bare boards, white with many scrubblings. Such pieces of furniture as were modern were of the plainest and cheapest sort; but a few old-fashioned articles—a couple of arm-chairs, a corner cupboard of carved oak, a convex mirror in a gilt frame of the period of the first empire—were handsome and solid. A guitar-case stood in one corner; and, in another, a set of plain deal shelves, edged with red leather neatly nailed along them, held a small collection of books. The most noticeable feature in the room was a number of sketches in oil and water-colors, many of them unframed, which decorated the walls. These drawings were not such as one would expect to find in that shabby house in an obscure back street. Many of them were masterly; and all, even the roughest, were unmistakably the work of no mean artist.

The only occupant of this room when Barbara opened the door was a little old lady, seated in an arm-chair drawn close up to one side of the hearth, while her feet, supported on a low hassock, were stretched out in front of the fire so as to enjoy its full heat. She had delicate regular features, remarkably beautiful dark eyes, thick black eyebrows, and silky tendrils of snow-white hair curling from beneath her cap down each side of her face.

At the sound of the opening door she looked up eagerly. "Oh, I am so glad you have come, Barbara," she said, in a flute-like old voice, which, though sweet, had lost its freshness, as the worsteds in an elaborate sampler hanging above the round mirror on the wall had faded into mere ghosts of blue and scarlet. But there was nothing at all ghost-like in the appearance of Miss Judith Hughes. She was plump and well-nourished; with a pink color—somewhat heightened just now by the fire—in her round cheeks.

Her grandniece—for such was the relationship between them—advanced into the room, gently kissed the old lady's forehead, and remained standing by her side, but withdrawn as far as possible out of the range of the fire. The little room was oppressively warm to one coming from the open air; but a hot fire was one of Aunt Judith's few luxuries, and Barbara did not complain.

"Take off your hat, my dear," said Miss Hughes. "No; don't

carry it up-stairs yet. Sit down. I want to speak to you without delay."

The girl obeyed, seating herself at once, and taking off her shabby black straw hat, which she held as a screen between her face and the fire.

"First of all, my dear," continued the old lady, "I must tell you that I have had a letter from poor Claude—a letter that makes me extremely anxious, and—"

"Is my brother ill?" interrupted Barbara, hastily.

"No, no, child—that is, not alarmingly ill. But he is never robust, poor dear boy. William does not, I think, quite understand how delicate Claude is."

"Uncle William has always been very good to Claude," put in Barbara, gently.

"Good! Of course he has been good! Who should know that better than I? But a man is sometimes a little too harsh—no; not harsh, perhaps, but severe; too strictly severe. Especially towards one of his own sex. William expects a great deal from a young man. And, after all, our poor Claude is but a child in some things still. But now, see here: I want to speak to you about it before your Uncle William comes in."

During this speech Miss Hughes had taken her spectacles from her pocket, adjusted them on her nose, and smoothed out a letter written on foreign paper with a fat little brown hand, on the third finger of which she wore an old-fashioned seal-ring. Then she said, "I had better, perhaps, to save time, just read the most important parts to you, Barbara—the part that explains his leaving Vevey."

"Leaving Vevey!" exclaimed Barbara. The consternation in her tone evidently irritated Miss Hughes, who answered with a quick testiness which made her eyes sparkle and her winter-apple cheeks flush. "There—there, don't be explosive, Barbara! He has not left Vevey—yet."

Then she began to read: "'My dearest, best old Auntie,—I am ever so much obliged to you for the enclosure in your last—' Oh no; that's nothing; a little private word of my own to him. Where is it? Oh! Here, I have it: 'It is with the greatest reluctance that I have come to the conclusion that Vevey does not agree with my health.' *Does not agree*: he has scored that un-

derneath. 'I have struggled on, fearing to give trouble at home, and to displease my uncle'—poor dear boy!—'but I grow worse day by day. The air from the lake is so damp. The autumn has set in rainy, and people here say we are likely to have a wet winter. I cough very often, and have pains in my limbs.'"

At this point Miss Hughes took off her spectacles and turned an eloquently appealing glance on the girl beside her. But Barbara did not look up. She was sitting quite still, in a listening attitude, her head bent down, her face in shadow, and the lamp-light making effects of chiaroscuro among the smooth coils of her brown hair.

"Well!" cried Aunt Judith, "what do you say to that, Barbara? It is impossible to read such things unmoved. Poor fellow!—poor Claude! Coughing and suffering pains in his limbs! The place is killing him."

"When Claude first went there," said Barbara, thoughtfully, "he liked Vevey very much, and said it suited him."

"Ay—ay, that was in the summer! Of course, in the summer it must be very different. But in autumn and winter— Besides, he is not happy at Madame Martin's. I can see that very well. Claude is extremely sensitive to the least slight."

"People who have to earn their daily bread in that way may, no doubt, meet with some small mortifications now and then. But—they are not unbearable," said Barbara, with a smile that expressed a great deal of sadness.

Those quickly spoken words touched Aunt Judith's conscience somewhat. Did she not know how many petty affronts and vulgar impertinences Barbara had to suffer in the course of her business as daily governess among the people who were for the most part her inferiors in mind, morals, and manners? Was she not a daily witness of the patient courage with which the girl performed her hard and miserably paid duties? Oh, certainly, she loved and admired Barbara with all her heart. But for Barbara's brother Claude she cherished a blindly indulgent fondness. Indulgence, indeed, was uncalled-for in Barbara's case, and this was the key to the different feelings with which their great-aunt regarded the brother and sister.

Miss Judith Hughes belonged to that order of women whose affection is most surely evoked by demands on their forbearance,

and who inevitably idolize the most fractious and exacting of their children. In spite of her celibacy Miss Hughes had not escaped the cares which usually belong to marriage. It had been her lot to fill a mother's place to two generations of nephews and nieces. The son and daughter of her widowed brother, David Hughes, had grown up under her care; and in later years Fate had thrown upon her and upon her nephew, William Hughes, the charge of her niece's orphan children, Barbara and Claude Copley.

She was a kindly, generous-hearted woman. But, although claiming nothing for herself, she would make unreasonable demands on behalf of her idol Claude, with a sort of vicarious selfishness which it was not always easy to meet patiently. And, moreover, she was subject to quick spirts of temper, that fizzed and flashed and subsided, all with equal rapidity. The good soul was rather proud of this trait, and was apt to boast that she had hot Welsh blood in her veins, and that the Hugheses had never been meek or milk-and-watery. But, indeed, if one could imagine a mouse with a hasty temper, that creature could scarcely be more harmless or harbor less ferocious intentions than Judith Hughes.

After Barbara's little speech about mortifications not being unbearable, the old lady sat silent for a short while. At length, looking up appealingly—almost humbly—for her conscience was bearing testimony as to Barbara's right to speak as she had spoken, she said:

“But his health, Barbara!” Then, finding that Barbara did not answer, she added more emphatically, “His *health*, my dear! Surely that ought to be a paramount consideration!”

“Certainly, Aunt Judith, his health ought to be considered. Only—”

“Only—?”

“Claude sometimes exaggerates, you know.”

Miss Hughes made a little impatient gesture of the shoulders, and drummed with her fingers on the arms of the chair she sat in.

“I see I shall get no help from you, Barbara,” she said. “I did so hope you would stand by me in persuading your Uncle William—! I wonder you can be so hard to the poor boy.

Don't you *know* he is not strong? He has been delicate from a baby."

"Uncle William is sure to judge wisely and kindly," answered Barbara, trying to evade an irritating discussion.

"It is a miserable sort of position for Claude," said Aunt Judith, fretfully.

"Of course it is not a brilliant position to be secretary in a second-rate Swiss *pension*. But, after all, Madame Martin is kind-hearted. And she is stretching a point to serve us in employing Claude at all. He is gaining experience which may be of great value to him hereafter. He is lodged, fed, and furnished with money enough to buy his clothes. When I remember the difficulty we—you had, you and Uncle William, to find a place for him at all, it seems to me that on the whole Claude has been lucky."

"I see. I see very well the line you mean to take. And I do say it is hard, Barbara, when I know that William would let Claude come home at once if you would but join me in urging it."

"Come home! And what is he to do here? How could we provide for him? How could we ask Uncle William to take any new burden on his heavily laden shoulders?"

"Then we are to let the poor boy *die* without making an effort to save him! Would William wish *that*?"

"Dear Aunt Judith, you and I are both quite sure of Uncle William's tender goodness. Whatever else we doubt, we can neither of us doubt that."

Whether intended or not, there was an implied reproach in these words, which stung Aunt Judith. She answered sharply, "It is not merely a question of goodness, but of judgment. I presume you will not maintain that your uncle is infallible!"

At this moment the sound of a key in the lock of the street-door checked her speech. She stopped abruptly. "Here *is* William," she said. At the words Barbara sprang up joyfully, and ran into the passage.

And since in the case of the keenest-eyed and most sympathetic of us all, a little knowledge of a man's previous history helps us to judge him understandingly, it will be well, before he comes forward to speak for himself, to assist the reader in interpreting the present William Hughes by giving a brief summary of his past.

CHAPTER II.

THE Hugheses were tradespeople who, when William was a child, had already been established for two generations in a thriving Western seaport. But their Welsh blood enabled some members of the family to boast of those "claims of long descent," which, however they may be smiled at by "the grand old gardener and his wife," are undeniably coveted and valued by many millions of their posterity.

Perhaps it may be due to the more imaginative cast of the Celtic mind, as compared with the dull (and often extremely inconvenient) English prejudice in favor of proved facts and plain truths, that among the Welsh, the Highlanders, and the Irish, the happiness afforded by a long genealogy is so very generally diffused. Their royal and martial progenitors of the dimmest antiquity live upon the tongue, and in the internal self-satisfaction of many a Mac, O', and Ap, whose neighbor Smith or Dobbs can barely set forth the Christian-name of his grandfather. Thus Judith Hughes, although her grandfather did keep a shop, was not to be balked of her birthright, and would proudly repeat that her mother had been an Ap Thomas, and that she thus enjoyed the valuable privilege of being pure Welsh by both sides of the house. She openly regretted that her patronymic, originally Ap Hugh, had been degraded into plain Hughes (which, however, she admitted, she preferred to the more usual form, Hugh) by her grandfather when he crossed the border of the Principality and set up as a bookseller and stationer in the busy mercantile harbor of Marypool. And there is no doubt that she had a great deal of enjoyment in making speeches of this sort.

Her brother, David Hughes, deprived his children of that full comfort in their pedigree which Judith derived from hers, by marrying a young woman named Timmins. But as Harriet Hughes, born Timmins, was not only a remarkably pretty, but a very gentle, sweet-natured young creature, her warm-hearted

sister-in-law soon loved her as tenderly as she could have loved a lineal descendant of Glendower, and possibly even a little more.

The father of David and Judith had given them an excellent education—an education greatly superior to that of most of their social equals in those days; and, in the case of the son, the school teaching had been followed by wide and intelligent reading. David Hughes was a man of unusual abilities, and his abilities were of an unusual sort. Had he been free to improve them according to the natural bent of his mind, he would probably have attained distinction. His temperament and talents were essentially artistic. But circumstances so shaped his life as to give him but small opportunity for manifesting the faculties that he possessed. One loophole towards the light, however, was vouchsafed to him. When he inherited the bookseller's business, which his father had conducted successfully, he inherited with it the ownership of a small local newspaper, which old Mr. Hughes had bought cheap as a speculation.

The life of this obscure little print had appeared to be almost extinct when David Hughes came into possession of it. But its flickering existence soon began to revive under his care, and before very long flamed up with a light that could not be hidden under a bushel. Within a few years it had prospered sufficiently to justify him—or so he thought—in abandoning altogether the dingy book-shop behind whose counter his father and grandfather had stood, and in devoting his fiery energies (which were great) and his available capital (which was small) to the improvement and diffusion of the *Phoenix* newspaper. After a while he transformed it from a weekly to a daily print—a change that ate up nearly every penny he had in the world. But he was still little past the prime of life, strong and vigorous, and he confidently looked forward to the time when he should receive large profits from the venture, and when the *Phoenix* would be a handsome property to bequeath to his children.

He had two daughters and a son. His wife having died when they were still in the nursery, the girls were brought up under the care of their Aunt Judith, who had embarked her little patrimony in establishing a boarding-school at a fashionable watering-place not very far from Marypool. The school prospered exceedingly. Miss Hughes could not pretend to the possession of various

modern accomplishments, but she had the good sense to secure competent teachers of them by liberal pay, and her native shrewdness was seldom deceived in judging of her subaltern's qualifications.

David Hughes's son William, the youngest of his children, inherited his father's temperament, refined and developed by a more congenial training than his father had ever enjoyed; and David Hughes was resolved that his son's genius should have due play. The young fellow was enthusiastically desirous to become a painter, and a painter he should be. At any rate, it should not be David's fault if he were not one. Mr. Hughes had no dislike or mistrust of art as a calling in life—a state of mind very rare in those days among the class to which he belonged, and not so common at the present enlightened epoch as some people may fondly suppose. Full of hope and high spirits, the lad entered on his chosen career. After some preliminary studies his father sent him to Rome, where he lived strictly within his moderate allowance, worked with enthusiasm, and became a general favorite among the cosmopolitan society of young artists whom he met there.

It was a happy time for the whole family. The *Phoenix* was daily rising in reputation; Aunt Judith's school was flourishing; Winifred, the elder of David Hughes's daughters—a brilliant creature, and the idol of her father's heart—had obtained an excellent situation as governess in the family of a fashionable London physician; and her younger sister, Olive, was engaged to marry the son of a wealthy merchant in her native town. This last circumstance was considered by all their neighbors as the crowning good fortune of the Hugheses. And although David did not quite share this feeling, having but a moderately high opinion of Arthur Maddison, his daughter's betrothed, and disliking a certain purse-proud air of patronage towards him and his which was assumed by the Maddison family generally, yet, since his pretty gentle Olive's heart was set on the marriage, he did not oppose it.

Yes; that was a happy time for the whole family. But one morning a letter arrived in Marypool which shattered their fortunes and ruined their lives.

Winifred Hughes had eloped from her situation in London with a married man.

Put crudely and briefly, that was the announcement made to her father. But the latter was not brief. It was diffuse and incoherent, and, above all, angry—furiously angry; for the writer of it was Mrs. Kirby, Winifred's employer, and the companion of Winifred's flight was Mrs. Kirby's brother.

But the blow was not aggravated by Mrs. Kirby's eloquence. When a man is stabbed to the heart, what matter whether the weapon be blunt or keen, rusty or shining? Aunt Judith, hastily summoned the same day by poor trembling little Olive, found on reaching Marypool that her brother had started for London; and upon her fell the bitter task of writing to William. On Olive the effect of the news was almost to paralyze thought. She passed hour after hour sitting motionless and dry-eyed, with a dumb weight of misery oppressing her soul like some monstrous dream. Their Winifred—their proud, high-spirited, brilliant Winifred, to have plunged into this black abyss of shame and misery! No! It was incredible—impossible!

A considerable time elapsed before the miserable story was, bit by bit, made clear to them. Nor could any explanation of how it came to pass have given them consolation. In the home where Winifred's name had been a household word, uttered with profound affection, the chance sound of it came to be like the touch of a cruel hand upon a wound. A few words will suffice to tell all that need be said of her here.

Mrs. Kirby's brother, Christopher Dalton, had married unhappily, and, when he first met Winifred, had long lived apart from his wife. Winifred at first supposed him to be a widower—a belief which Mrs. Kirby took no pains to overthrow. She only wished it had been well-founded. She regarded her sister-in-law with the strongest aversion, and desired that her very existence should be ignored or forgotten. Mr. Dalton resided habitually in the south of France; but when Winifred Hughes had been but a few months installed as governess to Dr. Kirby's daughters, Dalton came, in an evil hour, to England on a visit to his sister. He was a cultivated man, far better able to appreciate Miss Hughes's unusually brilliant intelligence and accomplishments than were any of the Kirbys. He took the habit of frequenting the school-room at first in order to superintend his nieces' French and Italian studies. And so the end came.

Mr. Hughes, as has been said, hurried up to London immediately after receiving the fatal letter; and after an interview with Dr. Kirby, resolved on starting for the Continent in pursuit of his daughter, but the following morning he was found dead in his bed at the hotel where he had alighted: killed, the doctors said, by a stroke of apoplexy, but, in his sister Judith's phrase, "dead of a broken heart."

William, who had set out from Rome in wild haste on receipt of his aunt's letter, arrived to find his father dead, and his sister Olive deserted by her lover, who had (in deference to the wishes of his family, as he said) broken off his engagement in consequence of the scandal and disgrace which attached in Marypool to the name of Hughes. Blow followed blow. Mr. Hughes's death put an end to all chance of the prosperous future he had anticipated for the *Phoenix*. The position of the paper was not yet so assured that it could afford to lose his animating influence, his intelligent inspiration. The *Phoenix* was sold, and scarcely fetched more than the original cost of its purchase. This meant utter financial ruin to the Hugheses. Their old house was given up, the furniture sold, and the afflicted family had to face the world with poverty added to their load of sorrow.

"But, God be thanked, we owe not a sixpence," said Aunt Judith. "Everything is paid, and we have my school to fall back upon."

Alas! the school proved to be a broken reed. It was ruined by the same disaster which had already done so much evil. The watering-place where Miss Judith Hughes had established herself was so near to Marypool as to be within reach of the gossip that was on every tongue there. Various circumstances combined to give notoriety to the wretched story. The fact that Olive's betrothed belonged to a rich and influential mercantile family in Marypool caused the breaking-off of her engagement to be a matter of considerable local interest; and then Mr. Hughes's sudden death in London, and the subsequent inquest, gave the story fresh publicity by means of the press. Judith struggled on desperately in the teeth of difficulty. Rebuffs met her on every side; mortifications of all kinds assailed her, and her daily bread was steeped in bitterness. It would have been wiser not to attempt the struggle. Had the good-will of the school been sold without delay, it

would probably have brought a fair price. But poor Judith was obstinate, and even thought it a point of honor not to give way; so that when she finally yielded to necessity, and withdrew from the school, her connection had entirely melted away, and she had involved herself in debt.

All liabilities having been met by the sale of her books and furniture, and a tiny sum of ready money remaining in hand, the Hugheses resolved, after taking counsel together, to go to London. There lay William's best chance of pursuing his art, and Miss Hughes and Olive could earn their bread by teaching. So to London they went.

And now began for William Hughes a life of struggle and self-sacrifice, in which he never flinched or faltered for five-and-twenty years. He found himself, at little over twenty years old, the sole prop and stay of two helpless women, for poor Aunt Judith's sanguine expectation of earning her bread by teaching proved fallacious for a long time. Only after many years, and after sinking her pretensions even lower in the social scale, did she succeed in collecting a few day scholars. Olive worked with her needle, and taught whenever the opportunity arose. But her earnings were precarious, and at the best miserably small. And, moreover, she fell into a weak state of health.

On William's shoulders alone rested for many a day the burden of supporting the family. He refused no occupation by which he could earn a little money. He gave lessons not only in drawing, but in music and languages, to any one who would employ him. He rose before dawn on summer mornings, and tramped miles into the country to work at some landscape, that was sold, perhaps, after all, for a few shillings. There even came winter days, when there was neither food nor fire in the miserable lodging, and when, under cover of the dusk, he would go out with his guitar into the streets, and sing and play for a few pence, to enable them to break their fast.

That was the time of their deepest poverty. By degrees his talent as an artist began to be recognized. He got one or two commissions from an obscure but enterprising dealer who was bold enough to trust his own judgment of the power and delicacy displayed in the landscapes of that unknown man. And, indeed, as the prudent dealer reflected in self-justification, the risk was

really very small; for such was the artist's poverty that he was willing to work for little more than the cost of his color and canvas.

After a while, Olive's marriage seemed to promise some happiness to the long-tried family. Her husband was only a clerk employed in a great wholesale city house. But he was in receipt of a rising salary, was steady and frugal, and Olive was content to take him. William made no objection to the marriage; neither did Aunt Judith—openly. But in secret she fretted over it and disapproved it, and told herself with some bitterness that Olive never had had a spark of that spirit which ought to animate the descendant of so many Ap Hugheses and Ap Thomases. Olive was absurdly meek and humble. Mr. James Copley was a very mean and insignificant sort of personage in Aunt Judith's eyes; and she only hoped he had *some* idea how far Olive's merits were above anything he could justly aspire to!

However, Olive became Mrs. James Copley; and although the romance of love was over for her, yet she enjoyed domestic peace and quiet kindness, and was grateful for them. But misfortune had not yet ceased to attend the Hugheses. Before the elder of Olive's two children was ten years old, Mr. and Mrs. Copley died within a few weeks of each other, being carried off by an infectious fever; and the orphans, left almost totally unprovided for, were thrown on the care of their uncle and great-aunt.

Bravely and cheerfully was the charge accepted; and now on that September evening, when we have seen Barbara on her way home through the squalid street, she had already for some time been contributing no inconsiderable share to the household expenses; while of Claude enough has been said to explain his position and prospects.

As for William Hughes, he had slowly made for himself a peculiar reputation among a few connoisseurs in painting. A canvas signed by him bore a considerable value—to the picture-dealer to whom, in the days of his direst necessity, he had mortgaged his fame and his future. There are, doubtless, liberal and generous-hearted picture-dealers; but William Hughes, unfortunate in this as in all other worldly affairs, had not happened to fall in with any of them.

It may be stated at once that Winifred Hughes never returned

to England. She survived only a few years after leaving it, and died in the South of France just six months before the death of Christopher Dalton's wife. Dalton himself was understood to have emigrated to one of the Western States of America. His name was never heard in the Hughes family. Only once, soon after the breaking-up of their home, and their removal to London, a communication from France was received by William. Aunt Judith discovered that it had contained money. What else it contained she could but vaguely guess at; for the receipt of it threw William into such a frenzy of grief and indignation that his health was for a long time seriously affected, and Judith dared not allude to the subject. During many years afterwards she lived in dread of a chance meeting between her nephew and Dalton, for she believed that William could kill him if they met. But no such meeting ever came to pass; and when the letter and its contents had been returned to the sender, silence, though not oblivion, covered the names of Dalton and of Winifred in the household of Winifred's kindred.

The younger ones, Barbara and Claude, naturally remained ignorant of their Aunt Winifred's story. A chance word had revealed to Barbara that her mother had once had a sister. And she never forgot the white misery in her mother's face as she said hurriedly, in answer to the child's innocent questioning, "Hush! She is dead. Never speak of her to your Uncle William. It hurts him too much to remember her." Thenceforward Barbara was silent on that score. Nothing could more effectually have checked her than the dread of hurting Uncle William. From her earliest years Barbara had adored her uncle. The closest sympathy existed between them; and it often seemed as though the child were striving to make amends to him for some dimly apprehended loss or sorrow in his life, by lavishing on him the tenderness of her deeply affectionate nature.

This was the more remarkable, because, during all her remembrances of him, a more cheerful-mannered creature than William Hughes did not exist. Full of quaint wit, and with that keen, hearty, and enjoying sense of the humorous which is one of Heaven's best gifts to mortal man, he presented so unruffled a front to the world in general that a certain class of persons were absolutely provoked by such unreasonably good spirits; and a

lodging-house landlady had been known to say, disparagingly, that 'twasn't much odds to Mr. Hughes what happened; he'd have his joke and make hisself comfortable, let things be as they would, and that you might depend on! For the suspicion that there are sacred feelings which you purposely conceal from them is exasperating to some minds. And the daws naturally hold that the proper place to wear your heart is on your sleeve.

But all this while we have kept Mr. William Hughes standing in the passage!

CHAPTER III.

THE person whom Barbara had run to greet on his entrance was a man so encumbered with portable baggage that it was difficult to discern much of his figure, while his face was overshadowed by a wide-flapped felt hat. He carried a portfolio under one arm, a camp-stool under the other, a knapsack at his back, and a worn shepherd's plaid hung folded across his shoulder.

"Oh, Uncle William, dear," cried Barbara, "how you are laden!" And then she proceeded eagerly to relieve him of some of his packages. Larcher had come up from the kitchen at the sound of Mr. Hughes's arrival, and added the light of a very attenuated tallow candle to that of the small petroleum lamp, with a tin reflector, fixed against the wall.

And now, having removed his wide-brimmed hat, Mr. William Hughes stands before us, sufficiently illuminated to enable us to see his outward aspect.

It is that of a man about midway between forty and fifty; rather short and square-built, with small but strong and nervous hands and spatula-shaped finger-tips. A certain expression of suffering is given to his whole person by the shoulders being always a little raised, as if with an effort, and the head somewhat sunk between them. This attitude is due to his habitually and instinctively lifting the shoulders to assist his labored breathing during the severe asthmatic attacks to which he is subject.

So much for the figure. The face is a striking one. There is a considerable resemblance in it to his Aunt Judith's—notably

in the strongly marked eyebrows and fine dark eyes. But every trait of Miss Hughes's countenance is exaggerated and accentuated in his, so as to give the impression of a remarkably vigorous and masculine character. The nose is well-shaped enough, but somewhat thick; the chin boldly curved; the mouth a little down-drawn at the corners. The coloring of the skin, eyes, and eyebrows, and of the closely cropped hair surmounting a square and massive forehead, is as dark as that of a Spaniard.

Altogether, one would say, a sad, saturnine face. But wait until he speaks or smiles! The change is as great as when, upon the rugged shoulder of some granite mountain in the gray distance, a ray of sunset falls aslant, revealing unsuspected streaks of soft green meadow and human dwellings, with a ruby gleam in their western windows.

And yet a suggestion of sadness always lingers in that face. Even when the play of humor lights it up, the smiling mouth and eyes never quite overpower a certain plaintive expression due to a quaint trick of the eyebrows, which seem to make a half-astonished protest against the jest. It is an expression which may sometimes be seen on the face of a little child.

When William had gone up to his own room to wash off the dust of his journey, and Larcher was frying a dish of eggs and bacon for the family supper, Miss Judith hurriedly whispered to Barbara, "Don't say anything yet about Claude. We must choose a good moment."

"All moments are good with Uncle William," returned Barbara.

"H'm, child, your uncle is the best of men, but he *is* a man. Suppose we wait until he has lighted his pipe?"

"Well, in that case, he will at least be allowed to eat his supper in peace before being worried!" thought Barbara. But she did not say so.

William had been staying for a fortnight at Purfleet, in order to finish a picture for which he had made studies early in the summer; and when he came down to the parlor he had various items of news to ask and to give.

How was Aunt Judith? Had all been going well at home? Barbara still giving holiday lessons at the Needhams'? As for himself, he was famous; famous! Oh, that touch of cough was nothing. Merely a reminder of the existence of his old enemy.

But, on the whole, he had been wonderfully free from asthma at Purfleet.

"And the picture, Uncle William?" asked Barbara. "Have you been able to work well?"

"Yes, yes; you will see to-morrow. There are wonderfully delicate effects of color in that wide view across the river. I had capital weather, too; the three last afternoons, particularly, were delightful—just the soft, misty effects that I wanted for my distance. I really was in wonderful luck."

"I think we have all been in good luck during these holidays," said Judith. "I declare we are getting quite rich."

"Are we?" exclaimed William, in some surprise; for Aunt Judith's views of the present were seldom so rose-colored.

But she was eager now to dwell on the bright side of their prospects, and to suggest inferentially that, having one more person to feed at home, would be but a trifling matter. She was not consciously laying an artful plan. Many of our motives work in the dark like moles; and we should often be unfeignedly surprised to behold their ugliness suddenly illuminated.

"Oh yes; quite rich!" repeated Aunt Judith. "It is a blessing to think you need not pinch, and slave, and deprive yourself of every little comfort now, William."

"I? But, my dear, I always have everything I want!"

He said it with the most simple earnestness, looking at her with grave, wide-opened eyes.

Somehow, Aunt Judith's eyes fell before his, and her cheeks grew hot. Sundry passages in that letter from Switzerland (passages which she had not read to Barbara) seemed to tingle through her consciousness. But she rallied after a moment and went on: "I have two more day scholars promised for next term. And then Barbara has some new pupils—she goes to them three times a week to teach music and drawing; she had only just come home from giving her lesson there before you arrived—very good people, and very good pay!" proceeded Aunt Judith, warming with her subject, and winding up triumphantly.

"Why, Barbara, how is this? El Dorado's opening to you on every side, and you never wrote me a word on the subject!"

"I wanted it to be a pleasant surprise for you when you came home, Uncle William."

“Oh, dear me, yes; so she did!” cried Judith; “and I ought not to have spoken, for Barbara had set her heart on telling you herself! But, you know, I never can hoard up what is in my mind—out it must come. My mother used to tell me that her grandfather, Morgan Ap Richard, was called by a nickname signifying ‘The-impetuous-flash-that-lights-up-the-dark-secret-of-the-cloud.’ I forget what it is in Welsh.”

“Are you ready for your pipe yet, Uncle William?” asked Barbara, quietly; and at the words Aunt Judith’s cheeks flushed hotly once more; and she slipped her hand into her pocket and took hold of Claude’s letter.

Barbara helped the servant to carry the plates and dishes down into the kitchen, and then, having returned to the parlor, she washed up the teacups, and arranged them in the corner cupboard; while Miss Judith sat nervously awaiting her opportunity, with the letter from Switzerland held between thumb and finger, and William, from behind a soothing cloud of tobacco-smoke, watched his niece’s quiet, graceful movements with an artist’s appreciation.

During the performance of these humble household tasks, Barbara chatted to her uncle about the family of her new pupils. Yes, they really were pleasant, well-educated persons. She had been recommended to them by William’s friend, Herr Rosenheim, the violinist. The mother of the family, a Mrs. Kettering, was a German by birth; and that was how Herr Rosenheim had come to know them. “And is it not an odd coincidence, Uncle William,” said Barbara, “that they should have connections in your part of the world? Mrs. Kettering told me that her brother, who lives in Hamburg, had married a lady from Marypool.”

“Indeed!” said William, in a constrained voice. Even after all these years, the unexpected mention of his old home gave him a little jarring shock. And he never willingly spoke of the place himself.

“What was her name? Did they tell you her name, Barbara?” asked Judith, more curious and less sensitive than her nephew.

“Maddison was her name. Mrs. Kettering told me that the Maddisons were among the foremost merchants of Marypool. Did you ever hear of them?”

“Why, that must be Gussy!” exclaimed Aunt Judith, clasping

her hands. "Don't you remember, William, that Augusta Maddison married in Germany?"

Something in the expression of her uncle's face checked any further questioning on Barbara's part. Perhaps these Maddisons had been connected in some way with Aunt Winifred, whose name her mother had warned her never to mention. But Judith's thoughts had rushed back to the old days, and, after the manner of her ancestor, the impetuous Morgan ap Richard, she proceeded to light up the darkness of the past by a series of zig-zag flashes.

"Only imagine this Mrs. Kettering being Augusta Maddison's sister-in-law! I should like to know what Gussy's feelings would be if she knew that our poor dear Olive's daughter was teaching her nieces in order to earn her bread! Not that Augusta was the worst. I never thought that, even in the bitterest time. I always thought that Augusta had a heart, if it could have been allowed fair play. But as for Arthur— I wonder what has become of him? Did you ever hear Mrs. Kettering speak of Arthur Maddison, child?"

Barbara glanced quickly at her uncle, and then shook her head.

"No, no, Aunt Judith. It was a mere chance word about Marypool."

Barbara resolutely refrained from asking any questions. Nevertheless, it must be owned that she felt considerable curiosity on the subject of the Maddisons of Marypool. And her curiosity was whetted by Miss Judith Hughes pursing her mouth up, nodding solemnly, and saying in a low voice, "Aye; but it might interest you more than you can imagine."

"Come, come, Aunt Judith," said William, taking his pipe from between his lips and smiling kindly on his niece, "don't let Barbara fancy this is a Bluebeard's closet. After all, there is no reason why she should not be told that once upon a time—years and years ago, of course—her mother was engaged to marry Arthur Maddison. Circumstances divided them. Your dear mother had no blame in the matter. Nor," he added, slowly, "ought we to blame Arthur too harshly."

"Not blame!" burst out Judith. "Not blame Arthur Maddison! Of all the poor, mean-spirited, cold-hearted, false—"

"No," interrupted William, laying his hand, palm downwards,

on the table, and leaning a little forward. "No, no; not false. Weak, perhaps. But we have no right to expect heroes. Why needlessly embitter our thoughts about any one? God knows there is enough bitterness and wrath that we cannot put from us."

Aunt Judith shrank back into the shadow, and was silent.

After a brief pause Barbara said, cheerfully, "Well, dear Uncle William, at all events there can be no bitterness in my thoughts about that past and gone story. Mrs. Kettering probably knows nothing about it. And, if she does, she is not likely to connect Miss Copley, the governess, with the rich Maddisons of Maryport. And of course I do not gossip to her about my relations. She expects me to employ my time in a different manner, I assure you."

She felt, with a delicate intuition, that her uncle would shrink sensitively from the thought that strangers were canvassing the family history with his niece; and she desired to reassure him, so far as she was concerned.

Barbara's own knowledge of that family history was very incomplete. She had heard, in a fragmentary way, of her grandfather's terribly sudden death; of the loss of money which followed upon that disaster; and of the long struggle with poverty and difficulties of many kinds which had been so gallantly maintained by Judith and William Hughes. Of course she had heard, too, from Aunt Judith of the glories of the school at Westbeach. As she grew to womanhood, the conviction gradually forced itself upon her mind that some cloud darker than sorrow rested on the memory of that dead Aunt Winifred, whose name was never heard among them. And now, to-night, there came this revelation about his mother's youth. How much sorrow there had been! What suffering and misfortune!

And yet how tenderly had she and her brother been sheltered from the sharp winds of the world! Her memory recalled a hundred traits of the unselfish love and gentleness which had made her childhood happy—quiet sacrifices accepted then as mere matters of course, but understood and valued more and more with every advancing year. Her heart swelled with love and compassion and gratitude in thinking of it all.

"Ah, dear me!" sighed Aunt Judith, all at once. "Ah—h—h! Poor Claude! Poor dear boy!"

Barbara almost started. It was not Claude whom *she* had been pitying. William, too, looked up hastily, as if he had been awakened from a fit of meditation. "What of Claude, Aunt Judith?" he asked. "Is there anything amiss?"

"Very much, so I'm afraid," returned Aunt Judith, with another long-drawn sigh and a shake of the head, and in that way she commenced her attack.

William listened patiently as she set forth her case, but she felt sure that he was not in sympathy with her view of it; and this knowledge, coupled, perhaps, with some uneasy prickings of conscience, irritated her, and led her to make sundry excuses which, as the French proverb has it, are tantamount to accusations. What if the dear fellow *were* weary of his life at Madame Martin's? That, surely, was natural enough! And depression of spirits would make him more susceptible to the dampness of the climate. No; he certainly did not appear to have sent for a doctor; nor to have complained to Madame Martin. But a young man of his age would endure a good deal rather than make a fuss about his own health. Well, and if he did complain to his own Aunt Judith! To whom *should* he carry his troubles if not to her who had stood in a mother's place to him ever since he was seven years old, poor orphan lamb?

"My dear old aunty," said William, "you have stood in a mother's place to us all. But that, surely, is a reason for *sparing* you trouble, not for bringing it to you!"

Here Aunt Judith, seeing an opportunity, rushed at it with ardor.

"Oh, if you're thinking of *that*, William, I can assure you on my solemn word and faith that there can be no trouble so hard to me as to think of a boy lonely and sick, and among uncongenial people, and longing to get home. And as things are going at present, I am sure we all could afford to have the dear fellow here for a few weeks, until he gets stronger; and we could look about for some other employment for him. And how on earth *you*"—turning particularly upon Barbara, who all this time had not said a word, but was diligently mending a pile of the family linen—"how you *can* sit there listening in that cold way, and not speak a word for your own, only brother, I am unable to conceive! One might fancy you had not a drop of our blood in your veins."

"I think, Aunt Judith, it might be a good thing to get the opinion of some competent physician at Vevey as to whether the place suits Claude or not," answered Barbara, gently.

"Certainly," said William, with an emphatic nod. "That must be done, at any rate."

Aunt Judith started up in a pet.

"Physician's opinion! Diddle, faddle! Ask a Vevey doctor if Vevey is a healthy place, and what do you suppose he is likely to say? Besides, it wouldn't matter to me what he said. The poor boy knows his own feelings better than any one else!" And she marched out of the room, and down-stairs into the kitchen, where she would relieve her feelings by talking to Larcher about "Master Claude." For Larcher had been in service with the Hughes family as a fresh-cheeked country lass of sixteen; when Miss Judith had been reckoned one of the handsomest young women in Marypool, and was courted and flattered by a score of admirers.

William Hughes and his niece sat silent for some minutes after Judith had left the room. At length William removed his pipe from his mouth, and, gazing into the fire with a half-sad, half-humorous smile, said: "Poor dear Aunt Judith! How fond she is of the boy!"

The example of long-suffering toleration is by no means generally contagious. Indeed, to the young it is often exasperating. They cannot bear that an offender should escape. They are keen for justice, and untroubled by any doubt of their own ability to decide what it is! Barbara did wish for a moment that Uncle William would plainly show Aunt Judith how unreasonable she was, and how others besides Claude had claims on her consideration. But it was only for a moment.

She rose up, and, standing behind her uncle's chair, put her hand tenderly on his shoulder.

"What do you think you shall do, uncle dear?" she asked.

William took the slender, fair hand in his own brown and strongly marked one, and remained so, still gazing into the fire, as he answered: "Well, my dear, I was thinking the best place might be for me to go to Vevey, and see how things are. Hopkins spoke to me about a little commission for some Swiss views. A small matter, I believe—panels for decorative purposes. But I

should be glad of it, of course. I must look him up. Young Hopkins (with an unquestionable gleam of fun in his eyes) has invited me to his lodgings. If his father gives me that commission he talked of, I shall certainly go to Vevey. We must try to make Aunt Judith happy—poor, dear soul!”

CHAPTER IV.

IMMEDIATELY to the westward of the Gray's Inn Road lies one of those districts—not rare in London—which are compendiously described as having seen better days. The better days of the district particularly in question just now can never have been of the palatial kind. Even the civic grandeur and spaciousness of Russell Square are far more imposing. But Gentility dwelt here in the times when that word was not yet so degraded and rubbed down as to be blurred and meaningless—like a current coin debased by manifold coarse handlings.

No country gentlefolks of fortune spend the season in that neighborhood nowadays. No town-bred lady of fashion illumines it by her beauty or enlivens it by her airs and graces. But beauty is to be found there nevertheless; and even airs and graces may still be discovered by a competent observer behind its smoke-begrimed bricks and mortar; for Belgravia and Tyburnia, May Fair and South Kensington, have no monopoly of pretty faces, and vanity is a hardy plant that thrives in all latitudes. Indeed, as to this latter quality, it appears positively to enjoy what may be figuratively termed a severe climate and a poor soil; and flourishes with amazing vigor where neither talents, graces, nor virtues can contrive to grow at all.

The association of ideas which connects this reflection with the tea-party to which William Hughes has been bidden will perhaps appear in the sequel. But, at any rate, the mention of the locality must be allowed to be relevant to that entertainment, since it was to be held there. The giver of the party was Mr. Mortimer Hopkins, son of the man from whom William Hughes was expecting a commission, and with whom a mere chance had quite

recently made him acquainted. The chief business carried on by Hopkins senior was that of a carver and gilder; but he had lately commenced picture-dealing on a small scale, and was gradually extending his connection. But, having but an uncertain hold on, and a still more uncertain faith in, the fine arts as a paying investment, he thought himself lucky in having obtained for his son the post of clerk in a respectable tea-broker's house in the city.

Mr. Mortimer Hopkins himself was at bottom very much of his father's opinion. But it pleased him, in his leisure moments, to disdain the tea-broker, and to affect the company of some kindred spirits who talked about art with the biggest of capital letters—and, sometimes, in moments of great enthusiasm, even with a superfluous aspirate. They formed a little society for mutual admiration, whose sayings and doings were simply a caricature of the sayings and doings of some far more genteel and cultivated coteries, cemented by a similar fellow-feeling.

The valid objection to such societies is that they do not and cannot limit themselves to admiration. Honest admiration (even of each other) might comprise some humility and generosity. But the real quintessence of your mutual-admiration coterie is the detraction of all the outsiders who do not belong to it. When Armande, in the "Femmes Savantes," formulates that delightful rule that no one, save themselves and their friends, shall possess any wit, she—to borrow George Eliot's admirable illustration of another subject—pinches a vast cobweb of fine theories into a practical maxim of pillular smallness.

When William Hughes, on the Wednesday following that Saturday on which we first made his acquaintance, alighted from the top of an omnibus in the Gray's Inn Road, he betook himself to a street which may be designated in these pages as Anson Street. It was a short street leading out of a square, and, although so near to one of the main arteries of traffic, was comparatively quiet. Vehicles seldom disturbed it, and, except twice a day—in the morning and the evening—the pedestrians who passed between the posts set up (for some inscrutable reason) at either end of its pavements were few and far between. The street, short as it was, contained two boarding-houses, and nearly every house in it accommodated weekly lodgers—chiefly single men, who went out to their business betimes, and did not return until evening.

It was now nearly eight o'clock, and the returning tide of lodgers and boarders had long flowed in. The air had turned chilly after sunset, and a dry, bleak wind was beginning to whirl the dust into eddies, to flutter women's skirts, and to threaten men's hats as they turned a corner, and to send morsels of paper, fragments of straw, and all the nameless litter of the pavement hopping and leaping as if in a sudden panic, which subsided as suddenly as it had arisen, and left one's nose and eyes unpleasantly conscious of a general arid grittiness. In the case of William Hughes, moreover, the harsh wind caused a somewhat severe fit of coughing, which arrested his progress and made him lean for a few minutes against some area railings to recover his breath.

As he so stood, a cab drove up to the door of a house a few yards farther on, and from it alighted four individuals, two of whom wore ordinary attire, while the other two were muffled in cloaks, but not so completely as to conceal the fact that the garments beneath the cloaks were not at all of the every-day sort. The foremost, who ran quickly up the steps on alighting, had his head covered by a crimson velvet skull-cap laced with gold, and with a long silken tassel depending from its centre and hanging down near to his shoulder. This much was plainly visible by the light of a street lamp which happened to stand immediately opposite the house in question. When the four men had entered, and the door was shut again, the cabman still stood at the bottom of the steps with his fare in his hand, and a puzzled expression on his countenance. But Mr. Hughes having by that time come up, and happening to meet his eye, that expression changed to a broad grin, and, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, and apparently convinced that he was speaking to a sympathetic listener, the driver opined audibly that that was as rummy a lot as ever he drove—if not rummier!

William's face was full of quiet but intense amusement, for this was the very house of the tea-party.

"By George, it wasn't a joke, then, his writing in the corner of his note 'Fancy Dress!'"

Thus ran Mr. Hughes's private reflections as he waited for the door to be opened. And while he was depositing his hat and the worn shepherd's plaid on a chair in the passage, his eyes sparkled with humorous enjoyment. The servant-of-all-work, after glanc-

ing at him in some disappointment (as he was quick to perceive) by reason of the humdrum and commonplace fashion of his clothes, briefly remarked that if it was Mr. Mortimer 'Opkins he wanted, that gentleman would be found in the droring-room front, withdrew and left him to go up-stairs alone.

He knocked with his knuckles at the door of the drawing-room front, but the talking within deadened the sound; so he turned the handle and walked in without further ceremony.

It was a fair-sized room, and decently furnished; the only noticeable circumstance in that respect being the unusual abundance of easy-chairs, lounges, and cushions. But these articles of luxury were clearly the property of the lodger, and not of the lodging-house keeper; for all the rest of the furniture was calculated to foster self-denial and a Spartan view of life. Tea and coffee were laid out on a large table, which also bore a liberal supply of thin bread and butter, cakes, and jam. A good fire burned in the grate, and a small swing kettle, set down just within the fender, steamed and bubbled over a spirit-lamp.

So far, all was commonplace enough. But the assembled company presented some more unusual features to the average beholder.

To begin with the host: he was a sickly-looking young man of three-and-twenty, with a countenance of the kind popularly described as sheep-faced. That is to say, his profile formed one unbroken and retreating line from the tip of his nose to the top of his forehead, which latter was rather flat and poor, and surmounted by a not very abundant head of hair, light brown in color, and artificially curled by the hairdresser's tongs. Mr. Mortimer Hopkins was considered by his friends, in virtue of the profile before-mentioned, to be of an Athenian type of beauty, and was, indeed, often spoken of among them, with the utmost gravity, as an Early Greek youth. On the present occasion he was dressed in a non-descript costume, of which the lower part was a pair of baggy Turkish trousers, and the upper, something between a classical tunic and a smoking-jacket, cut very open at the neck so as to reveal the whole of a long and scraggy throat. The color of these garments was deep blue, and the material soft woollen.

This Early Greek youth reclined in a Late English arm-chair, in such an attitude as to present his profile to the spectator. Between

him and the fire sat a singular-looking man, tall and thin, with long, straggling hair, and staring blue eyes. He was dressed in a complete suit of black velveteen, and wore a rose-colored silk handkerchief tied in a bow at his throat.

On the other side of the host was seated, with his elbow on the table, his forefinger on his forehead, and his legs stretched out and crossed before him, a middle-aged person with a big bald forehead, a pointed beard, and moustache. This gentleman's attitude, as well as his fashion of trimming the hair on his face, at once suggested the model he aimed at resembling; but the matter was put beyond a doubt by his costume, which consisted of a reddish-brown doublet and full knickerbocker breeches, crimson stockings, shoes with lachets, and a wide, falling collar, tied with a cord and tassel.

He was quite as resolute in maintaining a correctly picturesque posture as the Early Greek youth himself. And the conversation between them languished somewhat in consequence. Since two gentlemen side by side in the pillory could scarcely have been more constrained in their movements or less—apparently—able to look each other in the face. The man in velveteen, however, being untrammelled in his attitude by any particular ideal, held forth in a lively manner with much gesticulation and tossing back of his hair. The only other persons present were the young man in the crimson skull-cap, who now stood revealed in full Albanian costume, and a second young man in an ordinary mourning suit, but distinguished from the common herd by wearing a group of very large Michaelmas daisies in his buttonhole.

These two appeared to fulfil the function of audience, almost unassisted; for the Early Greek and Elizabethan Englishman were not able to bestow much attention on each other, as has been explained. While, as for the velveteen gentleman, although his talking was fervid enough, his listening was distinctly tepid.

To these William Hughes on his entrance was presented by the host, who named them, and pointed them out with his hand and great play of profile.

“Mr. Hughes, Mr. Coney” (motioning towards the man in knickerbockers and falling collar). “Mr. Snagge” (man in the velveteen suit). “Mr. Toller and Mr. Green” (Albanian, and

wearer of the Michaelmas daisies). "We have had two or three disappointments, I'm sorry to say."

William Hughes shook hands with each member of the company, and then apologized gravely for his attire.

"Oh, don't name it," returned Mr. Mortimer Hopkins, with much affability. "I—in short, I only put 'Fancy Dress' on my invitation because, on an occasion like the present, a gathering of a few choice spirits above the ordinary, some of my friends like to get rid of the costum of the present day, so entirely revolting to the principles of 'igh Art.'"

"Year, year!" murmured the Albanian, who was obviously relieved by having his appearance so creditably accounted for.

"Oh, dear, yes; it's capital fun dressing-up," said Mr. Hughes, sitting down and smiling amiably round the room. "I remember when I used to enjoy it myself immensely."

Mortimer Hopkins looked rather blank for a moment at this reply, which was not at all what he expected. But recovering himself presently, he whispered to Mr. Coney that the new-comer was an artist of ability in his way, but had a mechanical sort of mind, and rather wanted poetry.

So mechanical was Hughes's mind that he at once drew young Hopkins aside to ask if there was any chance of his father's coming there that evening, as he wished to speak with him on a matter of business. Mortimer Hopkins did not hold out much hope of his father's appearing; such feasts of tea, even when combined with flows of æsthetic soul, not being much in that gentleman's line.

"But," added the young man, "if it's anything about that series of Swiss views, I think I can undertake to say that my father has seen the party, and it will be all right."

This news was most welcome to William Hughes, and, being thus encouraged, he prepared himself thoroughly to enjoy the evening.

When the tea had been drunk, and all the sweet things on the table eaten up with great relish, cigars and pipes were lighted, and most of the company drew their chairs round the fire, while Mortimer Hopkins gave some orders to the servant before she carried away the tea-tray. Finding himself after this close to William Hughes, who had not yet seated himself, Hopkins took occasion

to give the latter some particulars about his fellow-guests, beginning with Mr. Snagge.

This gentleman he described as a genius by nature, and a painter by profession.

"At least," he said, correcting himself, "he don't get his living by it, you know. His father was—well, I believe, he was in the linen-drapery line in the Midland Counties, and much respected. Name's over the place of business to this day. There were several in family, but Snagge there got a small independency for his share, which enabled him to devote himself to Art. He lives in Italy, you know."

"Really!"

"Oh yes. No half-measures! Went and took a studio near Florence, and—and *lives* there." (Mr. Hopkins appeared to expect that this announcement should greatly impress his hearer.) "There's something altogether uncommon about Snagge."

William Hughes glanced at Mr. Snagge, who, not wholly unconscious that he was being discussed, tossed his hair back with a certain peculiar jerk of the head and elevation of the chin, while his eyes were raised to the ceiling, in a fine frenzy rolling.

"Decidedly uncommon," assented William Hughes.

"He has invented a new system of coloring, sir," said Hopkins, watching his hearer with the corner of his eye. "It gives a peculiarly rich tone. In fact, he is familiarly called among a certain set of us 'T. Y.,' which stands for Titian the Younger. He's only in England for a short time on a little matter of business; so you've just nicked it, haven't you?—I mean as to making his acquaintance, you know."

William Hughes protested warmly that he would not have missed meeting Mr. Snagge, otherwise the Younger Titian, on any account.

"His friend, too, Mr. Coney, is a remarkable man. Do you notice any likeness. Does he remind you of any well-known face?"

"The Swan of Avon," returned William, slowly and with profound solemnity.

"That's it, sir. Marvellous resemblance. And—what is *most* extraordinary—he was born within five-and-thirty miles of Stratford-on-Avon."

"You don't say so!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"And is Mr. Coney also a painter?"

"Oh no, no! He—in fact, he travels at present in hardware for a Sheffield firm. But he has seen an immense deal of the world—been in the United States, and, in fact, pretty well everywhere. He's a wonderful Shakespearian student, wonderful!—has lectured on the Immortal Bard, in character, for several charitable institutions in the provinces; great friend of Percival Snagge; known each other from boyhood. But won't you come near the fire?"

"Thank you. One moment. Those two young gentlemen standing side by side—"

"Oh! Toller (the one in the crimson skull-cap) and Green? They are both engaged in a Greek merchant's house in the city; but they are devoted to Art and the 'igher culture. Green has written some very fine poems; and" (dropping his voice to a deep, emphatic whisper) "*one of 'em has been printed.* Do come near the fire."

In order that the rest of the company should be under no disadvantage with respect to the stranger, or, possibly, to justify his introduction among them of so very shabby and undistinguished a figure, Mortimer Hopkins took occasion to mention that Mr. William Hughes had had a picture exhibited and sold in the Academy last season. This announcement appeared considerably to impress Messieurs Green and Toller; but it was not so well received by the Younger Titian, who nourished deep-seated suspicions of a man whose pictures were bought and paid for, as being probably of a low order of mind. And although somewhat appeased on learning that Mr. William Hughes was not a figure painter, he maintained a rather reserved and supercilious attitude towards him to the end of the evening. Since, however, William Hughes by no means resented this mistrustful loftiness, but, on the contrary, privately enjoyed it as an excellent joke, the general harmony was not in the least impaired.

The host now set himself (as he whispered behind his hand to Hughes) to "draw out" the gifted persons assembled round his hearth. One and all desiring and expecting to be so drawn, the only difficulty in the matter was to moderate the flow of genius,

and to tap—so to speak—each vintage in due rotation and with impartial fairness.

One after the other the company was favored with an exposition of his peculiar and Titianesque system of coloring by Mr. Percival Snagge; the principal soliloquies of Hamlet by Mr. Coney; and the recitation of two original poems by Mr. Green, which were, Mr. Hopkins remarked, “quite in Swinburne’s best manner.”

Then followed a general discussion on Modern Art and Literature. These, it appeared, were in a deplorable condition, and would, in fact, be ruined outright but for the existence of some select minds, who made a point of despising everything that the world in general admired, and of admiring everything which the world in general persisted in considering as a bore. The select minds had a virulent hostility against the Amusing; and upheld the Dismal Interest under every manifestation of human tediousness. And this was by no means because the select minds had no power of being amusing if they tried. Not at all! It was from devotion to a lofty ideal of Art. Nothing, it was agreed, was easier than to divert one’s fellow-creatures. And if the select minds did not paint attractive pictures, compose melodious music, and write books full of sparkling humor, you were expressly required to understand that it was because they *wouldn’t*. So absorbed and delighted was William Hughes in listening to these views that he did not hear the door open, and was surprised when Mr. Hopkins, senior, appeared unexpectedly in the room, to give a new turn to the conversation.

CHAPTER V.

“EVENIN’, gents,” was Mr. Hopkins’s compendious salutation to the company.

There was a curious likeness in unlikeness between him and his son. Hopkins, senior, had the same retreating forehead and sloping nose, but the jaw was much more marked and powerful in his case; and the face had a general expression of determination mixed with cunning,

Mr. John Hopkins was a very ignorant man, and he was never backward in acknowledging it. Indeed, the vanity of most of us being apt to lean towards the weak side, like a mother's partiality for her crippled child, Mr. John Hopkins sometimes displayed an aggressive pride in his ignorance. He made it, moreover, a theme of self-glorification that, whereas there were men of learning and accomplishments who couldn't earn their salt—he knew where to put his hand on half a score of 'em—there stood he, John Hopkins, early left an orphan to tumble up as he could without any education at all, at the head of an improving business, and owing no man a fi'-pun' note!

He had married a woman of very superior connections to his own; but she had died long ago, leaving him with an only child. Mr. Hopkins was by no means blind to his son's affectations; and had not the smallest sympathy with the high-flown notions which Mortimer retailed—very much at second-hand, and a good deal the worse for wear. But he had an odd persuasion that the gentility of his late wife's family "came out" in Mortimer's vagaries; and he secretly regarded them with complacency.

A tray with wine and spirits was carried in; and the kettle over the spirit-lamp being replenished with hot water, Mortimer Hopkins invited his guests to "mix for themselves," which they proceeded to do. Hopkins senior meanwhile had been proposing in a low voice to William Hughes the terms on which the latter was to undertake the Swiss landscapes.

"I can't help it, Mr. Hughes," said Mr. Hopkins, after some whispered discussion. "The party I'm dealing for has his views, and he sticks to 'em. There's many would be glad of the price offered, that's all I know. Take it or leave it."

"I will take it, Mr. Hopkins," said William, after a short pause, "because I am in need of the money."

"And a very good reason too! I don't know a better. Well, then, that's settled."

Then Mr. Hopkins sipped his grog with an air of satisfaction, and became conversational.

Mr. Percival Snagge, who had got the lead just before the arrival of the last comer, and had been holding forth about his own Titianesque methods, wished to keep the discourse at that lofty level; but Hopkins senior proved extremely unsympathetic and

unmanageable. As for William Hughes, even the grinding bargain to which he had just been subjected could not suppress the enjoyment with which he listened to the new element introduced into the conversation.

"My dear sir," said Hopkins, addressing Snagge, "we must move with the times. It isn't a bit of good sticking to one period more than another. Lord, the number of styles I've seen come up and go down again even in the short time I've had anything to do with pictures—! Say, for instance, that I see a run on smudginess of execution at any given date—what then? Am I a goin' to preach against smudginess in the teeth of the fashion? Not if I know it! No, no; whether it's pre-Raffle-ite, or Meedevil, or Impressionism, or whatever it may be, when the public appears with its money in its hand, I supply what the public demands, to the best of my ability. But as for taste—Lord, whatever the public likes, that *is* taste! And, let me tell you, nobody'll ever make a business pay on any other terms."

"The abstract principles of Beauty," said Mr. Snagge, emphatically (and when Mr. Snagge was emphatic he clenched his teeth in a fashion which seemed to flatten out all the vowel sounds as though they had been mangled)—"the abstract principles of Beauty are eternal!"

"Oh, 'old 'ard there, Mr. Snagge! I'm not contradicting you on the point of abstract principles. I never had the education for it. Why, I don't suppose there's a man living knows less about the abstract principles of 'igh Art than me! And I believe Mr. Hughes here'll bear me out in that?"

"Entirely!" assented William Hughes, with polite readiness.

"Nor I ain't disputing against my son Mortimer's ideas of 'igh Art. He's quite welcome to entertain 'em, being provided for at a rising salary with one of the most respectable tea-brokers in the city of London. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that there's something particularly gentlemanly in those views and suited to gentlemen. But for practical artists, it's another thing; and I believe Mr. Hughes'll bear me out again?"

"Undoubtedly!" responded William Hughes, with a beaming face.

"Now you, Mr. Snagge," proceeded Hopkins, growing more and more eloquent under the stimulus of hot gin-and-water, com-

bined with his own powerful arguments—"you yourself, sir, as I am given to understand, are in the enjoyment of a private independency. What follows? You can afford to go in for abstract principles and Titian's coloring, and what not. It's no odds to you that your pictures don't command a price in the market--which, merely looking at what stands to reason, I presume they *don't* do. But with Mr. Hughes, for instance, if he'll excuse me saying so, that sort of thing won't wash. Why, if he was to go in for coloring on a new principle equal to Titian's, or any games of that sort, there isn't a dealer in the trade would give him another commission! He's got to paint pictures that 'll sell. And you'll notice, as a general principle, the 'igh Art private gents that crack up each other's performances ain't fond of *buying* 'em!" added Mr. Hopkins, with a solemn wink.

After this, there ensued a profound silence which lasted several minutes. It was felt that, however sincere might be Mr. Hopkins's admiration for the gentlemanly views of Art held by Mortimer and Mortimer's friends, yet his mode of expressing that admiration had a damping effect on the company generally.

Messrs. Green and Toller puffed silently at their cigars, with their eyes fixed on the fire. Mortimer privately held that there was a vast deal of unanswerably sound argument in his father's remarks, being aware, deep down in his consciousness, that, for his own part, the Early Greek youth was but the guinea's stamp—medallion's profile—while the tea-broker was the man, for a' that. Nevertheless, he considered those remarks to be ill-timed. For work is one thing, and play is another; and when you are playing at æstheticism it is objectionable to spoil the game. As for Mr. Percival Snagge, he had pointedly withdrawn his attention, and sat with his eyes upturned to the ceiling, his hair tossed wildly back, his chin elevated, and his upper lip turned almost inside out, to express scorn.

The pause was broken by Mr. Coney, whose mind (perhaps by reason of its vastness) moved slowly, and who had been pondering on Mr. Hopkins's allusion to his son's prospects.

"Ah!" he said, shaking his big, bald forehead from side to side, "Baikie and Wiggetts is as sound a firm as I know, and a young man is to be congratulated on having a berth there. But Mortimer is not likely to be dependent on *that*."

Hopkins gave a short cough, and looked round him with an air of mysterious importance. "Well, Coney," he said, "you may happen to know that there is property among my son's relations by the mother's side, but I never build on it. Anyway, what I say is, that Mortimer's best chance of getting it is to make it plain that he can do without it. There's nothing a rich man hates more than the idea of his money going to a poor one. And, mind you, I don't know but what I should feel the same. You may call it sentimental if you like, but I'm persuaded there's feelings in human nature that you can't redooce to cool reason."

"There's a pot of money rolling up in a certain quarter, sir—a pot of money," said Mr. Coney, impressively, and slowly passing his hand upward over the perfectly smooth expanse from his eyebrow to the crown of his head.

"Ah! it was curious," returned Hopkins, "your happening to fall in with that party, after him ducking under, so to say, for years, as I've understood—to such an extent, in fact, that some of his friends and family thought he was dead. Let me see, how long is it since you met him?"

"Two years—rather better; last time I was in the States. We were in the same boarding-house for a time out West. He was tied by the leg there, laid up with a sprained foot, and I saw a good deal of him."

"Ah! just so. He couldn't get away, eh?" said Hopkins, without the least sarcastic intention.

"You were never personally acquainted with him, were you?" said Coney, after a short pause.

"Me! Lord bless your soul! he wasn't very likely to be personally acquainted with a chap like *me*! No, no; the late Mrs. Hopkins's connections are a very different stamp from yours truly."

"He was a blood relation of Mrs. H., though, wasn't he?"

"Rather! Own uncle by the mother's side."

"So near as that?"

"So near as that, sir."

"What aged man do you say he is?" asked Coney, after another pause.

"Oh!—why, let me see. A year or two the wrong side of sixty, I should say."

“He looks more than that. Ten years more than that. But men live hard out there. He drinks more than is good for him, in a queer, solitary kind of way. All his life is queer and solitary. Men who know him in New York said to me that his speculating is just for the sake of the excitement, and that though he’s had wonderful luck, he cares very little about the money.”

“Gammon!” cried Hopkins, indignantly. “Not care about the money! ’Pon my soul, there’s nothing some people won’t say about a man!”

Mortimer Hopkins listened with attentive interest to all this. So did Green and Toller. They were frankly curious on the subject; having hitherto heard only vaguely magnificent hints from Mortimer about his wealthy connections, and having, it must be owned, regarded the hints with scepticism.

But William Hughes had not found the conversation interesting, after the moment when it had descended from general principles to concrete particulars about Hopkins’s family affairs. Hughes sat, pipe in mouth, plunged into a meditation as to how little it would be possible for him to subsist upon while he should be painting the Swiss views, and how he could contrive to provide for Claude in such a manner as to content Aunt Judith.

All at once the mention of a name roused him from his musings as effectually as if it had been shouted aloud, although it was spoken in an ordinary tone of voice:

“CHRISTOPHER DALTON!”

It was twenty-seven years ago since he had first made acquaintance with that name in Judith’s distracted letter. The tumult, the rage, the throbbing anguish of that time were past and gone—gone like his hopes, his ambition, and his youth; but even now he could not hear the words “Christopher Dalton” without a quickened pulse and a sickening rush of feeling. The mention of Dalton in that company was strangely unexpected; but William Hughes had no impulse of curiosity to hear more. His first instinct was to go away. For years he had striven to drive the thought of that man from his mind, which had once been haunted by it night and day with maddening persistency. He had turned resolutely away from the irrevocable past. The lost and loved would not return. And for the man who had caused their misery—there was a gulf between

them. They were divided forever; and it was best so. Moreover, William Hughes's feeling was not of the kind which finds relief in words. During these latter years Aunt Judith would fain sometimes have "talked over" their tragic family story; but she had never dared to mention it to William.

He stood up automatically, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Not going, are you, Mr. Hughes?" said Mortimer, civilly.

But Mr. Hughes answered that he must be going; and his departure seemed to furnish the needed impulse for deciding the other guests to go also. As he was wrapping his shepherd's plaid round his shoulders in the passage, the elder Hopkins ran down-stairs, and offered to walk with him as far as the roads were the same. The offer was unwelcome, but it could scarcely be refused, so they left the house together.

Hughes supposed that the dealer had some further suggestion or direction to give about the Swiss views; but Mr. Hopkins was full of a different subject, and began upon it almost as soon as they had stepped into the street.

He expatiated on the gentility of his late wife's family; on the dismay her father and mother would have felt at the idea of her marrying a chap like *him*; on the certainty that she never would have married him but for the fact of her being a drudging nursery governess, penniless, and an orphan; on the remarkable circumstance that Mortimer was "quite the gentleman" in many of his ideas, taking, in this respect, entirely after his mother's side of the house; and, finally, on how the discovery of Mr. Dalton, his mother's uncle, might lead to Mortimer's being able to carry his gentlemanly ideas into practice by the only means available for that purpose—namely, the possession of a great deal of money. "For," said Mr. John Hopkins, with naïve conviction, "the gentlemanliest ideas in the world ain't enough if you want to *act* the gentleman. You must have the cash, sir."

At another time, William would have delighted in these artless manifestations of Mr. Hopkins's soul. But now all relish of that sort had been overcome by a pungent bitterness. Suddenly a startling thought caused him to lift his head, and break silence with an abrupt question: "There's no chance of his coming to England, is there?"

"Who? Mr. Dalton? No; I'm afraid not. I wish we *could*

get him this side of the water, for I think a man like him would be pretty sure to take to Mortimer, and pleased to see that he'd had a good education and all that. But he's a very odd fish, is Christopher Dalton, Esquire; reg'lar, what-d'ye-call-it?—missingthrope. He hates the very name of coming back to the Old Country, so I'm told. However, owing to my friend Nat Coney having a pretty wide circle of acquaintances in the States, I shall be able now to keep my eye on Mr. Dalton, more or less. That's important, you know, in case of his going off the hooks sudden, and dying intestate, or anything of that sort; and his life ain't a good one from an insurance point of view. I'm not sure what collaterals there may be, because the late Mrs. H.'s connections ain't very likely to take any notice of *me*. But, by what I hear, Dalton's bound to cut up so as there'll be a good slice for all. Mortimer's grandmother was the favorite sister; and if you come to next o' kin, I don't know whose's nearer! Well, there's your 'bus, I think. Good-night, Mr. Hughes."

CHAPTER VI.

BARBARA COPLEY thought herself wonderfully fortunate in having fallen in with such a family as the Ketterings. They were good-tempered, cheerful, on excellent terms with themselves and with each other. They were, moreover, well educated. Poor Barbara's pupils had been drawn hitherto from a very different class of creatures. The mother of one of them had been heard to object to Miss Copley on the ground that she looked so dismal, and didn't seem to take any pleasure in the lessons; whereas *she* (the matron in question) was convinced that a "cheerful way with you" was half the battle in teaching young people.

But if you set the most accomplished and enthusiastic of whips to drive a costermonger's cart, you would scarcely expect him to manifest much vivid enjoyment of the performance. Indeed, his enjoyment would probably be in an inverse ratio to his skill. Now, Olga and Ida Kettering were sufficiently intelligent to make the lessons interesting. In truth, Barbara had never taught under such

agreeable circumstances. And since any pleasurable emotion with Barbara easily transmuted itself into gratitude, she felt herself growing daily more attached to these people who were so kind as to employ her.

And then the revelation of her mother's old love-story could not fail to make her listen with some curiosity to her pupils' gossip about their Aunt Augusta in Germany. Barbara would certainly have liked to know something more than the mere dry fact that her mother had once been engaged to Arthur Maddison, and that the match had been broken off by circumstances in which neither of them was to blame. And she had little doubt that Aunt Judith would be willing to speak of it all freely enough. But Barbara's delicate and sensitive loyalty towards her uncle made her shrink from asking for more information than he had chosen to give voluntarily.

It was therefore with some little stirring of excitement that she heard from her pupils of the arrival of their cousin from Hamburg; and when, on entering the Ketterings' drawing-room a day or two afterwards, she found a gentleman there whom Mrs. Kettering introduced as "My nephew, Mr. Frederick Hofmann." Barbara could not help looking at him with more keenness of interest than usually attends such casual encounters, for she knew that his mother had been Augusta Maddison.

She met an odd look in his eyes, which seemed to be a look of recognition, although she was sure she had never seen him before. This seemed to strike Ida, the younger of the two girls, also; for she said, "Why, Fritz, you look as if you had known Miss Copley before!"

"No; I have never had that honor," answered Fritz.

"Well, now you must just clear out, Fritz," said Olga. "I am not going to take my lesson before witnesses. Please to make tracks. Skedaddle!"

"Olga," cried Mrs. Kettering, "I wish you would not talk so much slang! It is really dreadful."

Mrs. Kettering was a handsome blonde: such a looking woman as Gretchen might have developed into if she had never met Faust. She spoke idiomatic English with perfect ease and fluency, but with a strong German accent, producing all her "r's" somewhere at the back of the palate, instead of with the tip of the tongue.

"Oh, mamma, I only want to complete Fritz's education. I'm sure Aunt Augusta would wish him to speak his mother-tongue like a native."

"Slang is not my mother-tongue, nor my mother's tongue either, Miss Kettering. But I'm not altogether such a benighted foreigner as to talk correct English!" answered Fritz, smiling. "So be good enough to consider yourself snubbed and sat upon."

"I am sorry to turn you out, Fritz," said Mrs. Kettering, leading the way to another room. "But the schoolroom piano is nearly worn out, and the girls say it is fit for nothing but five-finger exercises. So they take their lesson on the Broadwood. They are to have finishing lessons next season from Hammerfaust, and then papa promises them a new instrument."

The latter part of this speech was made in the little sitting-room at the back of the house, which Mrs. Kettering called her boudoir, and whither Ida had followed her mother and cousin.

Here they found a lady seated at a table, writing. But almost as they entered she closed and locked a little portable leather desk which she had been using, and put a small, jingling bunch of keys into her pocket.

"Don't let us disturb you, Sally," said Mrs. Kettering.

"No; I have done," answered the lady, speaking with the same sort of sharp decision which had marked her way of locking the desk.

"Here is Fritz Hofmann. You remember Miss Stringer, Fritz."

Fritz bowed, and then took Miss Stringer's offered hand. "Oh, yes, Aunt Gertrude," he said, "I had the pleasure of making her acquaintance the last time I was in England, and I do not easily forget faces."

"How d'ye do?" said Miss Stringer. And then she took some needlework out of a basket, and appeared to dismiss him from her mind altogether.

She was a lady of about five-and-forty years old, with a thin aquiline nose, and bright, handsome eyes of a bluish gray. She had abundant gray hair, all drawn back from her face, and twisted into as tight a knot as possible. There was a high color in her cheeks, and her complexion generally looked rough and rasped, as though it were ruthlessly exposed to all weathers.

"Fritz," said Ida, looking earnestly at him, "I know it's quite

true what you say about not forgetting faces; and you *have* seen Miss Copley before! I'm sure you have. Come now, haven't you?"

One of Ida's characteristics was a stolid inquisitiveness. She would press her questions with the untiring persistency of a draught ox, which may be brought to a standstill by steepness or a heavy load, but will never, under any circumstances, jib. Ida was perfectly good-humored, and never had any malicious intention in her questioning; but she was incapable of considering more than one aspect of a subject at a time. And when she wanted anything, she entirely lost sight of the possibility that you might desire something different. On the present occasion, however, this constitutional want of tact did no harm; since Fritz had not the least objection to answer "Yes, I have met Miss Copley before. I recognized her immediately."

"There! I said so. Where did you see her?"

"In a halo—surrounded by an aureole of light."

"Oh, Fritz, that's nonsense. What do you mean?"

Fritz might have postponed his explanation, feeling a certain amusement in "playing" Ida's curiosity, but that his aunt here looked at him interrogatively with large blue eyes which were very like Ida's, and he felt himself bound to answer straightforwardly. "I saw her one Saturday evening in the Harrow Road by the glare of a gaslight outside a butcher's shop."

"Goodness! And you call that a halo?" exclaimed Ida, indignantly.

But here Mrs. Kettering, interposing, and desiring Ida to go to her lessons, the young lady returned to the drawing-room, in some uncertainty whether Fritz had been laughing at her or not.

"I was walking towards the Underground Railway Station," pursued Fritz, whose imagination was evidently busy with the retrospect, "pushing along through a swarm of squalid people, when out of the stream of faces on the opposite side of the way, that face seemed to rise like something belonging to another world. It was a very curious sensation to see it appear out of the haze into that strong illumination, looking so different from all around it. It impressed one like something in a dream."

"Yes; I am sure Miss Copley must have looked very different

from most of the people in the Harrow Road on a Saturday night," said Mrs. Kettering, after a little pause of consideration.

"What is the matter with the people in the Harrow Road on a Saturday night?" inquired Miss Stringer, abruptly. She spoke with a tight horizontal movement of the lower lip, articulating every syllable with sharp, metallic distinctness.

"Oh, my dear Sally, they are so horrid!"

"How—'horrid'?"

"Oh, so—so—so dirty!"

"Dirtier than the people in other roads on a Saturday night?" asked Miss Stringer, ironically.

"Oh yes; much!" replied Mrs. Kettering, taking up her embroidery and leaning placidly back in her chair.

Miss Stringer glanced at her, and then glanced impatiently away. She felt sometimes that talking to Mrs. Kettering was like shooting arrows into a down cushion. "I presume," she said, turning her bright eyes on young Hofmann, "that the recognition was not mutual? Miss Copley did not see *you*?"

"I presume not; I was on the other side of the way."

"Ah! Unembellished with a halo."

"Except the moral halo of virtue, which I always carry about with me."

Miss Stringer threw back her head like a horse that had been suddenly checked, and a rather grim smile widened her tight lips. Frederick Hofmann was evidently not a down cushion.

"We like Miss Copley very much," said Mrs. Kettering, who had been pursuing her own train of thought in her own leisurely fashion. "Of course, we were sure, when Rosenheim recommended her, that her music would be all right. But, besides that, she teaches drawing in a very superior way, and she is altogether accomplished and quite a lady; isn't she, Sally?"

"*Ladylike*," returned Miss Stringer, with an air of emphasizing a subtle distinction.

"And *we* think her pretty."

"Scarcely pretty. Interesting," pronounced Miss Stringer, with decision.

"Well, she would be pretty if she were not quite so pale."

"No; as far as *that* goes, her paleness—which is quite clear and healthy—is rather attractive."

"Oh, by the way, Fritz," said his aunt, turning towards him with new animation, "you must tell your mother—fancy what we found out the other day! Miss Copley's family belong to Marypool! Augusta will like to know."

"Ah! Really? Yes; my mother is always interested in hearing about her native town."

"Wasn't it an odd circumstance, Sally?" said Mrs. Kettering.

"Odd! What?"

"Miss Copley's people being of Marypool, you know."

"Well, considering that the population of Marypool was over a quarter of a million at the last census, one would suppose it likely that a good many persons should be more or less directly connected with that seaport."

"But they don't all come here to my house, Sally!"

"Good heavens, no! That I *should* consider odd—and, perhaps, even more than odd!"

"I will write and ask my mother whether she remembers the name of Copley in Marypool," said Fritz.

But when, later in the afternoon, Mrs. Kettering made some allusions to this intention in the presence of the girls, Olga and Ida both declared that Miss Copley had never been in Marypool in her life, and that they imagined the connection with that town to be on the part of her aunt and uncle, who were named Hughes.

"And they're quite, quite poor, so they can't have been friends of Aunt Augusta's," said Ida, naïvely.

"Oh, I did not mean that Fritz should go into detail. I only thought Augusta would like to hear of somebody from Marypool. But, perhaps, it is not worth while to trouble your mother about it, Fritz," said Mrs. Kettering.

"Perhaps not," answered Fritz.

Nevertheless he did write the same evening, asking his mother if she remembered the names of Hughes and Copley among the Marypool folks in his youth.

What a flutter of excitement it would have caused in the breast of poor Aunt Judith could she have known that her name was being thus recalled to Augusta Maddison after all these years! To her the events connected with the breaking-off of her niece's engagement had been so momentous as to shape the whole course of her subsequent life. And ever since she had learned that Bar-

bara's pupils were related to the Maddisons, a crowd of slumbering memories and associations had been revived in her mind, and had occupied almost all her waking thoughts—all of them, that is, which were not devoted to Claude. In her heart she wondered that William should have taken it so coolly; and should ever have spoken in excuse of Arthur Maddison's conduct. For her part, she despised and detested Arthur Maddison, and should never cease to think he had behaved in a dastardly and dishonorable manner.

The truth was, that Judith had been from the first the chief partisan of the Maddison alliance. She saw none of the purse-proud patronage on the part of the rich merchant's family which irked her brother. It was never displayed in an openly offensive form. And Judith was defended against any suspicion that the Maddisons could possibly think they condescended in allying themselves with the Hugheses, by her fond belief in the glories of her pedigree. Her illusions on this point made an agreeable medium through which to contemplate her fellow-creatures; and they had the advantage of being intangible, and thus defying "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"—and even, to a certain extent, of ill-natured criticism. You may shatter your neighbor's painted glass window of which he is so proud; but it is clearly of no use to fling stones at a rainbow.

Moreover, Judith had not so much perspicacity in judging the character of Arthur Maddison as her brother had. She was consequently overwhelmed with surprise and resentment when he broke off his engagement to Olive; and in that heat of her anger she had written a very bitter letter to the young man, which offended him beyond forgiveness. About this letter Judith had never said a word to any one. She felt instinctively that William would disapprove of it. But although William's disapproval might awe, it seldom convinced her. She was, indeed, obliged to admit to herself that the hot Welsh blood of which she was so proud had occasionally hurried her into rash actions, scarcely justifiable by cool reason. But she had never repented writing that letter to Arthur Maddison. She only hoped she had made him feel the sting of the lash!

But that was long, long ago now. She had not expected ever to hear of the Maddisons again, for all the old links with Marypool had been broken abruptly when the ruined family left their

native place. When Barbara told her that she had seen and been introduced to a gentleman who was the son of Augusta Maddison, Aunt Judith was quite agitated.

"I hope he doesn't guess who *you* are, Barbara," she said. "You may depend on it our name has no sweet savor in the Maddison nostrils. The man who has injured you, you know, will never forgive you. Not that Augusta was so heartless as the others. I have always said that. And besides, she was away—married and out of it all before—" And then the old lady stopped short and shook her head.

"Aunt Judith," said Barbara, turning on her all at once with a little quiet air of resolution, "has Uncle William ever forbidden you to talk to me about my Aunt Winifred?"

All the wintry roses forsook Aunt Judith's cheeks, and her dark eyes had a startled look as she exclaimed, "Forbidden me, child!"

"No; I don't mean forbidden. I mean—do you think he desires I should know nothing about her story? Because, mind that, Aunt Judith, if you think so, I will not ask another question. You will tell me the truth, I know."

"N—no, child," stammered Judith, faintly. She was searching her conscience, for she wished and intended to answer truly. After a moment or two she raised her head and said, more confidently, "No; I do not think so." Then she added, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, "Only he cannot—you must never speak to him on the subject. It nearly killed him. He had convulsive fits when he was a young man. Oh, it was terrible! But I don't believe he would think it right to refuse to tell you if you wish to know. You are not a child now."

"I am not a child; and I do wish to know," answered Barbara, firmly. Then, seeing Aunt Judith pause, uncertain how to begin, she said, "Was it on account of Aunt Winifred that my mother's first engagement was broken off?"

Aunt Judith put her old wrinkled hand on the fair young hand of her grandniece. But it was not of Barbara she was thinking. "My poor little gentle Olive!" she exclaimed. And then in a rush of feeling that made the words flow in broken sentences, like a full stream that is chafed and checked by sharp rocks, all the sad story was told.

Barbara listened in almost absolute silence. Every now and then she pressed her aunt's hand; and when the old woman ceased, she said, almost in a whisper, "Thank you, Aunt Judith."

The tears were flowing down Barbara's cheeks, and her cheeks were white as lilies. The tragedy of her grandfather's death, the ruin of the family fortunes, the terrible fate of Winifred, falling like a star from heaven into unknown blackness—all these were very dreadful to think upon; but they scarcely came home to her more nearly than some sorrowful story in a book. She half reproached herself that it should be so, but that was the truth. Even her mother's broken love story had a touch of unreality to her mind. That poor young Olive! Yes; she pitied her, but she could not help thinking of her as an altogether separate being from her own mother. Her mother's home had been happy, and her mother's life had not been loveless, in spite of the defection of Arthur Maddison.

But what did touch Barbara—what pierced her very heart as she thought of it—was the record of struggle and self-sacrifice heroically borne by William and Judith Hughes; her grand-aunt striving against benumbing discouragement and advancing age, to help in the earning of their daily bread; and William! What had his whole existence been from the day when he read that letter, telling of his sister's flight, under the bright-blue sky of a Roman spring morning?

He had then youth, hope, health, friends, and genius. Barbara believed fanatically in her uncle's genius. But a blight had fallen on them all. His artistic gifts were mortgaged for many a year to earn food and raiment and shelter for the helpless woman dependent on him; his health was broken; his whole life maimed. And then she thought of his face beaming with some quiet jest, his eyes full of cheerful radiance, his kind voice; and the pathos of it all smote her to the heart, and she hid her face and sobbed.

Judith had not shed many tears. She had told her story very simply as regarded herself, having, in truth, a brave nature, not at all prone to exaggerate her personal sufferings. And now her mind was busy with another order of ideas. She was imagining the shock and commotion it would cause among the survivors of the Maddison family if they could know whose child Miss Copley, the governess, really was,

“And were there any other relations there, Barbara? That lady you spoke of—Miss—Miss Sally Somebody, does she belong to the Maddisons?”

“No, Aunt Judith,” answered Barbara, drying her eyes and checking a sob in her throat. “She is a far-off cousin of Mr. Kettering, I believe.”

“Ah! Then there was only that young man, Augusta’s son? Better so. Men are not so sharp as women in some things. It would really be a tremendous business if the Maddisons were to know. I hardly think you could continue giving lessons to the Ketterings. The Maddisons would not know how to hold up their heads before you; and of course they would hate you all the more.”

Poor Judith!

A day or two later, Fritz Hofmann was reading a letter from his mother, in which, after a page and a half occupied with other matters, there was this passage: “Your mention of the Hugheses reminds me of old times. The name of Copley I know nothing of. But Hughes is a name that was once very familiar to me, although the people who bore it were not quite in our circle of friends. But your Uncle Arthur was once actually engaged to a Miss Hughes! Papa never liked the match, but Arthur was set upon it, and if Arthur had cried for the moon in those days, I think my father and mother would have sent up a balloon to try and bring it down for him. You can’t imagine Uncle Arthur a spoiled young gentleman bent on making a romantic marriage! However, it was all broken off. There was some terrible scandal in the Hughes family—nothing touching the girl my brother was fond of, and whom I knew before my marriage; a sweet, gentle creature, but rather *unbedeutend*—a little insignificant, you know. But although I never was told particulars, I know there was great trouble about an elder sister in London, and Arthur felt it his duty to yield to the advice of his friends and family, and the whole affair was at an end. The Hugheses disappeared from Marypool after that. There was an aunt whom I remember, and my mother used to say she had been one of the Marypool belles in her young days. See how your question has set my pen running? What can you care about all these old stories? But if any of the Hughes family survive, and you should be thrown

in the way of them, just say a kind word from me. I have a soft place in my breast for all Marypool things and people. The glamour of youth, I suppose. But very likely the Hugheses of this generation know nothing about me, and will wonder what you are talking of!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE end of September and the first week in October are not supposed to be the time best adapted for landscape-painting in Switzerland, and yet this was the season chosen for William Hughes by William Hughes's unknown patron, acting through Mr. John Hopkins. But then the painter was not asked to paint high mountain valleys, ravines, or glaciers. His views, it was stipulated, were to be all taken in the immediate neighborhood of Lake Lemman, among reddening vine-leaves and groups of walnut-trees framing blue glimpses of the lake.

"The fact is," said William Hughes, speaking of the commission at home, "they are to be simply a series of decorative panels made to fit a certain room, and carrying out a certain autumnal tone of color."

"That is not worthy of your brush, Uncle William," said Barbara, indignantly.

"The better it is done, the worthier it will be of my brush, which is a reason for my doing it," answered William, talking his nonsense with a grave face, but with a gleam of jest in his eyes which looked confidently for an answering gleam in Barbara's.

"Of course it is," said Miss Hughes, seriously. "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well!"

Aunt Judith did not always understand her nephew's irony. And she could never be made to see clearly the subtle distinctions between art and handicraft on which artists seemed to her to lay too great stress.

"I suppose you would scarcely think it fitting for Uncle William to paint griffins and crowns on coach panels, Aunt Judith?" Barbara had once said to her.

"Oh no; of course not," Judith had replied. It may, how-

ever, be doubted whether, by her unassisted judgment, she would have arrived at the conclusion that William much derogated in painting coach panels; if only the coach panels were paid for at the same rate per square foot as a canvas in a gilt frame. But her judgment on this point was assisted—as the judgment of all of us is assisted on so many points—by the opinion of the world in general.

“The work will be very welcome,” said William. “All the more because it gives me the chance of seeing Claude. I don’t know how else I could have afforded it.”

A second letter had been received by Miss Hughes from Claude, written as soon as he learned that it was probable his uncle would go to Switzerland and see for himself how matters stood. Claude was not at all delighted by the prospect of that personal inspection, and his second letter Aunt Judith did not show to any one else. It was not that in her own mind she accused Claude of misrepresentation or exaggeration. She believed every word he wrote about himself—or, at any rate, she believed that he believed it. But that was, she told herself, because she understood him, and could sympathize with his inmost feelings. To the outside observer things might not appear to justify Claude’s complaints; and she feared that, where Claude was concerned, William would never be more than an outside observer.

She, to some extent, relieved her feelings on this score by having a pitched battle with Larcher in defence of “Master Claude,” the faithful old servant having taken upon herself to blame the young man for unsteadiness and want of resolution.

“Mistress was terrible down in her spirits, miss,” said Larcher afterwards to Barbara. “I could see she was fretting and nervous like about the boy, and I knew nothing would brisk her up like giving me a good rowing. It done her a deal of good, Miss Barbara; and I often think ’tis a mercy mistress has got me to talk to, for talk she will, and sometimes says more to the school-children’s parents than common people like them can understand. Mrs. Budge now, the baker’s wife, begun at me the other day as familiar!—wanting to talk about *our* family affairs. Mistress had been letting out things. I knew that very well. Well, Mrs. Budge didn’t get much change out o’ *me*, Miss Barbara. Oh, I don’t say nothing against her so long as she’s kept in her place.

Why, the chimley-sweep round the corner is a good, honest man as need be, but I shouldn't be fond of setting next him at meals!"

"Of course my aunt has a right to speak to whomsoever she pleases, Larcher," said Barbara, gravely.

"Law, Miss Barbara, I don't mean no disrespect to mistress! Never likely! and me a slip of a little fool of a country girl when she first took me for under-housemaid forty odd years ago! And her brother, Mr. David Hughes—your grandfather, Miss Barbara—as fine-looking and clever a gentleman as any in Marypool, and the kindness I've had from all the family as is past telling! 'Tain't very likely as *I* shouldn't know what's due to mistress!"

Larcher had, indeed, only one grievance against the Hughes family—their refusal to accept all her savings when ruin fell upon them, and the school at Westbeach was broken up. Larcher had at that time already lived many years with Miss Hughes, her service having been only once interrupted for a short time by a circumstance which she now appeared to regard as a mere trivial episode, and temporary interruption to the serious history of her life—namely, her marriage. She had married a green-grocer and market-gardener, who was much her senior, and who died within two years of the marriage, bequeathing his market-garden, his cart, his donkey, and all that was his to his widow.

Upon this, Mrs. Ann Briggs, *née* Larcher, realized her property, invested the proceeds, and returned to her service with Miss Hughes as quietly as though nothing had happened. She even refused to assume her married name, preferring to be called by the old familiar appellation.

There was no reason to suppose that she had been unhappy with her husband. He had certainly not ill-treated her; and he had left her all his worldly goods. But Larcher scarcely ever mentioned him; and when she did, it was with an apologetic smile and shake of the head, speaking of him as "that there poor man Briggs," and conveying in a general way that her marriage had been a passing absurdity, for which she solicited your kind indulgence, and which she begged to assure you should not occur again.

The day of William's departure for Switzerland was fixed, but he had one or two last words to say to Mr. Hopkins; so he walked

down one forenoon to the frame-maker's place of business, in a street off Oxford Street, to see him.

In the shop he found those two distinguished votaries of the Muses, Mr. Snagge and Mr. Coney. It could not be denied that Mr. Snagge suffered less of a metamorphosis from the broad light of day and the restrictions of ordinary life than did his accomplished friend. Mr. Snagge could wear a suit of black velveteen, and a pink neck-tie, and a slouch hat; his eyes might roll wildly and his hair straggle down over his coat collar without attracting any inconvenient amount of attention in the busy streets of London. But one could scarcely count on the public preoccupation so far as to venture on walking about crowded thoroughfares in the costume worn by the Immortal Bard; or, at any rate, by the Immortal Bard's plaster effigies. Mr. Coney, therefore, wisely resolved to "sink the poet," as his friend Snagge gracefully expressed it, during his daily avocations; and his worst enemy could not deny that he entirely succeeded.

When William Hughes entered the shop, Mr. Coney was pressing on the frame-maker's attention some articles used in his trade, and Mr. Percival Snagge, with folded arms, and a face of ineffable disdain, was gazing at one or two pictures disposed on easels at the back of the shop.

"Mornin', Mr. Hughes, mornin'," said Hopkins. "Would you mind waiting a minute? I'll attend to you in half a jiffy. Well, but now how would it be taking 'em by the gross, Coney?"

William Hughes nodded, and then strolled in the direction of Mr. Percival Snagge, who saluted him with a lofty bow, but did not relax the severe and almost bitter expression of his countenance. It was obvious, however, from the direction of Mr. Snagge's eyes, that this severity was not aimed at Hughes personally, but was called forth by the lamentable shortcomings of the pictures at which he was looking. There were three oil-paintings—a study of a head, and two landscapes—and Hopkins had just exultantly informed Mr. Snagge that all the pictures had been sold, and sold "dooed well too."

"It's discouraging to a man who has any feeling for High Art to see this sort of thing fetching a price," said Mr. Snagge, with gloomy scorn on his brow, and his teeth tightly clenched.

"Oh, you shouldn't allow yourself to be discouraged," said

William, cheerfully. "If you persevere, perhaps your things may fetch a price some day."

"*My* things—? You misunderstand me. I did not mean—Are you acquainted with the works of Titian, sir?"

"I wouldn't venture to say so much as that; but I have seen some of them."

"You must have remarked the extraordinary beauty of his backgrounds—the depth, the tone, the feeling, the *chosen* forms of mountain outline, the delicious aerial distance? Now look at that miserable daub which calls itself a landscape here"—and he pointed with outstretched finger to one of the canvases before him. "Is there any one of all these qualities in it?"

"Well, with regard, now, to there being no 'chosen forms of mountain outline,' for instance—might not that be in some measure accounted for by the subject of the picture being in the Essex Marshes?"

Snagge slowly shook his head. "It is not this or that detail, sir; it is the spirit of the whole. The flatness, the—the—above all, the poverty of coloring. Do you know how *I* should have begun had I been painting that picture?"

"Not in the least. I can only give a dim guess as to how you would have finished."

Snagge turned his vague, lack-lustre blue eyes on the other man for a moment, doubtfully. Then he said, with an air of patient explanation, "You don't carry in your mind the account of my process which I gave at our friend Mortimer's the other night. The whole secret of my depth of color lies in the first preparation."

"Oho!"

"Entirely. I begin by giving the canvas one uniform coat of black."

"Bravo! Don't say another word!"

"Eh?"

"You can't improve on that! I see it all. 'One uniform coat of black.' Capital! Nothing could possibly be better."

And, with a beaming smile on his face, William returned to the front part of the shop, where Hopkins and Coney had by this time finished their business.

"Sorry to detain you, Mr. Hughes," said Hopkins.

“Don’t mention it! I have been having a delightful conversation with Mr. Snagge, and enjoying myself very much.”

“Rum charikter, that!” said Hopkins, when William Hughes had departed, after saying the word he had come to say.

“How—rum?” asked Mr. Coney.

“Well, what I should call a thoroughly unpractical charikter. Do you know that chap lives mewed up with an old grandmother, or aunt, or something! And he has a whole brood of nephews and nieces hanging on him, too.”

“Don’t say so!” returned Coney, who was but moderately interested in Mr. Hughes’s domestic history.

“Fact. Oh, he’s an uncommonly rum charikter, is Hughes! He’s almost a fool, you know, in some ways. But all the same, he has talent, mind you!”

“He does not impress me as having any high æsthetic culture,” remarked Mr. Percival Snagge.

“Ah! I dare say not. But he’s a well-educated chap, too. There’s a good deal of the gentleman about William Hughes,” said Mr. Hopkins, handsomely.

The subject of the foregoing remarks had scarcely turned the corner into Oxford Street before a young gentleman entered the shop, and was received by the master of it with great deference. The young gentleman was our acquaintance, Fritz Hofmann; and Mr. Hopkins’s extreme civility was due to his knowledge that Fritz Hofmann belonged to wealthy people, and was connected with some of his (Hopkins’s) most important customers. The young man had come now with some message to the frame-maker from Mrs. Kettering, and when the message was delivered he glanced round the shop, and saw the paintings on the easels.

“That’s a charming thing!” said he, pointing to one of the landscapes, and going up to examine it.

Hopkins followed him, voluble and eager. “Ah! a charming thing indeed, sir. First-rate bit of work that. An original William Hughes, sir, undoubted.”

“I say, Hopkins—no; that landscape isn’t by Hughes, is it?” said Mr. Snagge, plucking him by the sleeve, with a very disconcerted and bewildered expression of countenance.

Hopkins turned on him sharply—almost savagely. “Is it by Hughes, sir? Of course it is, sir. I’m not aware as I am in the habit of palming off one artist’s work for another.”

Snagge fell back in consternation. This aspect of Mr. Hopkins was entirely new to him. But then he had not hitherto beheld Mr. Hopkins in the prosecution of his trade.

The next moment Hopkins turned with deferential blandness to young Hofmann, who was still looking at the picture. "No; that ain't my way of doing business—not exactly! And if it was, it wouldn't be much use trying to deceive *you*, sir. You're a connyshure, sir. I can always tell with half an eye when a gentleman knows what's what. And as to that landscape being an original William Hughes" (with a withering glance at the crest-fallen Snagge), "the picture's signed. There's the name in the far corner."

"Hughes," repeated Fritz, musingly to himself. "Yes, he is a painter I know. I wonder if it's the same."

"Of course it's the same, sir," answered Hopkins, suspecting in his anger that Snagge's question, and Snagge's singular manner when putting it, had made his customer mistrustful. "'William Hughes;' there can't be any doubt about it at all. One of his pictures was bought off the walls of the Royal Academy Exhibition last season by His Imperial 'Ighness the Grand Duke Casimir. It was the property of Mr. Barker, the well-known dealer. Most of Mr. Hughes's work does get into Barker's hands. That landscape, sir, which you so justly admire came to me by a fluke, as I may say."

"Is it sold?" asked Fritz.

"Well, yes; it is sold. But the party might be indooed to part with it. I could try."

"Not on my account, thank you. I am not a buyer of pictures."

"Oh, don't say that, sir, such a connyshure as you are! I had the pleasure of selling a couple of pictures to Mr. Kettering—the frames were something superb, sir—two years ago."

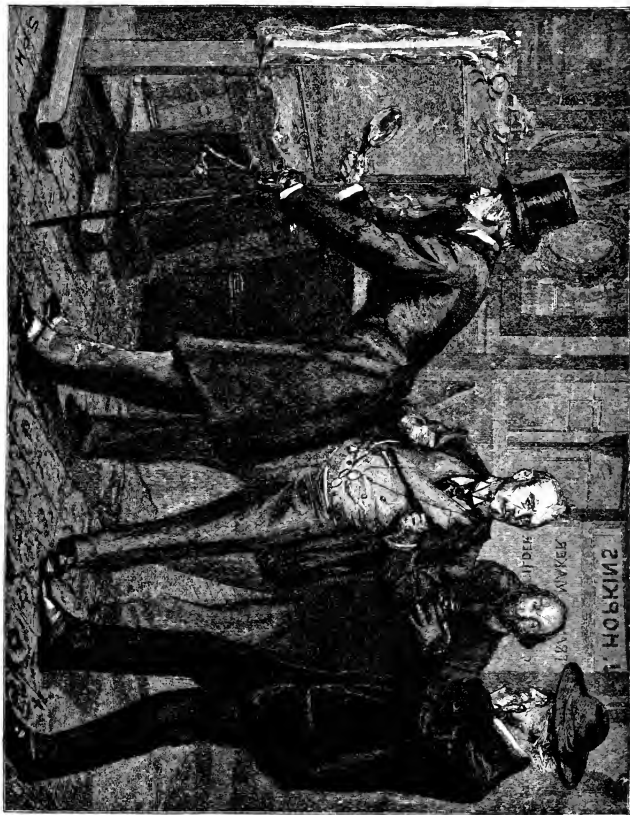
"Oh, to my uncle! That's a very different matter. But I should be much obliged if you would do one thing for me, Mr. Hopkins."

"Proud, sir. Anything in my humble power."

"Just write down for me, on the back of this card, the address of Mr. William Hughes."

Hopkins had already taken the proffered card, and now stood with it in his hand, looking at Hofmann.

“I say, Hopkins, no; that landscape isn't by Hughes, is it?” said Mr. Saugge.”



"Mr. Hughes's address, sir?"

"If you please."

"I'm extremely sorry, but I don't happen to know it."

"Don't you? I thought, as you had bought his picture—"

"Oh, but I didn't buy it of *him*! Oh dear, no. It came into my hands by a fluke, as I mentioned. The truth is, he's queer-tempered and shy about dealing direct with the public. Many artists are. But if it was for a matter of business—a commission, or anything of that sort, I dare say I could find him, sir."

"Oh, thank you, it does not matter. You will attend to Mrs. Kettering's order as soon as possible? Thank you. Good-morning."

No sooner had Hofmann turned his back than Mr. Snagge, who still wore a troubled look, said, complainingly, "You never mentioned before that any of those paintings were by Hughes!"

"What does it matter to you whether I did or didn't, sir?" returned the dealer, snappishly. "And I'll tell you what—another time, don't go putting your oar in when a man's engaged in his business."

"I didn't put my oar in!" said Snagge, feebly.

"What did you mean by asking in that mysterious kind of a way if the picture really was by Hughes, after I'd said it was? It made that young fellow prick up his ears in a moment. I could see it plain enough. And the next thing is, he wants Mr. Hughes's address. A nice job if buyers are to go to the artist direct! There's a certain etiquette in every business; and I ain't a-going to have it interfered with in mine."

"I—I'm very sorry—I didn't mean—I was only rather—rather surprised; because I had been making a few critical remarks to Hughes on that very landscape."

"Oh, blow your critical remarks, sir!" answered Hopkins, who was still very angry. "They may be all very well at a social gathering, where parties meet together to enjoy themselves in a gentlemanly way, and it don't matter what confounded nonsense they talk. But when you come into a place of *business*—where painting pictures and selling pictures is *business*—the less of that rot the better."

Fritz Hofmann, as he walked away, was debating a question in his mind—should he, or should he not, ask the Ketterings for

Miss Copley's address? What reason could there be why he should not openly demand the address, and openly announce his intention of delivering his mother's message to the Hughes family in person? There could be, of course, no valid objection against this; but there was Miss Sally Stringer. Fritz told himself truly that he was not in the least afraid of Miss Stringer on his own account. In fact, he rather enjoyed a tilting match with her, caring not a straw for any verbal pricks which her sharp tongue was able to inflict on him. But he did not wish to run the risk of Miss Stringer's harrying that gentle little governess. Sally would probably not intend deliberate cruelty. But in order thoroughly to enjoy the society of a porcupine, one should perhaps be either prickly or pachydermatous; and he felt sure that Barbara was neither. That face, which he had first seen by the flare of the street gaslight, belonged to a sensitive nature.

Then, all at once, a way occurred to him by which it might be possible to find the Hugheses' house without making any inquiries at all. Miss Copley walked home every Saturday evening along that crowded thoroughfare; and Fritz thought he might so manage as to be allowed on the following Saturday to walk home with her.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTOPHER DALTON had not so entirely vanished out of the world with which he had been familiar but that his existence and whereabouts were known to a good many persons; and latterly the fact had leaked out that he was making a large fortune in the United States. Had he sunk into abject poverty, no doubt there would have been very little said about him. But all the various ramifications of his family were naturally interested in a rich, childless kinsman, and liked to speak of him.

Indeed, there was a large number of persons wholly unconnected with him who seemed to take great pleasure in hearing about Chris Dalton's wonderful strokes of luck; his daring speculations which had turned up trumps; the exact number of thousands of acres which he was supposed to own in a district described with geographical vagueness as "Somewhere out by the

Rocky Mountains, you know;" and so on. They appeared to enjoy the mere suggestion of wealth which could never flow in their direction, much as a young lady with thirty pounds a year pin-money feasts her imagination on the description of the dresses at her majesty's drawing-room.

Had the circumstances of William Hughes's life not secluded him from all society—save such exceptional and eccentric gatherings as that held by Mortimer Hopkins—he might easily have chanced to hear Dalton's name mentioned during the last two or three years. But, as we know, the sound of it came upon him suddenly, and from very unexpected lips.

To the Ketterings the name of Chris Dalton had latterly become familiar, for Miss Sally Stringer claimed kindred with him. Miss Stringer called herself, and was called by every one, Mr. Philip Kettering's cousin; and they had been on cousinly terms together all their lives. But she was, in truth, not related to him by blood, being his uncle's stepdaughter. With Dalton, however, her relationship was undoubted—she was his first-cousin once removed.

The Ketterings were wealthy, hospitable, and sociable—three strong recommendations to Miss Stringer's favor; and she must be acquitted of appreciating them in any spirit of greed or self-interest, for she had an income of four or five hundred a year, which rendered her independent, and she neither expected, nor would have accepted, pecuniary assistance from any one. But so many of her friends and connections were moneyed people that—although considered among them, and considering herself, to be very poor—Sally had become accustomed to an atmosphere of wealth as one becomes accustomed to a warm climate, and did not willingly encounter the chill of less genial latitudes.

Perhaps there is no rank of life in which the enjoyment of money is so thoroughly tested as in the prosperous mercantile class. Aristocratic families, even when they are rich, are hampered by a thousand claims and obligations of which trade knows nothing. They are like the dwellers in a country fertilized by an accurately adjusted system of irrigation, where every channel and runlet must have its share, and no more than its share. But the trader lives on the brink of a great river. And so long as he has strength and industry to dip his bucket, the flood is practically inexhaustible, and he may pour it wheresoever he chooses.

Mrs. Kettering and her daughters had never known an hour's anxiety about ways and means. If anxiety had ever come to Philip Kettering in that matter of holding his place at the river's brink, and keeping his bucket water-tight, he had said nothing of it at home.

He was a good-looking, middle-aged man, tall and upright, and always well dressed. His manner was quiet and his voice soft—almost too soft, some persons said. But it was not a wheedling nor a servile softness. It was partly natural, and partly the result of his resolution, to show the world that “that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere” is no monopoly of high birth. He had never said exactly that to himself, but that was the truth as nearly as it can be conveyed in a few words. It was not that he was in the least ashamed of being in commerce. On the contrary, he was proud of his position in the mercantile world; and desirous that every one should perceive how entirely compatible are buying and selling with the most finished manners. “There can be no doubt that there is more culture among the families of the best style of merchants than among any other class in the community,” he would say, thoroughly believing what he said. For the hereditary aristocracy he professed a little mild contempt. But his contempt did not go to the extent of wishing to differ from them in his outward demeanor; and it is certain that he would not have been offended at being mistaken for a lord.

The Ketterings were not usually to be found in London in September. They had been in Scotland in August, and had now returned to town, there to remain until it should suit Mr. Kettering to take them to the Continent. It was proposed that Mrs. Kettering and her daughters should spend the winter abroad. Ida, the younger girl, had outgrown her strength, the doctor said, and needed sunshine, and the possibility of passing several hours of each day in the open air. Italy had, at first, been talked of, but none of the family had taken kindly to that idea. Italy was so far off! And to be compelled to lead a semi-invalid life among a totally unknown population, and unable to see any of the sights which tourists enjoy, would, Ida declared, be intolerably irksome. Switzerland would be far more *gemüthlich*. She knew Switzerland. Many invalids, Russians and others, spent the winter on the shores of Lake Lucian. Did not Dr. Slocombe think that

Montreux would do? Dr. Slocombe pronounced that he thought Montreux would do—at any rate, for October and November. Mrs. Kettering had begged that Sally Stringer might accompany them, having an idea that if she herself grew tired of remaining so long away from home, Sally might be induced to remain and look after Ida. And so the plan was arranged.

Notwithstanding that it was now the end of September, and consequently “not a soul was left in town,” Mrs. Kettering managed to find at any rate a few bodies to grace her board and eat her dinner, and some other bodies to assemble afterwards in her drawing-room on a certain evening close upon the end of the month. It was a sort of farewell entertainment. “Of course one cannot think of giving a *party* just now; but we are going to get Rosenheim to play for us after dinner. It would be very kind, if you would come in *sans façon*.” That was the sort of phrase in which Mrs. Kettering invited her guests. The dinner was to be equally informal. Ida, who was not supposed to be “out” yet, never appeared at any of the grand dinners given during the season. But on this occasion she was present at table.

The dinner-party consisted of ten persons. Of these, six belonged to the family, counting Fritz Hofmann and Miss Stringer. The other four were a certain Lady Lambton, widow of a physician who had been knighted on the occasion of the opening of a great provincial hospital; Mr. Perikles Rhodonides, junior partner in a firm of Greek merchants; Herr Rosenheim, the violinist; and General Mullett, an elderly bachelor, who appreciated Mr. Kettering’s fine wines not too well, but wisely.

Fritz found himself seated at table between Miss Stringer—whom he had had the honor of escorting—and his cousin Ida. The host had Sally on his left hand, and Lady Lambton on his right. Fritz was therefore not too far removed from the latter lady to enjoy some share of her conversation.

Before saying a few necessary words about Lady Lambton, it should be stated that she and Hofmann had met a year ago, during a previous visit he had paid to the Ketterings; and there had sprung up a semi-sentimental flirtation between them.

Lady Lambton was undoubtedly very handsome. Had her figure been at all equal to her face, she might have ranked as a beauty of the first class. But she was rather lean and flat-chested.

Her arms were bony, and her hands and feet, although not large, were wanting in symmetry. Grace, whether of form or movement, was not her strong point. But into her manner of dressing herself she did contrive to throw some grace. She was always well, or at all events becomingly, attired, dissimulating too thin outlines with cloudy arrangements of black or white lace. And her abundant dark hair was massed artistically upon a small and well-shaped head. She had a brilliant brunette complexion, a delicate aquiline nose, black eyebrows and eyelashes, and deep-blue eyes.

She was young, too; not more than eight-and-twenty, although many of her friends declared her to be five or six years older—moved, probably, to this exaggeration by her own frequent allusions to having been married as a “mere child,” and having been taken away from her school-books and her playfellows to preside over Dr. Lambton’s house.

Her husband had been a provincial doctor in large practice. He had met her by chance in London, and had married her, an entirely portionless girl, out of a poor and struggling household, he being, although not old, some twenty years her senior; and he had died after seven years of marriage, leaving her a childless widow with a small independence and the title of “my lady.”

She was a Londoner to the marrow of her bones, and the first use she made of her liberty was to leave the provincial metropolis where her husband’s money had been made, and establish herself in town. It had seemed to her at first to be a very great thing to be Lady Lambton; and, taking into account her beauty, her quick brains, and her comfortable income, she had returned to London after her husband’s death full of crude and exaggerated notions as to the place she would now be able to take in society. But, being in truth quick-witted and observant, she soon discovered that she had been mistaken on several points. She did gain admission into many houses, where, as Miss Amy Shortway, she would scarcely have been likely to be on visiting terms. But a physician’s widow with but a few hundreds a year was, she found, of no social importance whatever, as such. It was a poor satisfaction to dazzle her younger sisters, and stir the bile of old family acquaintances by her elegance and her title, when she paid a rare visit to her old home. That was not the world she lived in now.

She remembered very well thinking, in her early girlhood, that if she could cut out their neighbors, the attorney's daughters, in the matter of bonnets, and arrive at a social status sufficiently elevated to overawe Mrs. Hardman's caustic criticisms on "the goings-on of young ladies nowadays," she would never be weary of enjoying those triumphs. But the triumphs had come to her as the unlimited freedom to eat sweetmeats comes to an adult—the bonbons are there, but the childish greed for them has departed.

Nevertheless, Amy Lambton had a sufficiently youthful appetite still for a great many pleasant things which the world could give her. She enjoyed, no doubt, being admired for her beauty; but her most eager ambition was to be acknowledged as a woman of intellect. Not a strong-minded creature, wearing hideous clothes, and braving the jeers of men—by no means; but something in the style of Corinne or Aspasia, about both of whom her knowledge was, to say the best, hazy. She wanted to be rich, thinking that a solid gold background would throw into strong relief all her other attractions. And in so thinking she was probably right. She would never, she told herself, make a merely mercenary marriage. But there could be no reason why she should be unable to love a rich man. Fritz Hofmann was rich—would be very rich. He was the only son of a prosperous merchant, and the prospective heir to a bachelor uncle. He had made legal studies, and was qualified to practise as an advocate in his native city. But it was out of the question that he should ever need to earn his bread. He was sufficiently good-looking, having a well-knit, manly figure, and a good-humored, intelligent face. And he had been evidently greatly struck by her charms. She might certainly do worse than marry Fritz Hofmann, particularly as she remembered having been a little bit in love with him last year.

"Fritz," said Mrs. Kettering from her place at the round table, "did you think about my commission about the mirror-frame?"

"Yes, Aunt Gertrude. I went to Hopkins this morning. It will be attended to. He was all curiosity, and told me he had sold some pictures once to Uncle Philip. He didn't say much about the paintings, but the frames, he assured me, were superb."

"Sensible man," said Miss Stringer. "He talked of what he

knew. People tell the shoemaker to stick to his last, and when he does, they laugh at him and sneer 'Nothing like leather!'

"Mr. Hopkins, however, has not stuck to his last. He goes in for picture-dealing, and told me I was a connoisseur because I admired a landscape he had in his shop."

"By the way, Sally," said Mr. Kettering, smiling blandly, and the least bit in the world condescendingly, at his cousin, "are you aware that you have the honor of being remotely—and perhaps not so very remotely—connected with this worthy Mr. John Hopkins?"

"Not at all aware of it. But I'm very glad, in that case, that he is a picture-dealer and not a picture-painter. Selling other people's productions is a pretty safe pursuit, as I needn't tell *you*, Philip; and I am not fond of poor relations."

"But what do you mean, Philip? You are joking, eh?" said Mrs. Kettering to her husband.

"Pardon me, my dear Gertrude. I hear that Mr. Hopkins's late wife was own niece to Mr. Christopher Dalton."

"What Dalton? the man who is making such a pot of money out in America?" said General Mullett. "You don't say so! He is a relative of yours, Miss Stringer, I am aware."

"Rhodonides tells me," said Mr. Kettering, "that some young clerks in his house are full of the subject."

"Oh yes," assented Mr. Perikles Rhodonides, a handsome young man, with a rather silly mouth, and dressed with a faultless perfection—especially as to his cravat and shirt-front—which seemed almost incompatible with the conditions of breathing and blood-circulating mortality. "Yes; our chief cashier tells me that Green and Toller are always talking about it. They know Hopkins's son. It's quite an excitement among the clerks."

"Why? What is the excitement?" asked Lady Lambton, leaning a little forward, and seeming to address the company generally.

Then Mr. Kettering took upon him to explain that Mr. Dalton was an eccentric individual who had greatly enriched himself by hazardous speculations; who had been living a strange, lonely life among wild places and wild people; and who was now stated to be in feeble health.

"Most interesting creature," said Miss Stringer.

“Oh, he must be!” answered Lady Lambton, with an earnest look in her deep-blue eyes.

“Very!” returned Sally, emphatically. “We none of us know exactly *how* interesting—not within a hundred thousand dollars or so. But, taking him in round numbers, there can be no reasonable doubt of his being very interesting indeed.”

After the ladies had withdrawn, the subject of Christopher Dalton’s fortunes was again discussed over some of Mr. Kettering’s special Burgundy—always brought out in honor of General Mullett.

“He was always rather a loose fish,” said Mr. Kettering. “There was an ugly story of his running away with a girl—accomplished person, quite a lady—and her old father dying in consequence, or some terrible business or other. But it must have happened when I was a mere boy. I should never have heard anything of it—or of him—had it not been that my cousin, Miss Stringer, happens to be related to the man.”

“It’s pretty clear he will have no lack of relations,” observed General Mullett. “By George, I shouldn’t mind having a ticket in that lottery myself.”

“Bah!” said Rosenheim. “I would not think it vos vorth much, your ticket. He will turn out to haf married a squaw, and haf a brood of copper-colored pickaninnies; and den every one will be looking quite blue.”

“’Pon my soul, do you know that’s uncommonly likely!” said Mr. Perikles Rhodonides, opening his mouth, which was generally slightly ajar, a little wider than usual, as he looked round on the violinist.

“Oh, I fancy the parties interested keep themselves pretty well informed,” said Mr. Kettering.

“That’s true. That’s very true,” said Rhodonides. “I know from Toller that Hopkins—who seems to be uncommonly wide-awake—got a lot of information out of a man who saw Dalton recently in America.”

“At any rate, if he dies intestate—as is most likely with that wild kind of fellow—I should think there would be very pretty pickings for every one,” said General Mullett, rising from the table.

“Well, hang it, there *must* be, you know, eh?” exclaimed Rhodonides, cheerfully, as he and Fritz followed their seniors up-stairs.

In the drawing-room some of the evening guests had already arrived. There was a group of young people, with Olga and Ida among them, standing round the pianoforte. Lady Lambton looked across the room from her seat on a corner ottoman as the gentlemen entered, and her eyes rested on Fritz. He approached at once, and was rewarded by a smile and an invitation to seat himself beside her. But Fritz felt that the smile and the invitation conveyed nothing to flatter any tender sentiment which he might be disposed to indulge in.

"I want to tell you an odd thing," said her ladyship, eagerly. "It was on my lips when they were talking about that man at dinner, but— The fact is, Miss Stringer has such a peculiar way of looking at things, and such a sharp manner of expressing herself, that—"

"Exactly," said Fritz, nodding confidentially.

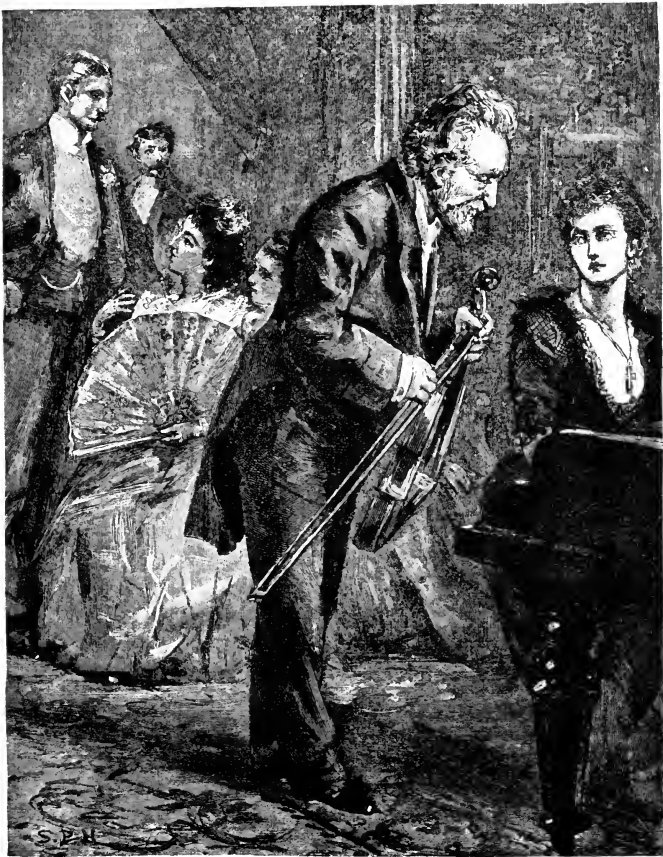
"Ah! I see you understand. Well, but what I wanted to say is this: I believe that *I* also can claim kinship with Mr. Christopher Dalton! Isn't it strange? I am almost sure I have heard mamma mention a relative of that name. I shall ask her to tell me all about it. Don't say anything just now," she added, as Fritz uttered an ejaculation of surprise. "I don't want Miss Stringer to pounce on me. There is Rosenheim going to play. Don't you love music? But, of course you do. It is your birth-right as a German."

Herr Rosenheim approached the piano, fiddle in hand, and at the same moment the little group standing near it divided, revealing a young girl in a very plain black dress seated at the instrument, ready to accompany the violinist. Fritz saw immediately that it was Miss Barbara Copley.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSENHEIM'S performance was received appreciatively. When it was over, he was observed to say something to the accompanist with a cordial smile, and to shake hands with her.

"How divine that slow movement was!" exclaimed Lady Lambton, raising her handsome eyes enthusiastically.



“Herr Rosenheim approached the piano, fiddle in hand.”

"And Miss Copley accompanied him beautifully," said Ida Kettering, who had seated herself beside her ladyship to listen to the music.

"Charmingly!" assented Lady Lambton.

"Oh, you noticed it then?"

"Of course I did!"

"I didn't know whether you would. So few persons understand what the effect depends on, although they hear that it all sounds well."

"You are speaking of persons quite ignorant of music, my dear Ida."

"Oh no; not quite ignorant. They just know a little," returned Ida, in her matter-of-fact way.

"I think I must congratulate Miss Copley on her performance, and tell her how highly I approve it," said Fritz.

"Oh, *Du Fritz!* The idea of *your* announcing your approbation!" cried Ida, laughing, as her cousin moved away across the drawing-room.

"Why should not Mr. Hofmann express his admiration? I have no doubt it will be valued," said Lady Lambton, raising her voice just a little, so that it might reach the ears of the retreating Fritz.

"Goodness, Lady Lambton! Fritz does not know one tune from another."

"Mr. Hofmann doesn't—? But, how? Why, I thought that, of course, as a cultivated German—"

"Oh, that's nothing! Lots of people on the Continent think all the English eat their meat raw; but we don't, you know."

"But I have been talking about music to Mr. Hofmann for ever so long, and I thought he appeared interested."

"I suppose he just listened out of politeness," answered Ida, gravely nodding her head.

Meanwhile Fritz had made his bow to Miss Copley, who remained seated quite alone at the pianoforte. "I did not know I was to have the pleasure of meeting you this evening, Miss Copley," he said, after waiting a second or two for a word from her. But she had merely bent her head in acknowledgment of his bow.

"Mrs. Kettering engaged me to accompany Herr Rosenheim," answered Barbara.

Fritz understood the touch of pride in her anxiety not to appear under any false pretence.

“Very lively for Rosenheim! So far as I can judge by his gratified demeanor, that is to say. I am an outer barbarian as regards music myself.”

There was something so frank and cordial in his manner that Barbara’s reserve melted before it. She was not reserved by nature; but sensitive persons in a position like hers learn, by painful experience, to shrink from the chance of a rough touch, whether careless or cruel. Besides, in the case of Mr. Hofmann, Barbara felt some especial constraint—she could not forget the story of her mother’s youth, and she could not help wondering whether he would ever know that she herself belonged to the Hughes family.

His next words decided that question.

“I think, Miss Copley,” he said, “that I am charged with a message for a relative of yours. Do you not live under the care of a lady and gentleman named Hughes?”

“My uncle and grandaunt are Mr. and Miss Hughes.”

“Formerly of Marypool?”

“Yes.”

“You must know that my mother is an Englishwoman, and a native of Marypool. I had a letter from her the other day, charging me with many remembrances to—to the Hughes family.” (Fritz was, in fact, very vague as to which member or members of that family his mother had ever been personally acquainted with.) “I wonder if Miss Hughes would allow me to present them in person?”

Barbara hesitated. She was uncertain how Aunt Judith would receive such a proposition. Before she could decide on what answer to make, a voice, speaking very close to her, said:

“You must let me say how much I appreciated your delightful accompaniment to Herr Rosenheim’s playing.” And, turning her head, she saw Lady Lambton standing beside the piano.

“You are very kind,” she answered, with a slight flush of surprise, for she had met Lady Lambton once or twice before, and had not received any notice from her.

“Not kind at all! Only I have an artistic fibre which responds to every touch of Art.”

Barbara, not knowing what to say to this announcement, said nothing.

"I have been complimenting Miss Copley on her performance," said Fritz, gravely.

Lady Lambton shot an interrogative glance at him. Perhaps Ida had been merely hoaxing her, in silly schoolgirl fashion.

"Of course, you are devoted to music?" she said, smiling a little, so that her words might pass for having been spoken jestingly, if necessary.

"Devoted! H'm! Well, I should not venture to declare myself absolutely devoted to music. I should keep that word for—other things." And he made a little bow in her ladyship's direction.

By this time Miss Stringer, on General Mullett's arm, had joined the group at the piano, and was observing them all with her sharpest glances.

"Is Lady Lambton going to favor us with a musical performance?" inquired General Mullett, gallantly.

"Oh no! I play a good deal for my own private delectation; but I should not dream of playing before an assembly of strangers."

"I think you are quite right," said Miss Stringer, emphatically. "I wish more people had the sense to keep their unfinished attempts to themselves."

"Oh, it is simply that I have not the nerve for it, Miss Stringer. As for the rest, I have been very thoroughly taught, and I studied at one time very enthusiastically."

"Oh! Well, it is much better to be an angel who fears to tread than a fool who rushes in, isn't it?"

"Perhaps you sing, Lady Lambton?" suggested General Mullett.

"Do you know," said Lady Lambton, dropping her voice confidentially, "it is an odd thing to say, but my sensitive ear prevents me from singing! I am so exquisitely and painfully alive to the least little fault of intonation that I positively writhe under it. Such a trifle, you know, may cause a note to be something less than quite true—a shade that scarcely any one would notice. But I should be aware of it in myself, and it would paralyze me."

"Dear me! That is very unfortunate," said General Mullett, solemnly.

"Never heard of anything so unfortunate!" put in the ruthless Sally. "It's as if a cook couldn't make pies because she had too light a hand for pastry!"

Lady Lambton slipped behind the piano, and let herself sink into a seat close to Barbara. "I have come to take refuge," she said, playfully, with an arch look up at Fritz, who was still standing there.

"Refuge?"

"From our friend Miss Stringer's conversation. It is a little overpowering sometimes."

"Perhaps it is. But I rather like Sally. I think she is what you call 'good fun.'"

"She is not by any means what *I* call good fun, I assure you."

"Oh, if you knew her better, I think you would like her."

"You will allow me to doubt that. But I beg your pardon, I forgot. She is a sort of relation of yours."

"She is rather a sort of relation of *yours*, if your idea about your kinship with the millionaire is correct."

"Good gracious, so she is!" exclaimed Lady Lambton, clasping her hands. "I never thought of that! Really it seems that every second person one meets now is a cousin of the millionaire, as you call him. What a blessing to be able to turn to Art and Poetry, and so escape from all these sordid speculations! I don't understand how people *exist* who have no resources of that kind."

"Oh, we jog on in our lower place, contentedly enough."

"Now, Mr. Hofmann! You don't mean to include yourself in that category? I shall think you are fishing for a compliment."

"Then pray do not let me fish in vain."

"Ah, no, no; Art and Poetry, and all that, is a subject on which I feel very deeply. But one dare not speak of one's feelings to most people. The world is very hard and very flippant. And we English, in particular, seem to be so absurdly ashamed of having any sentiment!"

"That is a point you must settle with your own countrymen. My withers are unwrung."

"But have *you* no affectation of that sort? Are you sure? Now, as to music: Ida says— But I cannot believe that with your German culture and training you have no delight in music. Tell the truth now, on your honor!"

"Oh, if you adjure me so solemnly, I must confess that although I really have no ear, in a musical sense, yet I do enjoy a certain kind of singing—singing full of dramatic expression. The words do produce a greater effect on me when uttered to music than if they were simply spoken. If you can call that appreciating music, so far I do appreciate it."

All this time Barbara had sat by, silent and unnoticed; but now Lady Lambton all at once addressed her. "I envy you, Miss Copley," said her ladyship, "your power of using your musical gift at will. I suffer so sadly from nervousness that my music is practically of no use to me in society, although at home I play and sing for hours."

"But perhaps you get more enjoyment from it in that way," said Barbara, gently.

"Oh, I dare say I do—yes. But, still—it is not that one wants praise, but *sympathy*. To see one's own feeling reflected in the eyes of a friend! That is the sort of pleasure *I* should get from an audience if I could have courage to perform before an audience. One person who thoroughly felt with me would suffice if I— Why, where is Mr. Hofmann?" she added, abruptly.

"He is over there, talking to Olga and Mrs. Kettering," said Barbara.

"Oh, I was not aware that he had moved away. Had you known him before?"

"I had only seen Mr. Hofmann here during the last week or two."

"Oh! I fancied as I came up to the piano that I heard him saying something about an old acquaintance."

"His mother knew my grandfather's family many years ago."

"I see. Miss Copley, do you ever take engagements as a *répétiteuse*—just to accompany songs when one is learning them, I mean?"

"I have never had such an engagement, but I should like it very much indeed."

"Should you? Then I hope you will come to me twice or

thrice a week. I am sure we shall get on well together. I liked your face from the first moment I saw you; and I am a devout believer in first impressions."

"Thank you, Lady Lambton. But about hours and — and terms?"

"Oh, we will settle all that by letter. Write to me; and meanwhile I will look up my engagements and see what days I have free. It will be delightful. I am sure you will understand me. We are, at any rate, kindred souls about music, I know."

Then she glided away, leaving Barbara much cheered by this unexpected chance of employment, and very grateful to Lady Lambton for having thought of offering it to her.

As Lady Lambton approached the part of the room where Fritz and his cousin Olga were standing, surrounded by a few of the younger guests, the former was struck by the bright glow of excitement on the handsome widow's face.

"You look terribly dazzling to-night," he said lightly, but with a good deal of real admiration under the light tone. "You must have been meditating some dreadful mischief to make you so radiant."

"Must I? I don't think what I have been meditating is so very wicked. I have only been conspiring with Miss Copley to help me a little with my singing."

"Are you going to have lessons from Miss Copley, Lady Lambton?" said Olga. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Not *lessons* exactly, my dear Olga. I am going to employ Miss Copley as accompanist."

"That was a kind thought," said Fritz, looking more admiring than ever.

"I fancied I had heard that an engagement would be welcome to her," replied Lady Lambton, smiling benevolently. "And she is a very interesting creature, and has music in her soul."

At the end of the meeting, Fritz put Lady Lambton into the hired brougham that was waiting for her and bade her "good-night" with a somewhat longer and closer pressure of the hand than mere friendship demanded; and, as she leaned back in the carriage, Amy was thinking of the young man with an agreeable glow of feeling. But she was not so absorbed in thinking of Mr. Frederick Hofmann but that her mind reverted more than once

to the subject of the wealthy and eccentric Christopher Dalton; and she felt impatient to question her mother about him.

Fritz, meanwhile, returned into the hall of Mr. Kettering's house just in time to see Miss Copley, muffled in a big cloak, leaving it on the arm of a shabbily dressed man, whom he rightly conjectured to be her uncle. He then remembered that he had obtained neither Miss Hughes's address nor permission to call on her. He was a little vexed, too, at having lost the opportunity of making William Hughes's acquaintance. "But, perhaps," said he to himself, "it would not have been a good moment. The address I can easily get, and as to the permission to call, it would be a pure formality. The old lady will be pleased enough, no doubt, to be remembered by my mother, and to receive my mother's son."

CHAPTER X.

It is a common experience that we may often obtain a new light upon a character by observing it among new surroundings. But the most valuable help in studying the real nature of any individual is obtained by knowing something of his early home. It is here that we find the elucidation of many otherwise inexplicable traits; just as a naturalist is enabled to understand many structural peculiarities by acquaintance with the creature's original *habitat*. If one had never heard of the desert, the camel would be a hopelessly puzzling animal.

It would be highly uncivil to compare Lady Amy Lambton with so ugly a beast as the camel; and it would be an exaggeration to describe her as "hopelessly puzzling," even to those who had never seen her in her home. Nevertheless, persons unacquainted with the Shortway family missed the key to a considerable part of her character.

Mr. Maurice Shortway had been for many years connected, in a subordinate capacity, with one of the great daily journals; and he wrote art criticisms for any periodical which would pay for them. He was a hard-working man who had brought up a numerous family of daughters not without struggle and difficulty.

Amy was the beauty of the family, and her marriage was considered to be a great piece of good fortune for herself and all belonging to her. As to herself, she had indeed done very well. But her marriage could not be said to have benefited the rest to any appreciable extent. However, they had struggled on, in some inexplicable fashion; steering their way between the shoals of poverty and the rocks of debt with a little luck, considerable industry on Mr. Shortway's part, and on the part of his wife a good deal of that elastic kind of fortitude which consists chiefly in "never-minding."

Things were now going better with them than in the days when Amy lived at home. The second daughter had married, and was prospering in America. Mr. Shortway had been engaged as sub-editor of a monthly periodical devoted to artistic topic, and was able to carry on this occupation without giving up his work at the newspaper office. Mrs. Shortway had an excellent tenant for the first floor of their house in Gower Street; and of the three remaining daughters, one was engaged as resident teacher in a school, while the two younger ones were studying drawing with a view to earning their bread by it by and by.

To the dingy old house Lady Lambton drove in a cab, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the day following Mrs. Kettering's dinner-party.

"Now, mamma," she said, cutting short her mother's exclamations of surprise and pleasure at seeing her, "I want to ask you a question. The answer may be very important, and—"

"Yes; but now do sit down and take your bonnet off, Amy! You'll have lunch with us, won't you? Papa isn't down yet; he was at the office till past four o'clock this morning. But he'll be here presently, and the girls will be home to lunch. Now do take your bonnet off! You mustn't run away in your usual fashion. It isn't often I get you all to myself for a few minutes."

"That is just why I want you to answer my question without loss of time, now that we are alone together."

"To be sure! But there is no such desperate hurry, after all. I must go and tell the cook— No, no; I am not going to order a 'grand luncheon' for you! Nothing of the sort. But you must have something to eat, I suppose? Now don't be disagreeable, Amy."

And Mrs. Shortway bustled out of the room in spite of her daughter's protestations.

It was evidently from her mother that Lady Lambton inherited her good looks. Mrs. Shortway must have been remarkably handsome in her youth, and was still a striking-looking woman; only in the forenoon her hair was apt to be a little untidy, and her gown to lack a button or so, and her slippers to be down at heel. Mrs. Shortway was the cheerfullest of slaves to her children, whom she admired unstintingly, and carried her complaisance towards them to the point of reflecting in her own person—so far as she was able—all her daughters' shifting views on dress as well as other matters. While Amy had reigned at home, some attempt was always made to follow the prevailing fashion of the day. But Blanche and Eleanor approved a more picturesque style; and in these latter years Mrs. Shortway's comely person had been arrayed after a great variety of "æsthetic" models. Since it was not always possible to buy new garments, the old ones were metamorphosed as well as might be, with, sometimes, a curious survival in the form of a sleeve, and so on, to mark the transition.

When her mother had left the room, Amy sat down in the well-known front parlor, with an impatient shrug and a sudden frown. But by degrees her face cleared as she looked around her, and observed signs of greater prosperity, and also of greater neatness and order, than she remembered in the home of her girlhood. There were some pretty sketches and engravings on the walls, and a bowl full of flowers on the table; and, besides these adornments, there was the substantial improvement of a new carpet on the floor. "I suppose Blanche and Eleanor look after the house a little," said Amy to herself. "But there must be more money, too, to buy things. I am so glad for poor papa!"

As a matter of fact, although Mr. Shortway labored industriously to support his family, yet all the immediate and self-sacrificing efforts made for Amy's pleasure, comfort, or caprice, had been made by her mother. Nevertheless, it was on her father's account that she chiefly rejoiced in the improved fortunes of her family. But Maurice Shortway's toils and struggles had always been held up for admiration, and his reserved and quiet manner inspired a certain respect in his daughters; whereas his wife bore her share of the troubles so jauntily that they almost seemed (to

the looker-on) to be no troubles at all; and a demeanor less dignified than hers is seldom met with. So true it is that the manner of most of our actions is more influential with our fellow-creatures than the matter. And also that, as the Italian proverb has it, "Whoso turns himself into a sheep, the wolf will eat him." To be sure he will! Such is the nature of wolves.

When Mrs. Shortway returned, breathless and smiling, and seated herself on the sofa beside her daughter, the latter caught hold of her arm, to prevent any chance of her suddenly escaping, and said, "Now, mamma, you must listen and answer to the point. Had you not a relation?—Christopher Dalton?"

"Christopher Dalton! Good gracious, Amy, what can you want to know about him?"

"But *had* you, mamma?"

"Christopher Dalton! Why, it must be five-and-twenty, or perhaps nearer thirty, years since I have heard his name!"

"Not quite that, for you mentioned it to me yourself—I am sure you did."

"Oh, very likely. I suppose I was talking about the old times?"

"Of course you were! Well, he was your relation, then?"

"Relation? Yes, indeed, he was my own first-cousin."

"No! Really, mamma? That's quite a near relation!"

"Well, pretty near. But what in the world has put Christopher Dalton into your head now?"

Amy hesitated. She was half unwilling to trust her mother with the information she had gained last night—not from fear of any specific mischief which Mrs. Shortway could do, but because her mother was apt to go off at a tangent, and to build castles in the air at a moment's notice. However, after a very brief pause, she answered, "Everybody was talking about him at a dinner party where I was last night, and—"

"About Chris Dalton?" (in a tone of measureless astonishment).

"Yes; he is very rich, and he has neither wife nor child, and all his relations, near and distant, are looking after his money," said Amy, rapidly, to prevent another interruption. "So now you know why I am interested in hearing all you can tell me of him."

"Very rich, is he? Well, that depends on what one calls rich. He was always very comfortably off—far more than *our* branch of the family."

"No—no—no," cried Amy, impatiently. "There is no question of being 'comfortably off!' Everybody calls him rich. Some people say he is a millionaire!"

Mrs. Shortway shook her head. "I shall be very slow to believe that, Amy," she said. "You had better wait for *very* good authority before accepting it, my dear."

Amy had dreaded her mother's easily raised hopes and sanguine enthusiasm. But she now found her temper chafed by the exact reverse. "I tell you it is quite certain," she said, irritably; "and I am sure you can have no real reason to doubt it."

"Oh, my dear, I knew Chris Dalton when I was a girl. He was a grown man then. He is ten or twelve years older than I am. We were never exactly intimate with his people, because the Daltons rather looked down on us. My parents were much poorer, and were in a different position altogether. Still, my mother was his aunt—Mrs. Dalton's own sister; and I knew all about Chris Dalton at that time; and he was the very last person I should ever have expected to turn into a millionaire!"

"But why—*why*, mamma?"

"Well, because— How was he to get riches? As to earning them—Chris was a sort of amateur Admirable Crichton, and had a dilettante smattering of all sorts of things. But as to earning money, if you had ever known him you would see that that is a wild idea. To be sure, he might have inherited. But who was there likely to leave him a fortune?—and his wife had no money. I really should be very cautious of believing that story, Amy."

"Good gracious, mamma, how extraordinary you are! I tell you everybody believes it—business people; sharp people, whose interest it is to find out the truth; and Mr. Dalton has not earned his money nor inherited it either. He has made it by lucky speculations in America."

"Well—well, my dear, don't be vexed. It can't matter to us, after all."

Amy eagerly endeavored to show that it might, on the contrary, matter to them a great deal. She recapitulated what she had heard at the Ketterings' of Mr. Dalton's weak health and

lonely position in the world; and all that had been said about the disposition of his property in case he should die without leaving a will.

But even this failed to rouse Mrs. Shortway to enthusiasm. "My dear," she said, "don't imagine that *we* should have much chance. There are too many other claimants before us."

"Who are they, mamma? That's exactly what I want to know. Now we may get at something practical!"

It was not possible to elicit any information from Mrs. Shortway in a clear and succinct form. But, by degrees, Amy drew from her all that she knew about the surviving members of Christopher Dalton's family. Of near relatives, she believed there would only be the children of his two sisters. The eldest sister, Christopher's favorite, had made a most imprudent marriage with a subaltern in a line regiment, had fallen into poverty and misfortune, and had disappeared entirely from the family horizon. ("That," thought Amy, "must have been the mother of Mrs. Hopkins, and the grandmother of the young man, Mortimer, whom they were talking about at the Ketterings'.") But she made no remark aloud. The second sister, Mrs. Kirby, was the wife of a fashionable physician, and had had several children. Dr. Kirby had quarrelled violently with his brother-in-law. Dalton had behaved very ill—had eloped with a young woman who was employed in Dr. Kirby's family, and there was a complete breach between them.

"Oh, then," cried Amy eagerly, "the Kirbys will be out of the running. He's not likely to leave *them* anything."

"I don't know about that, my dear. But if he dies without a will, I should think they must be his nearest living relations."

After a little silent consideration, during which her mother was making conversational excursions in various unexpected directions, Amy suggested that Mrs. Shortway should write a letter to her cousin, Mr. Dalton, expressive in a general way of kindly family feeling, and setting forth how pleased she had recently been to hear good news of her long-absent relative.

"But, my dear, that would be nonsense. Chris would see through that in a moment. We never were particularly fond of one another. And after so many years! He would know I was only looking after his money."

"Well, and if he did know it? It would be very natural. And it isn't as if you were approaching him as a beggar. You want nothing of him—nothing *immediate*, I mean. If he guessed that you thought some of the wealth he will leave behind him ought to come to your children, he would guess right. And, being a man of the world, he would think you were acting like a sensible woman."

Mrs. Shortway shook her head helplessly. "I'm afraid I couldn't do it, Amy," she said. "I shouldn't have the least idea how to set about it."

"Not if I sketched out the rough draft of the letter for you, mamma?"

"I don't know. I—I'm afraid Chris would see that it wasn't *me*," began Mrs. Shortway, hesitatingly. Then, suddenly struck by a bright idea, she exclaimed, "But why not write to him yourself, Amy?"

"I, mamma?"

"Yes, you. You would be able to put it so nicely. And, really, it wouldn't look so—so dreadfully mean, you know, as if I were to suddenly turn affectionate after all these years."

"I see no meanness in the matter, mamma."

"No, no, dear; of course not. But Chris Dalton might," answered Mrs. Shortway, quite innocent of irony.

The suggestion thus made speedily commended itself to Lady Lambton. With a rapid forecast, she saw herself an object of interest in the life of the lonely old man—lonely and an exile in the midst of his riches. He might even be induced by the charm of her letters to come to England. It would doubtless gratify him to find at least one of his relatives in a good social position, possessed of culture and various attractive qualities, and addressed as "my lady." There might be a good deal of romance about her relation towards Mr. Dalton—something at once filial and friendly, while his sentiments towards her would be pervaded by that general aroma of admiration for a charming woman without which any masculine regard would seem to her flat and uninteresting.

Amy's sanguine fancies moved as fast, and flew as far afield as those of the Arabian Alnaschar. But there was no present fear of her kicking over any basket of crockery in the ecstasy of anticipation. One could barely at a moderate speed have counted ten between Mrs. Shortway's last words and her daughter's reply,

spoken with an air of reflective candor, "Well, mamma, if you really think I ought to write to him, I will try."

Presently Mr. Shortway appeared—a pale little man, with pale thin hair brushed over the top of his bald head, and pale-blue eyes. His manner was very quiet; but its quietude, when one observed it closely, was rather tolerant than meek. He received his daughter affectionately, but without any of the warm enthusiasm which his wife had displayed; and he talked of himself, of his new engagement, its responsibilities, emoluments, and importance, instead of discussing, as Mrs. Shortway had done (when she was permitted to leave the topic of Christopher Dalton), Amy's amusements and occupations—the new gowns Amy had bought for the autumn, and the society in which Amy would have the pleasure of displaying them.

"I only hope you won't work yourself to death, papa," said Amy, while her mother had gone down to the kitchen to assist the cook, and was burning her face over the preparation of an extra dish for luncheon in honor of Lady Lambton. And then just before the repast was put on the table, Blanche and Eleanor came home.

These younger daughters resembled their father rather than their mother. Nevertheless, they were not without personal attractions. They had well-grown figures and fair skins; while their hair, if somewhat colorless, was glossy and abundant, and their light-blue eyes were bright with the radiance of youth. They greeted their sister with many expressions of surprise at her unexpected visit, which her ladyship interpreted into a reproach. And she proceeded, somewhat haughtily, to explain that it was impossible for her to be very frequently in Gower Street. But in truth the girls had not intended to be reproachful. They were far from envying Lady Lambton's lot in life, and far from being dissatisfied with their own.

Blanche, perhaps, hankered a little, now and then, after Lady Lambton's fashionable, though unæsthetic, gowns and bonnets; and might not have been indisposed to try the society of "smart" and rich people just by way of a change from shabbiness and the higher artistic culture. But Eleanor, who held severe and lofty theories about art with the uncompromising dogmatism of her seventeen years, would have scorned to change places for a day

with any Philistine whose creed involved a lax tolerance of trivial prettiness.

They all chatted together cheerfully during luncheon. And Amy observed with satisfaction that her mother made no allusion to Mr. Dalton. It was well, for the present, to avoid the risk of raising false hopes in the girls. Of course papa would be told by and by. It was really wonderful, though, that mamma showed so much discretion. Perhaps she had for the moment forgotten all about their rich relation. It was quite like mamma to do so. Mamma was so discursive, and so seldom got a firm grasp of any subject.

But while these thoughts were passing through her mind, she was able to follow the conversation going on around her, and to show some good-natured interest in it. She told herself, with considerable approval, that her interest was good-natured. So long as she was away from them she felt very kindly towards her sisters, and made projects of having one of them to stay with her some day, and of putting them in the way of marrying well. But each time that she came back into the home circle she was repelled by the absorbing interest they displayed in their own lives, quite apart from hers! They did not seem to long for her society at all. It was doubtless a good thing that they should be contented with their inferior position in the world. But it was a little irritating to find them apparently unaware that it was inferior. At this very moment they were talking of some delightful reunions at the studio of a person who lived near Tottenham Court Road with as much complacency as though they were given by the most fashionable and distinguished artist in Kensington.

"Are you girls taking lessons of this Mrs. Green?" inquired Lady Lambton, affably.

Eleanor set herself to explain, with dignity, that Mrs. Green was not qualified to teach such adorned students as Blanche and herself. But the great schools of art being now closed for the vacation, Mrs. Green (who was herself only a flower-painter) allowed a class of young ladies to use her studio for the purpose of drawing from life.

"It is a capital arrangement," put in Mrs. Shortway. "It not only saves money—for the price of the model divided among them all comes to very little—but it gives them delightful society.

They meet most interesting people there on Saturday afternoons, don't you, dears?"

"It's going to be something special next Saturday," said Blanche. "Mrs. Green's studio neighbor, Mr. Hughes, is going away, and she is to have the use of his studio while he is gone, and there will be more room. She has invited a very clever friend of hers—a painter who lives at Florence. And we are to have some Shakespearian recitations. And Mrs. Green says her nephew is coming; he writes poetry. And his friend Mr. Mortimer Hopkins will be there too."

"Hopkins!" exclaimed Amy, suddenly, with a quick look of mortification. "What Hopkins? Do you know them?"

"We have met Mr. Mortimer Hopkins once or twice at Mrs. Green's. His father is a picture-dealer," answered Eleanor.

"Do *you* know Hopkins, Amy?" inquired Mr. Shortway.

"*I!*—oh dear, no! But I have heard him spoken of at the house of a friend of mine who has, I believe, bought a picture from him."

"Ah! Yes; he has come a little into notice of late in certain quarters," said Mr. Shortway, nodding his head majestically.

Lady Lambton congratulated herself as she drove homeward on having had the presence of mind to keep her own counsel about what she knew of Mortimer Hopkins's parentage. "The girls chatter so familiarly to all these twopenny people—Green, and Heaven knows who!" she said to herself. Then she began, mentally, to compose a letter to Mr. Christopher Dalton. "Well, I have got some information worth having by going to mamma," she reflected. "How very odd of her to take so little interest in her cousin! But there never was any one so unpractical as mamma."

CHAPTER XI.

THE sunshine of a bright October morning was lighting up Lake Lemán and its shores, near to the town of Vevey. The varied foliage showed all gradations of tint, from pale lemon, through orange and crimson, to bronze. And in the background

the green darkness of pine forests stretched in velvety softness up the higher slopes. The air was still and clear, and the shining mirror of the lake gave back the autumn landscape—the distant mountains, the buildings draped with reddened leaves of the Virginia creeper, and the pale, turquoise blue of the sky, where a few white clouds hung high and motionless. All at once, with a wild, melancholy cry, a great swan rose and flew a few yards on, flapping powerful wings; then, dropping, furrowed the glassy water, and shivered the smooth reflections as it oared itself along.

William Hughes stood beside the lake, and looked across it. His shoes were powdered with the white dust of the roads, for, early as was the hour, he had already walked some distance, stopping now and then to consider a point of view, climbing up a slope to some farm-house embowered in walnut-trees, or scrambling across the miniature ravine made by a mountain brook, whose pebbly bed was now dry and parched after the hot summer. He had been assiduously seeking a spot from which to make his first sketch, and now stood leaning on his stick, and contemplating the landscape with a painter's eyes—eyes to which the landscape says more and less than to the mere nature-lover.

The latter will be less keen to recognize subtle harmonies of color, flowing grandeur or delicate grace of line; but he will surrender himself more absolutely to the emotion of the moment. Nature will not speak to him so artistically, but he will hear the sound of her voice as one hears the sound of the sea.

William Hughes at length shifted his stick from his left hand to his right, slowly nodded his head once or twice, like one who has taken a decision, and walked onward.

The boarding-house kept by Madame Martin, whither he was going, was at a considerable distance from the town of Vevey. It stood back from the lake, and did not command a particularly fine view. Indeed, nothing about it was particularly fine. But then, as poor Madame Martin had formerly tried to convince her inmates, the price was in strict accordance with the quality of the article paid for.

Long experience, however, of the kind of people who chiefly made up her connection had induced her to abandon this honest and simple appeal to facts. She now usually declared to her

boarders that the Pension Monplaisir offered more attractions than the great hotels, at half the cost. No one, probably, was deceived for one moment by this statement. But many persons cherished the fond idea that their neighbors would accept it as a reason for their going to Monplaisir rather than to Trois Couronnes. "We like the quiet of this place so much better than the bustle of those great, noisy hotels," Mrs. Smith would say to Mrs. Jones. And the latter would reply that, for her part, she considered the company at certain great *tables d'hôte* to be sadly mixed, and not such as she could willingly see around her daughters. And so that little flavor of a lie, which Bacon says "doth ever add pleasure," continued to spice the fare at Monplaisir, to the general contentment.

It was still early in the forenoon when William Hughes arrived at the Pension—a square, bare, stuccoed house, with an enclosure in front of it, where a pebbly path wound its way among plots of rank herbage much in need of the shears, and where a few spindly acacias and a lilac bush or two, dignified by the name of shrubbery, imperfectly masked some offices and an outhouse at one end of the main building.

Mr. Hughes opened a gate in the wooden fence, walked along the pebbly path to the house door, which stood wide open, and stepping within the threshold, looked about him for a bell or some other means of announcing himself to the household. A long passage running through the house divided the ground-floor into two equal parts. The door of a back room on the right hand was opened, and a woman's face appeared reconnoitring the stranger. After a moment's inspection, the owner of the face came forward, exclaiming,

"Why, dear laws, bless me, if it isn't Mr. Hughes, I declare!" and with outstretched hand invited him to enter.

"I almost wonder that you recognized me, Madame Martin," said Hughes, shaking hands with her.

"Oh, dear me, yes, sir! I couldn't fail to recognize you; for though I have not seen you since years and years, still you have the family countenance, and I remember your father so well—the dear gentleman! Please to walk into my little den. You will not mind, will you? We can talk quietly there."

So saying, Madame Martin led the way into the back room

whence she had emerged, and, having placed a chair for her visitor, sat down opposite to him.

She was a stout, elderly woman, whose broad, coarse-featured face was redeemed from utter ugliness by its prevailing benevolence of expression. She wore a wig of brown hair, which, in color and texture, resembled the external fibre of a cocoanut, and over it a snow-white muslin cap, with wide floating strings. Her gown was of rusty black, and she had huge carpet slippers on her feet. She was by birth a Marypool woman, and her father had been employed as a compositor in David Hughes's printing-office during the prosperous days of the *Phoenix* newspaper. She had married a Swiss, who had set up a little shop for the sale and repair of watches in the English seaport. But soon after their marriage, while Eliza Martin was still a very young woman, her husband had returned to his native country, where, after his death, she had invested her little capital in establishing a boarding-house.

Madame Martin had passed much more than half her lifetime out of England; and the result of this exile on her speech and phraseology was curious. Whether she spoke French or English, she retained a strong West-Country accent, oddly interspersed with certain foreign inflections. And now and then she would translate a French idiom literally into her mother tongue; but always in perfect good faith, and with complete unconsciousness that she was not talking the English current among the natives of Marypool. Like almost every one who had known the Hughes family in former times, she retained a great respect and regard for them; and these sentiments had moved her to give young Claude Copley the post which he now filled in her house.

The reader knows already that Claude was discontented with his lot in the Pension Monplaisir. But it shortly appeared that his employer was almost equally dissatisfied.

"I am sure, sir, I wish for your sake that I could say I was content of Monsieur Claude. But to say the truth, I am not content of him. Far from that!" said Madame Martin, winding up a rather long list of Claude's shortcomings, with a sigh and a shake of the head.

"I will speak to him seriously, Madame Martin," said William Hughes. "Perhaps, if he promises to do better in future, you may be induced to give him another trial? Mind," he added, as

she hesitated to answer, "I quite acknowledge the justice of all you say."

"Well, sir, you comprehend that disdainful manners are not suitable to the employés in a *pension d'étrangers*, don't you?"

"They are highly unsuitable to Claude Copley under any circumstances," answered Hughes, with his dark brows drawn together, and a quick sparkle in the eyes beneath them. "I had hoped that Claude understood better what is becoming in a gentleman."

"Oh, well, sir, I don't say but what there is provocation sometimes. As for that—yes! The boarders give themselves airs. But, Lord" (which Madame Martin pronounced "Lard"), "one must not take them too serious. If they don't know how to be'ave—well, it is not our affair to teach 'em! And I let Monsieur Claude keep apart as much as possible. He has the bureau to himself all the morning. And except just being in the way to receive people if I am out—which arrives very seldom, I assure you!—or going to the boat or the train to meet an English family, he has nothing to do but keep the books and make out the bills. And he does not do that regular, Mr. Hughes! He is very quick when he likes; and a good accountant and a pretty penman. But he is *not* regular, sir."

"He writes to us that he is not well, Madame Martin," said William, after a short silence.

Madame Martin's face instantly softened into an expression of maternal compassion. "Well, indeed, he is not strong, sir," she returned. "I do feel sometimes a bit anxious about him. But, there again, he will not hearken! He'll stand about in the garden in a thin coat when the dew is falling; and he smokes too much. 'Tis difficult to make young folks careful, Mr. Hughes. They will not hearken!"

"I shall get a doctor to look at him," said William. "I promised my Aunt Judith to obtain a good medical opinion about the boy. You remember my Aunt Judith, Madame Martin?"

"Remember her? Why, I should think I did, sir! Ah, the beautiful person she was! Such eyes, and such hair! And does she keep her health? But I have not shown you a room yet. You will stay at Monplaisir, Mr. Hughes? I will make the terms as easy as possible, for the sake of old times."

But Hughes told her that he had already engaged a room in a farm-house a few miles away, and explained the reason of his being in Switzerland at that moment.

Madame Martin knew the farm-house he mentioned. She thought in her heart that it was a sadly poor, rough place for a son of Mr. David Hughes to be lodged in. But she refrained from saying anything to that effect. She was blunt, and a little coarse in the grain; but her native goodness of heart often supplied the place of tact. She merely said cheerfully, "Well, 'tis a fine air up there, to be sure. And of course you will be out most of the day doing your pictures. But, anyway, you will have some breakfast here? 'Twill be an honor for me, and a pleasure, Mr. Hughes. And, dear heart alive, you must be famished walking all that way, too! I'll conduct you to Monsieur Claude's room—he is not there just now; he has gone to see some ladies off by the early train to Genoa—to wash your hands. And then after breakfast you can talk with him tranquilly. This way, sir. 'Tis rather high up."

Madame Martin led the way up-stairs, and left Mr. Hughes in his nephew's room. It was but a garret in the roof, but clean and airy. William, as he looked round it, was touched by perceiving evidences of special trouble having been taken for Claude's comfort. Pretty muslin curtains fluttered at the window; a row of bookshelves had been nailed up against the wall; and there was even the luxury of an easy-chair! This latter was shabby and battered, certainly; but the back and the arms were covered with clean white dimity. Altogether, the room was incomparably pleasanter and more comfortable than the quarters in which William was to pass the next few weeks.

Not that this reflection occurred to William himself. He was thinking of the women at home, and hoping that he might be able to send such an account of Claude as would reassure Aunt Judith about him. And then his thoughts wandered back to the days of his boyhood. The sound of honest Eliza Martin's voice, with its broad Marypool accent, had awakened a hundred beloved memories—memories of the cricket-field and the schoolroom; of sunny holidays and eager study; of happy evenings spent in the old home; of his father's racy talk, little Olive's gentle affection, and Winifred—! Ah, Winifred had been his idol, his friend,

his confidant, his dearest companion. What projects they had made, what visions they had seen together, the young, enthusiastic brother and sister! Although Winifred's name had not passed his lips for many a year, her image was not banished from his memory; only it lived and moved there in the pure brightness of her early youth.

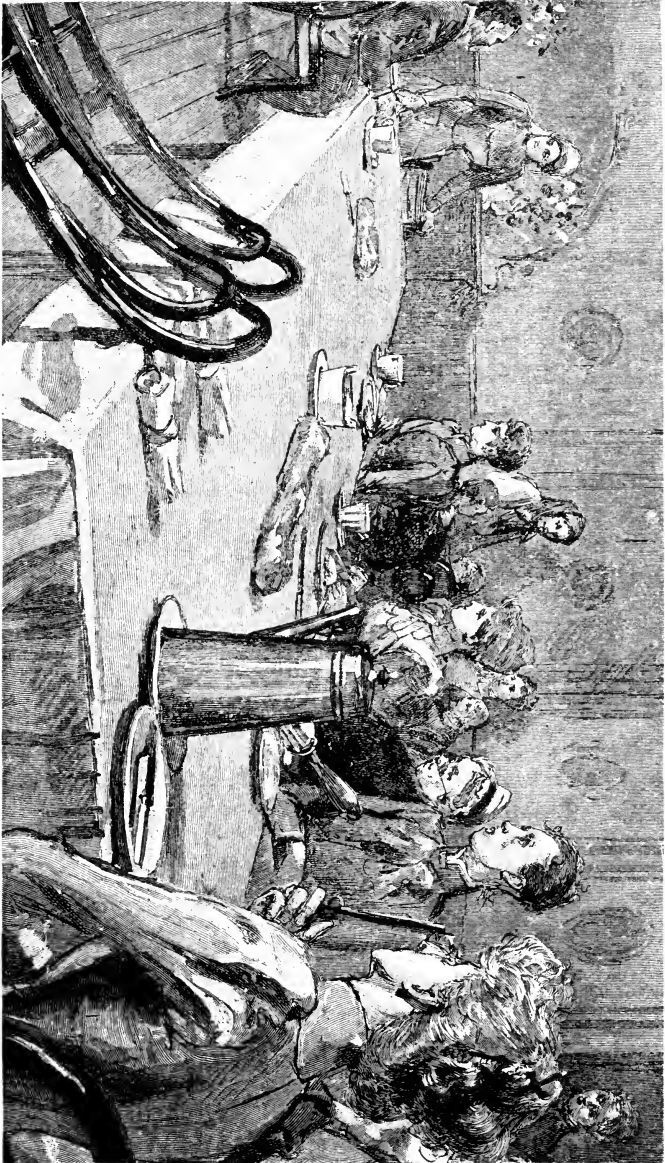
He was standing at the window when Madame Martin summoned him to breakfast; and her voice recalled him, not from the woods and hills of the Canton de Vaud, but from scenes lit by the sunshine of a vanished past.

Something of its melancholy radiance seemed still to linger in his face as he entered the long dining-room. But the prosaic side of life was apt to assert itself obtrusively at Monplaisir; and the aspect of that room and of its inmates was certainly not calculated to foster poetic sentiment!

The whole scene was one which may be found repeated, with slight and unimportant variations, in a hundred Continental boarding-houses. A long, narrow table ran down the whole length of the room. It was covered by a coarse, and not spotlessly clean cloth, and beside every plate lay a napkin encircled with a bone ring bearing a number. Dotted down the table at irregular intervals sat groups of persons breakfasting together, while here and there was a single figure, separated from the others by two or three vacant chairs. At a round table, in one corner, sat a Russian family-party with nurses and children. There was a faint, permanent smell of dinner in the room, and the only purely decorative objects to be seen in it were two pink China vases full of faded artificial flowers, which, for the present, stood on a sideboard, but would by and by grace the dinner-table.

As William Hughes walked to his place at the lower end of the long table, where his coffee was already set forth, he was the object of unconcealed scrutiny. Nearly every one present examined him with that air of resentful mistrust with which our fallen nature not uncommonly receives a new-comer, especially in those places where the new-comer's right to enter is absolutely equal to that of the persons who have entered before him! But Mr. Hughes had one qualification which mitigated the severity of the glances bestowed on him—he was a man. The appearance of an adult male human being, however usual a phenomenon through-

"A long narrow table ran down the whole length of the room,"



out the world in general, was rare in the Pension Monplaisir. William was, in fact, the only representative of his sex in the eating-room at that moment. Nevertheless, he took his seat, and ate his breakfast with a sufficiently unembarrassed demeanor.

Presently Madame Martin bustled into the room, with a shuffling sound of her broad feet in their carpet slippers on the wooden floor. She sat down beside Mr. Hughes, and whispered to him that "Monsieur" Claude would be back in a few minutes, and that she would then show Mr. Hughes into the bureau, where the uncle and nephew could talk undisturbed.

"But do not derange yourself, sir," said the good woman, heartily. "Finish your breakfast at leisure. There is no hurry!" Then she added, in his ear, "There'll be a deal of curiosity about you, Mr. Hughes; and I shall be cross-questioned the moment your back is turned. You see how Mrs. Armour is staring at you?"—indicating, by a stealthy movement of her thumb, a lady seated at the head of the table.

Hughes glanced discreetly in that direction, and saw a woman of about thirty-five years old, with a worn face, pale-blue eyes, and a great deal of tousled-looking light hair, attired in a style of shabby smartness.

"She and Monsieur Claude are great friends," proceeded Madame Martin. "She's a very proud lady, sir—an officer's widow—and considers herself quite the first in the Pension."

"But how does it come to pass," asked Hughes, raising his eyebrows gravely, but with an impressible sense of something comic expressed in the lines of his mouth, "that a lady of such exalted station should make friends with my nephew?"

"Ah well, you see, sir, of course, Mr. Claude being also rather high in his manners, and coming of such a good family and all, the two are what you may call birds of a feather. Besides, Mrs. Armour likes a good deal of attention, and we haven't hardly any gentlemen here," added Madame Martin, half shrewdly, half simply. "The only thing is," she went on, after a moment's hesitation, "that it does arouse a feeling of jealousy among the other boarders when they see Monsieur Claude so extra civil to Mrs. Armour, while he be'aves to *them* quite *de haut en bas*! That is but natural, sir; for when you pay the same as others, you do *not* like to be treated inferior. But there, there; don't vex yourself, Mr.

Hughes. You'll give Monsieur Claude some good advice, and he will hearken to you more than he does to me, that's sure. Lord, I don't want to be hard on him! He is but young. And the sight of you has brought back old times, so that I feel as if I couldn't bear to say a crooked word to any one belonging to Mr. David Hughes—the dear gentleman!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE irritation which William Hughes had felt on hearing Madame Martin's account of his nephew was suddenly mitigated by the first sight of the young man. Claude was not like his mother's family. There was some resemblance to the Hugheses in his thick black eyebrows and handsome dark eyes, but the weak mouth and retreating chin belonged to a totally different type from theirs. He was of slender build and rather tall stature. But he was now more than slender—almost emaciated; there was an expression of weariness in the bright eyes, which looked disproportionately large in the thin, pale face, and his sloping shoulders were rounded like those of an elderly man.

William reproached himself with having been too hard and incredulous. The boy was evidently much out of health. But Claude unexpectedly declared himself to be much better than when he had written to Aunt Judith. In fact, he eagerly declared that he was almost well. A doctor? No; he did not wish to see a doctor. He did not need one. As to Madame Martin's complaints, Uncle William must remember that she was a very vulgar, ignorant woman, and did not at all understand how to draw the line between the duties of a secretary and those of a servant. Besides, she had a chronic habit of grumbling; every one in the Pension knew that. Kind-hearted and well-meaning? Well, perhaps—oh yes! No doubt she was well-meaning. Only one must not take to heart every word which came out of her mouth. However, Claude was very willing to try and meet her requirements, even though they should be a little unreasonable. He did not wish to give up his situation at present—at all events,

not unless something better turned up. With regard to Mrs. Armour—Uncle William had no idea what a wretched, spiteful, petty-minded crew they had in the boarding-house now. Civil? Certainly, he was perfectly civil! But it was impossible to satisfy them by mere civility and politeness, and he presumed it was not reckoned part of his duty to profess familiar affection for them all.

When Claude had written to his Aunt Judith so lamentable an account of his state of health he had certainly intended to achieve his recall to London. He lacked stamina, both of mind and body, and shrank from any effort which was displeasing to him. He had met with unexpected mortifications in the position of clerk and secretary in the Pension Monplaisir, and he could not bear the yoke of a disagreeable duty. That other people bore such a yoke was nothing to him. Other people might be more thick-skinned, and very likely were!

Then by degrees he began to attribute a great part of the disgust and weariness which oppressed him to the climate of Vevey. And this suggestion he instinctively welcomed as affording a chance of escape. His selfishness was not of that robust kind which is content with the attainment of its own desires at any cost. Claude liked to make a good figure, and to be credited with the most reasonable motives for getting his own way.

But between the pathetic appeal which had brought tears into Aunt Judith's eyes, and the October day on which William appeared at the boarding-house, several weeks had elapsed, and had brought a change which greatly reconciled Claude to remaining where he was.

The change was due to the arrival of Mrs. Armour. Mrs. Armour had "taken up" Mr. Copley. In other words, she had made common cause with him against the other boarders, with whom she was not popular, and gave them to understand that she and Mr. Copley belonged to a superior order of gentility to theirs; that Mr. Copley, like herself, came of a "good family;" and that his being obliged, by pecuniary misfortunes, to act as secretary in the Pension Monplaisir by no means affected his claim to the distinction of Mrs. Armour's notice and friendship. Mrs. Armour had, in fact, strong personal motives for objecting to purse-pride in all its manifestations.

In a word, she flattered and cajoled young Copley, with no

deeper or more sinister object than to gratify a very pitiful ambition and indulge a taste for flirtation which long habit had turned into a craving as imperious as that of a confirmed dram-drinker.

It did not take William long to discover the real state of the case during his conversation with his nephew. He knew the young fellow to be vain and unstable, and to have, moreover, that ready susceptibility to unworthy influences which is often combined in a weak character with hard inaccessibility to reason and justice. It was, perhaps, the inflexible rectitude of William Hughes's mind which sundered the uncle and nephew more than anything else. Claude was conscious that behind the tender mercy of his uncle's deeds there lay a keen and unflinching insight into the faults and weaknesses which he forgave as he hoped to be forgiven. Now Claude, although he wished to be indulged, had no taste for being forgiven.

He had begun by standing somewhat defiantly on the defensive. He expected a sharp lecture. But the deep fountains of compassion in William's nature overflowed when he saw the pale young face and fragile figure. The few words of reproof and advice which he uttered were tenderly chosen and gently said. On one point only he was inflexibly firm—he must see a doctor.

When that had been fully settled William said "Good-by," and prepared to betake himself to the point of view he had selected for his first sketch. Madame Martin, who had been lying in wait for him, hurried out of her little room, and begged him to wait and rest awhile longer, instead of tramping all that way along the dusky road. "The sun will not wait for me," answered William, with a smile. "If I do not make haste I shall lose the light I want. But, before I go, I must tell you that Claude has promised me to do his best to please you in future; and that he has no wish to leave your house. For my own part, and in my Aunt Judith's name, too, I must thank you very heartily for your goodness to the boy. Have patience with him yet awhile longer, and I hope you will find things go much better. It is a great comfort to us to know that Claude is under the eye of an old friend like yourself." Then he heartily wrung the good woman's hand, and went away.

The verdict of the physician whom Claude consulted the next day was by no means unfavorable to the young man's remaining

in Vevey—at all events for the present. There was not much amiss. He must be careful not to catch cold, and to avoid exposing himself to the evening dews, and so forth. There was, perhaps, some hereditary delicacy of constitution, but no cause for immediate alarm. William was not altogether reassured by these indistinct generalities. But to Claude they sufficed. He had—half-unconsciously perhaps—influenced the doctor's view of his case by many suppressions of the truth. He felt quite strong; he had no cough now, scarcely any cough, at least. The lassitude and pains in the limbs which he had complained of to Aunt Judith had quite disappeared. He was in high spirits as he and his uncle left the doctor's house together. He was to have his own way, and to escape reproaches. There was only one little bitter drop in the whole affair, the position he was compelled to accept towards Madame Martin. She had consented to overlook his shortcomings and to give him another trial. That was humiliating. However, Madame Martin, although she spoke bluntly enough to him in private, was too thoroughly good-natured to snub him publicly. And as Claude had prudence enough to behave in a more conciliatory manner towards those boarders whom he had previously offended, all went on smoothly enough during the next few weeks at the Pension Monplaisir.

There was a great deal of disappointment among Madame Martin's inmates when it was found that Mr. Hughes did not intend to take up his abode there.

Madame Martin was subjected to a searching cross-examination about the "short, dark gentleman" who had suddenly appeared at the breakfast-table and had then been seen no more. She had boldly declared him to be one of the most celebrated landscape-painters in England. Even in these days of cheap newspapers, steam communication, and electric telegraphs, "celebrity" is still a relative term of more or less limited significance. And none of the boarders at Monplaisir ventured to contradict the assertion of poor William Hughes's celebrity, lest by ignoring him they should argue themselves unknown.

Miss Jenks, indeed, who was on some points courageous even to rashness, pronounced with some heat that Mr. Hughes *couldn't* be as celebrated as Landseer; but Mrs. Ford pointed out that Landseer was dead, and that, moreover, he had only painted

dogs and horses; and Miss Jenks, not being able at the moment to think of any English landscape-painter of eminence, was reduced to temporary silence on that score.

Miss Jenks was a tall, middle-aged woman, with a freckled skin, good, rough-hewn features, and a powerful, bony frame. She was extremely poor—so poor that it was a subject of wonder in the Pension how she had found the means of travelling from Northampton, where her friends lived, to Switzerland. But she was an intrepid borrower. It had once been said of her by a shy clergyman whom she had persecuted to the verge of desperation, that in demanding the assistance of her fellow-creatures Miss Jenks knew neither fear nor shame. And—possibly from her ignorance of those depressing qualities—she exhibited on all occasions a brassy cheerfulness which affected nervous persons like the sound of a gong.

“Oh, Mr. Hughes has a great *renommée* among the first artists, I assure you,” said Madame Martin, as she was shuffling out of the room in her big slippers. “Only last season the Grand Duke Casimir bought one of his tableaux.”

This was a concrete fact which made a considerable impression.

“Well, now, I’m glad to hear it,” said Mrs. Ford. Mrs. Ford was a good-natured old woman, in the main, although she had her antipathies—as every one who saw her in company with Mrs. Armour must perceive. “I’m glad to hear it,” she repeated, in a still more cordial tone, “for I thought Mr. Hughes looked rather shabby, and as if he’d seen trouble.”

“He looked to *me* like a foreigner, with those dark eyes and that complexion. Quite Spanish!” exclaimed Miss Jenks.

“That is his Keltic blood,” said Mrs. Armour, dropping her remark into the midst of the conversation with an air of indolent superiority.

Every one present turned round and looked at her.

“What blood is it?” asked Mrs. Ford, simply.

“Keltic. He comes of an ancient Welsh family.”

“Oh! *That’s* what you call Keltic, is it? The word used to be spelt with a C in *my* time!”

Mrs. Armour shrugged her shoulders in disdainful silence.

“Oh, but they do say ‘Kelt’ now, Mrs. Ford. I saw the word in a newspaper only the other day, speaking about the Highland-

ers. It comes from 'kilt,' very likely," said Miss Jenks, with more valor than discretion. She was quite ready to plunge into an argument on etymology; as she would have been to discuss conic sections or the latest discoveries in Egyptology, if she had ever happened to see those topics mentioned in a newspaper.

But the general curiosity about Mr. Hughes was impatient of any excursions from the matter in hand, and Mrs. Armour was closely questioned as to how she knew anything of Mr. Hughes's lineage. Had she been acquainted with him before? When it appeared that all she knew of Mr. Hughes was derived from young Copley, and that Mr. Hughes was young Copley's uncle, public opinion was somewhat divided. The two Miss Curdans made cutting remarks in an audible tone to each other.

"Oh, I see!" said Miss Curdan. "Since the gentleman is related to Mr. Copley, of course, he must be something very superior."

"Yes; that accounts for the 'Welsh blood.' I didn't understand at first," replied Miss Susan. "It is very convenient to belong to an ancient Welsh family. It can't be inquired into."

These sneers were, in truth, aimed at Mrs. Armour rather than at Mr. Hughes. But sneers, like arrows, often hit wide of the mark.

Mrs. Ford took a different view. "A relation of that young jackanapes, is he?" said she. "What a pity the young man does not try to copy his uncle's manners! *He* bowed in the politest way to everybody all round when he left the breakfast-table."

"Yes," said Miss Jenks. "I noticed his bow—quite Frenchy, wasn't it? I consider there's a deal of the foreigner about Mr. Hughes. I said so from the first."

Miss Jenks's experience of foreign manners had been limited to her journey, the preceding week, from Calais to Geneva and from Geneva to Vevey. But she made bold and rapid inductions, inferring the general from the particular—and very often from one particular.

On the whole, the feeling of the society at Monplaisir was inclined to be favorable towards Mr. Hughes personally. And when, on Madame Martin's pressing invitation, he spent an evening at the Pension, he at once established himself as a popular favorite.

He talked French with the Russian lady (who only knew four languages, of which English did not happen to be one); he sang Italian popular melodies in a soft baritone voice; he improvised an accompaniment on his guitar to a ballad sung by Miss Susan Curdan; he handed round teacups and cakes with a gallantry which confirmed Miss Jenks in her opinion that his manners were Frenchy; he chatted a little, and listened a great deal; and, above all, he did not single out Mrs. Armour for particular attention, nor show any desire to engross that lady's conversation. Even Claude, who was invited to join the party (and whom the severest of his female critics admitted to look "very interesting" and "quite the gentleman" in his evening dress), behaved with unusual politeness to every one—an improvement rightly attributed to his uncle's presence and influence.

As soon as Mr. Hughes had gone away, Mrs. Armour also withdrew, and then the other ladies became enthusiastic in the painter's praises.

"Such an accomplished musician!" said Miss Susan Curdan. "How well he accompanied me!"

"And what unaffected manners! Very different from the stuck-up pretensions of some people!" exclaimed the elder sister.

Mrs. Ford pointed out that even the young jackanapes had behaved quite nicely to-night; and she added that, after all, he was young, and allowance ought to be made for a lad of that age when a woman old enough to be his mother made a fool of him.

Miss Jenks's meditations about Mr. Hughes were of a more serious and far-reaching kind.

Miss Jenks was not used to be treated with much gentleness or consideration. Her demeanor did not invite such treatment. She impressed all beholders with the conviction that she was not only able to take care of herself, but determined to do so. No female fellow-traveller had ever offered Miss Jenks a smelling-bottle. No policeman had ever volunteered to pilot Miss Jenks over a London crossing. The society in which she had lived did not include any men who habitually treated all women with delicate deference; and Mr. Hughes's behavior to herself had impressed her profoundly. Imagine a dragoon in an enemy's country, who has been procuring his daily bread by active and ruthless "requisi-

tions," and to whom suddenly a native advances smiling, and offering fat poultry! What could be Mr. Hughes's motive?

There was something almost pathetic in Miss Jenks's astonishment at finding herself the object of considerate courtesy. But she was not of a soft or weakly grateful nature. With her usual practical energy she determined to take advantage of so unexpected a phenomenon. Mr. Hughes was a very agreeable person. He was said to be a painter of distinction. He must, at any rate, be earning a respectable living. He was evidently extremely amiable—a quality which Miss Jenks confused with feebleness of character. And it was clear, from his behavior, that he had taken an extraordinary liking to her.

Miss Jenks sat up in her own little room on the third floor for a long time that night, thinking over the occurrences of the evening. She did not light her candle, from motives of economy. But there was a bright moon; and, besides, one can think in the dark. Before she went to bed, Miss Jenks had taken a great resolution. She had made up her mind to marry Mr. Hughes.

Meanwhile, under the wooden veranda at the back of the house, Mrs. Armour was pacing up and down with Claude Copley. The autumn night, though clear, was chilly, and Claude, in his evening suit, shivered and coughed now and then. Mrs. Armour was wrapped in a warm shawl, and did not feel cold. She was talking about herself. Her favorite topic, usually, was her life in India with Captain Armour. But to-night her reminiscences went further back.

"Oh, my family were hand-in-glove with the first artists in London," she was saying. "Although we lived *chiefly* in fashionable society, yet papa's table was always open to first-rate artists. He had such liberal views about all that!"

Claude answered, vaguely, that he was quite sure of it.

"I was so much the youngest, you know. And, indeed, I had only been out one season when poor papa died. But celebrated people of all sorts were only too delighted to come to our house. Do you know, I think you ought to mention that to your uncle. He very likely supposes me to belong to the same class as these dreadful old women in the Pension here!"

"He can scarcely look at you and suppose that!" said Claude.

"Well, upon my word, I don't know! He did not *appear* to

distinguish me from them in any way. At any rate, Mr. Hughes would be interested to hear about papa. He may have met him. I should say he certainly *must* have heard of him. There was no house in London better known in the best artistic circles than Dr. Kirby's.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Now, Miss Copley, if I have any musical gift at all, it is for dramatic singing," said Lady Lambton.

Barbara bowed her head.

"I mean," continued Lady Lambton, "singing full of dramatic expression. The words produce so much greater an effect when uttered to music than if they were simply spoken. Singing of that sort is appreciated even by persons who have not what is generally meant by an ear for music. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I think so," answered Barbara.

Lady Lambton had kept her word, and had engaged Miss Copley, at a modest remuneration, to come to her house twice a week and accompany her songs. This was the first day of the engagement, and Barbara was already seated at the pianoforte, waiting for her ladyship to select a song.

There was a pile of loose music lying on a canterbury near the instrument, and Amy was turning it over, and taking up first one piece and then another, irresolutely. At length she looked round at the gentle, serious face beside her, and said,

"I wish you could suggest something that would suit me, Miss Copley."

"I think, perhaps," said Barbara, after a moment's hesitation, "that if you would sing me something, I might be able to recommend a song. You see I do not even know what is the register of your voice."

"The register?"

"I mean its compass. Is it a contralto voice? a soprano?"

"Oh, my voice has a very extensive compass. Let me see! It is really so long since I sang; and I have so unfortunately sensitive an ear that if I make the very slightest mistake it drives

me mad! However, let me see! Oh, here is a little thing I used to sing!" And Lady Lambton, who had been tossing the music about in a hasty, important manner, pulled out Schubert's "Adieu," and set it on the desk.

When Barbara began to play the symphony, the sound of the first chords almost made her start. The piano was sadly in need of tuning; and she nervously expected to hear Lady Lambton utter a cry of dismay and close the instrument. But her ladyship must have possessed more self-control than she gave herself credit for; since, far from evincing acute distress, she did not even appear to notice that there was anything amiss. The choice of the song was unfortunate. Its delicate pathos did not suit Amy Lambton in any respect. Her voice was hard—even harsh—in the upper notes, and she mispronounced the French words.

When she had finished there was a short silence, and then she said, peevishly,

"The 'Adieu' was never a favorite song of mine. It doesn't interest me. It is so dreadfully monotonous. You don't say anything, Miss Copley?"

"I—I think the song is rather too low for your voice. And, besides, the piano ought to be— I suppose you mean to have it tuned, Lady Lambton?"

"Tuned! Why, it is only— Let me see! How long is it since the man was here? It cannot be many weeks. Well; now that you have heard my voice, Miss Copley, perhaps you will suggest something that will suit me? I expected you to be able to do that when I engaged you."

Barbara considered silently for a minute. Then she asked if Lady Lambton sang Italian.

"Oh yes!" answered Amy, confidently. "I don't speak it. Nobody does talk Italian. But the pronunciation is so easy! Do you know Italian, Miss Copley?"

"Yes; a little. I learned it chiefly from my uncle, who once lived in Rome, and has a peculiar gift for languages."

"Oh, I see! Yes, it is quite a gift. I had it from a child, but my terrible sensitiveness has stood in my way. Some people can talk on stolidly, not caring what blunders they make; but nothing short of perfection satisfies me. Well, then, you would

be able to help me, perhaps, if I were doubtful about the pronunciation of a word? Oh, it might happen, you know!"

"I would do my best," said Barbara.

"Really, I think that is not at all a bad idea of yours about the Italian songs. The Italian school of music is so intensely dramatic—quite my style. The next time you come I wish you would bring me one or two pieces to look at. Will you? And now, suppose for a change, *you* sing me something! Here is 'The Erl King.' That is a very fine thing. Just run through it."

In vain Barbara protested that she had but the tiniest thread of a voice, and was quite unable to do justice to 'The Erl King.' Lady Lambton insisted.

"Never mind your want of voice, Miss Copley," she said. "We can't all have voices. Very often, do you know, in listening to other people an idea comes to me which I might never get if I were singing myself. Their very defects are a revelation as to how the thing ought to be done. Not that that applies to you, Miss Copley. I am sure you will get through it very nicely indeed. Sing it in English, please."

Barbara complied, and Amy listened with close attention. When the song was over she clapped her hands together, and cried,

"Very well! Very well, indeed! You *have* but a small voice, it is true," she added, smiling; "and, of course, 'The Erl King' requires a good deal of power and energy to give it its full effect. But still— You played that accompaniment so capitally that I must ask you to play it again. You have quite put me in the vein—that's my artistic nature! and I feel that I must sing the song myself."

So "The Erl King" was repeated; and this time no one could complain of want of force and energy. But, in spite of some exaggeration, the song was not badly sung; and, after announcing in a sepulchral tone that "In his arms the fair child—was dead," Lady Lambton turned round with a triumphant smile, and said,

"There! That's better than the whining 'Adieu,' isn't it?"

"Much better," assented Barbara, simply. "I am quite—"

"Quite surprised, you mean? Oh, don't hesitate to say so. You will find out by and by, when you know me better, that in all things artistic I am a creature of impulses. If a subject takes

hold of my imagination, I can do *anything!* But without that spark of enthusiasm I am powerless.”

When the hour came to an end, Lady Lambton was still in high good humor.

“I knew we should suit each other, Miss Copley,” she said. “These lessons—I mean these little practisings together—will quite inspire me. I shall take up my music again *con amore*. You see sympathy is necessary to me—not praise; I could not bear you to flatter me; but I do need sympathy. You will come next Wednesday without fail?”

Amy Lambton was convinced that she had made a delightful impression on Miss Copley. The poor thing did not often enjoy so interesting an experience in the course of her daily drudgery; and would doubtless take home a rose-colored account of the pleasant hour she had spent, and the charming kindness with which she had been treated. Amy felt a glow of self-approval when she remembered her own unaffected affability. But perhaps there is no form of social benevolence which produces a scantier return of gratitude than affability.

Barbara, as she sat in the omnibus which carried her homeward, was, in fact, thinking solely of her Uncle William’s last letter from Vevey—of his account of Claude’s improved health, and of that good creature, Madame Martin, who had been so kind to her brother. The letter also contained a description of the evening which William had spent at the Pension. A smile broke over Barbara’s face as she thought of it. She knew her uncle so well, and so thoroughly relished the quiet humor with which he narrated the sayings and doings of the company at Monplaisir. But this part of the letter Barbara had kept to herself, for Aunt Judith was not always discreet, and her sense of humor was rudimentary. Just as certain persons are color-blind, others are fun-blind. And both deficiencies may remain undetected throughout a long life, since the deficient ones are able to laugh, and to say that the sky is blue, as well as their neighbors.

It was dusk when Barbara reached home. Ruddy firelight shone from the window of the front parlor, and sent a warm glow, broken by flickering shadows, over the dingy whitewash of its ceiling.

“There’s been a gentleman to see mistress, Miss Barbara,” whispered Larcher, when she opened the street door.

"Has there? Was it Mr. Hill?" naming the father of one of Miss Hughes's little scholars.

"I said 'a gentleman,' Miss Barbara," returned Larcher. "Mr. Hill is a respectable man, in his way, though his weights and scales ain't to be followed blindfold; but he is—well, I should describe him as a party, or a person, myself."

Barbara laughed, but the next moment she said, anxiously, "I hope there has been nothing to vex Aunt Judith."

Barbara's experience, acting on Barbara's temperament, had led her to fear the unknown and unexpected.

"Law bless you, no, Miss Barbara! Mistress is as pleased as anything. The gentleman hasn't been gone five minutes, and mistress had just rung her bell, and had me up to talk to me about him. But now she can talk to you, which, of course, is far better. Not that I ever repeat again to common persons what is said to me in this family. As I used to tell that there poor creature Briggs—'Briggs,' I said, 'there's subjects you can't understand, never having lived with gentlefolks. And when a person gets talking about what they don't understand, they cause nothing but muddle to themselves and others.' But," she added, with her apologetic smile and droop of the head, "he was a well-meaning creature, poor man! And he didn't live but two years and three weeks from the day we was married."

As soon as Miss Hughes heard the parlor door open, she turned round eagerly to welcome her grandniece.

"Dear me, I am sorry you did not arrive a little earlier, Barbara!" she exclaimed. "However, he will come again. I gave him permission to call. I am very well pleased with him—very well pleased indeed."

"Pleased with whom, Aunt Judith?"

"Why, with Augusta's son! He apologized for calling without a formal introduction; but I said to him, 'You could not have better credentials than your mother's name. Circumstances divided our families many years ago; but I have always retained a kindly remembrance of Augusta Maddison, so far as she personally was concerned.'"

"Oh, Mr. Hofmann has been here?" said Barbara. She privately thought that her aunt's tone of mingled dignity and condescension must have surprised Mr. Hofmann; and that he had

expected a different kind of réception from his mother's message.

But Aunt Judith had clearly no idea of that sort in her head. She recounted the interview with perfect complacency. It was plain, she said, that the young man was in ignorance as to the events of the past; and that was all the better. Arthur Maddison, it appeared, was still living, and still unmarried. His nephew described him as a hypochondriacal invalid. Ah! No doubt he had not been able to forget Olive, after all; and no doubt he bitterly regretted his desertion of her, now that it was too late. Well, that was some comfort!

Barbara listened rather absently. "It was very kind of him to come," she said, when the worn, flute-like tones of the old lady's voice ceased for a moment.

"Kind! That is scarcely the right word, Barbara. It was polite and proper behavior; in fact, it was his duty. His mother had intrusted to him a message of remembrance for me. Poor Augusta! It is clear that she would be glad to make up old quarrels; and if she were in London I should certainly not refuse to receive her. I am only sorry your Uncle William was not here. I am sure William would have been pleased to make his acquaintance. However, it is only deferred."

"Oh, I don't suppose that Mr. Hofmann is likely to come here again. Why should he?" said Barbara, incautiously.

"Why should he? Upon my word, Barbara—!"

"I mean—because—since he has delivered his message, you know—"

"If he were Augusta's servant, that would be a sufficient reason for his not coming again, certainly. But, being her son, he will naturally avail himself of my permission to call."

"Oh! Yes."

"He is extremely interested in your uncle's work. He spoke quite enthusiastically of one of William's landscapes which he saw the other day by chance."

"Did he?"

"And he told me how much you are liked and admired by his relatives, the Ketterings. I am glad to know that they appreciate you."

"Dear Aunt Judith, I have always told you how kind the whole family have been to me."

“ ‘Kind’ again ! People are ‘kind,’ according to you, if they behave with common decency ! ” exclaimed Aunt Judith, pettishly.

But her face cleared again in a moment. Young Hofmann’s visit had highly gratified her ; and presently her thoughts, starting from the subject of the Maddisons, and wandering backward, busied themselves with still earlier reminiscences of her youth and of old times in Marypool.

Barbara, enjoying her one idle hour of the day—the hour before tea-time—sat with her hands loosely clasped on her lap and listened to her aunt’s often-told stories of the past. The firelight glowed and flickered, and the girl’s thoughts seemed to flicker with it dreamily. The old stories about all those dead-and-gone people sounded in her ears like the chime of distant bells—full of melancholy, and yet with an indescribable sweetness.

Barbara, too, young as she was, had her own cherished memories.

She was thinking of a holiday she had passed in Kent two years ago. Holidays of any sort were rare with her ; and a holiday in the country was most rare and precious. Her uncle was painting a subject which had attracted him near a remote Kentish village, and had found such cheap and pleasant quarters in a farm-house hard by that he had sent for Barbara to stay there with him while he was working at his picture. She had been looking pale and fagged, and a few weeks of rest and fresh air would restore her. Claude, who was then at home, stayed in town to take care of Aunt Judith.

Ah, what happy weeks those were for Barbara ! The country was beautiful ; the summer skies were sunny ; her uncle was interested in his work ; and, moreover, it could not be denied that the presence of Mr. Gilbert Hazel added to the pleasure of their stay at Thornfield. He had been lodging there for several weeks when they arrived at the farm-house, and William Hughes and he took a liking to each other at first sight.

Mr. Hazel was a soldier, on sick leave from India. He had been very near dying of fever ; but the sea voyage had done much for him, and his cure had been completed by the pure, bracing air of Thornfield Common. He was almost alone in the world. His few distant kinsfolk lived in the heart of a manufacturing district. Thornfield Farm suited his means as well as his health (for Gilbert Hazel made no secret of his poverty), and he had spent near-

ly the whole of his leave of absence in that peaceful, secluded place, with a few books and his fishing-rod for his sole company.

All these details came out quite naturally while he and William Hughes were smoking an evening pipe together in the farm-house kitchen, or during the long days while the painter was working in the open air. The spot which Hughes had selected for his landscape chanced to be the most favorable point for fishing in the stream, on whose banks Mr. Hazel spent many hours with his rod and line. It clearly must have been the most favorable point, since Mr. Hazel seldom moved far from it. And Barbara would carry out her work or her sewing, and sit near her uncle, or wander a little way over the picturesque common or along the course of the stream, but never out of sight. And so the summer days passed serenely, and the precious holiday came to an end.

But the recollection of it remained with Barbara as a treasured possession. She did not often speak of it to Aunt Judith, because Aunt Judith had taken an odd, jealous prejudice against Gilbert Hazel, whom she had never seen; and how could she talk about the holiday at Thornfield without mentioning Mr. Hazel? Neither did Barbara ever originate the subject with her Uncle William, who had conceived a strong regard for Hazel; but she listened with a glow of sympathy when her uncle spoke of him.

"Hazel," said William once to Aunt Judith, "has some characteristics which especially delight me. He has considerable pride and tenacity, but they are of a very unusual kind. There is a strong spice of romance in him, and no amount of 'chaff' could make him ashamed of it. That pretence of indifference which young fellows weakly imitate from one another, and imagine they are seeming strong—that cheap assumption of superiority to the finer emotions of humanity (as if insensibility implied superiority! Why, which of us can hope to rival the jelly-fish?)—has not infected him. Many of us outgrow it; but Hazel never took it—just as some constitutions are impervious to measles."

Whereupon Aunt Judith remarked sharply, "I don't admire sentimentality in a man. A man ought to be practical."

There is nothing so efficacious for closing the mouth of reasonable persons as a touch of unreason. A logical mind perceives at once that there is no hope of two parallel lines ever meeting. But Aunt Judith's mind was not of that cast. And she would pursue

her argument alongside of her interlocutor's argument (with which it had nothing whatever to do), in the confident expectation of their by and by converging, when her opponent must either get out of the way or be run over.

So Barbara sat silent in the firelight, and said nothing of what was in her heart as she thought of Thornfield and of an interview between Gilbert Hazel and her uncle, about which the latter had told her something, but which shall presently be narrated more fully to the reader.

CHAPTER XIV.

It came to pass in this way: On the evening before Hazel's departure from Thornfield (which was to precede that of William Hughes and his niece by a few days) he was alone with the painter in the old-fashioned kitchen. The rest of the household had gone to bed, and the house was very quiet. The two men had been smoking silently for some minutes, when Hazel said suddenly, "I should like to tell you something about myself, if you don't mind listening. It isn't a long yarn; and, indeed, I have little more of a story to tell than the needy knife-grinder himself."

Hughes looked up with a serious, attentive face, and nodded.

There ensued so long a pause that it seemed as though Gilbert Hazel had forgotten his purpose or changed his mind. But presently he went on: "Well, it can be said in a few words. My poor dad, who knew no more of business than the man in the moon—he had a good property in Buckinghamshire, and held a family living there—was ruined by a mining speculation. When the crash came, I had been engaged nearly a year to a girl whom I had known all my life. It had, in fact, been a boy and girl courtship. She was the only child of a man of very good means in our neighborhood. Her people thought we were too young to marry at once—anyway, they thought she was. And then when my regiment was ordered to India, they wouldn't hear of her going out there. However, if after a year or two we were still in the same mind, they would not oppose our marriage, provided I

could get sent home or would leave the army. Well, as soon as I knew how things were, and that I had literally nothing in the world but my pay, and the interest of a thousand pounds secured under my mother's marriage settlement, of course I wrote, offering to release her from her engagement.

"Yes," said William Hughes, nodding his head again thoughtfully.

"She—she accepted my offer at once, in the coldest possible terms, and within three months she married a rich fellow whom she used to make fun of to me." Hughes drew in his breath sharply between his teeth, as a man does who has received a sudden hurt. But he said nothing. And, after a moment, Hazel went on: "About the same time I got an offer from one of my mother's cousins in the Midlands to put me into his house of business, if I would leave the army and buckle to work. It might have been a good opening. Any way, it was a kind offer. But I had been very hard hit, and I had no heart to look forward. You see I had nobody to work for. My poor dad was gone—died after a week's illness—and I thought then—I was only three-and-twenty—that I should never care to marry. So I refused the offer, and stuck to the service, and I have managed to peg along well enough by myself. But I am thirty years old; I have nothing in the world but what I have told you; and while things jog on quietly, I have but little prospect of rapid advancement in my profession. So you see I'm not exactly what we would call an eligible match; and, supposing I met with a woman who fulfilled my ideal of everything that's best and loveliest and most lovable in her sex, it would be my duty to hold my tongue, and take care that if there must be any heartache in the case, none of it should fall to her share. You think I'm right, don't you?"

William, who had been leaning with his elbow on the table, and shading his eyes with his hand, now looked full at the other man, and said, in a low voice, "Yes; you are right."

Then, with an instinctive and simultaneous movement, they shook hands.

After that they talked long together, but the rest of their conversation is not material to the events of this story. They parted at half-past one o'clock in the morning—an hour at which no inmate of Thornfield Farm (barring the mice and the crickets) was

ever known to be audibly social. And Hazel's last words were: "I suppose there's nothing for it but to stick to the army. If my kinsman, the ironmaster, would but take it into his head to give me another chance! But that's idle talking. Perhaps I shall come home some day, a sun-dried, yellow-skinned, crabbed old fellow, to grumble, Britishly, on my half-pay. Your pictures will be fetching a thousand pounds apiece by that time, and Bar—Miss Copley—will have been married many a year. Say the last good-by to her for me, will you, Hughes? I couldn't—I shall be off before she is awake to-morrow."

Then, answering the look in William's eyes, he added: "No; don't be low-spirited on my account, old fellow. The world will be a sweeter place to me henceforward for knowing that she's in it."

A part of this conversation William Hughes had repeated to his niece; and he was pleased with his own diplomacy in choosing which part of it he would leave unsaid. Barbara must be shielded from all pain in the matter: there Hazel was entirely right. And it would grieve her to think she had been, however innocently, the cause of pain to another. Barbara was not the kind of girl who would be apt to imagine herself the object of a hopeless attachment. And still less was she likely to dream of giving her own heart unsolicited. As to that, William felt quite secure.

Barbara did not dream of it; but she thought of Gilbert Hazel more frequently than any one suspected. Silence, as well as speech, may come out of the fulness of the heart.

After hearing his story from her uncle, a sentiment of pity was added to sympathy and liking. Although Mr. Hazel had been so reticent and uncomplaining, it was clear to her mind that his father had been culpably rash in speculating with his fortune; and then that girl who deserted him in his poverty! She was rich, and she had coldly given him up! The chief luxury of wealth, to Barbara's thinking, must be the ability to help those we love. How could a woman voluntarily forego such a privilege? She could not have really loved him! And then Barbara would fall to wondering how much he had loved her, and whether it had been merely a boyish fancy, to be replaced hereafter by a truer and deeper love. Uncle William would have been more successfully diplomatic if he had kept Hazel's story wholly to himself.

However, Barbara was in no danger of wasting her time or her feelings in idle sentimentality. She was busy, and she was cheerful in her own quiet way; and although it is not wholesome to live on day-dreams, yet as much dreaming as Barbara ever indulged in during the twilight hour of rest only refreshed her spirit, jaded sometimes by contact with the commonplace, narrow, and uncultured minds among whom her occupations chiefly lay. If, as Gilbert Hazel had declared, the world was the sweeter to him for knowing that she was in it, Barbara, on her part, was strengthened by thinking on his courage under disappointment, and his manliness in bearing unmerited hardships, although she did not know the worst of his troubles.

Miss Hughes's spoken reminiscences had rambled on, and had finally ceased; and the speaker had fallen into silent meditation, and from that into a comfortable doze. She awoke after about a quarter of an hour, and said, as if there had been no break in the conversation, "But in talking about my visitor and about old times, I have never asked you how you got on with Lady Lambton to-day."

Barbara readily gave an account of what had passed. Her account might not have satisfied Amy—but then, how few of us would be satisfied in overhearing what our fellow-creatures say of us!—but Barbara spoke in no carping spirit. Her aunt listened complacently with little nods and smiles, and occasional shrewd remarks as to Lady Lambton's having made a good bargain by securing an accompanist who was also a competent teacher. "But," said she, "we need not grudge her that advantage, since she treats you with the politeness due to you as a lady; and she will doubtless recommend you. It will be an opening—an introduction. Mr. Hofmann was speaking of it only this afternoon, and expressed himself much pleased that you had accepted Lady Lambton's offer. He takes a very great interest in your success, Barbara."

"He takes a very great interest in Lady Lambton, at any rate!" answered Barbara, smiling.

"What? Oh, of course, Barbara, no one can take an interest in *you*! That is quite your Uncle William's tone—I don't mean about you, but about himself. I have no patience with such nonsense!"

Barbara hesitated for a moment, fighting against a shy feeling which she could not—or, at all events, did not—explain to herself. Then she said, “But, Aunt Judith, I do believe that Mr. Hofmann feels a very special interest in Lady Lambton. She is extremely handsome and attractive, and he admires her very much. He shows it openly.”

This time no quick, petulant answer came from Aunt Judith. She turned her head to peer at Barbara’s face, rose-tinted by the firelight, and remained as though struck with silence.

Then the tea-tray was brought, and the lamp was lighted, and the talk between the aunt and niece went to other topics.

They debated whether they should, or should not, accept an invitation which had reached them for the following Saturday. Mrs. Green, the flower-painter, whose studio was in the same house as that of William Hughes, had begged Miss Copley and her aunt to join a small, select party who were to meet at her house for the purpose of enjoying what Mrs. Green called a “*conversazione*.”

The meaning of this word—like the immortal “swarry” in “*Pickwick*,” which was taken to signify a boiled leg of mutton and trimmings—was somewhat elastic in Mrs. Green’s mouth. It always stood for a social entertainment in general; but it varied from time to time as to the particular nature of the entertainment. On the present occasion it was explained to include music, readings, and recitations, together with as much “*conversazione*” (in the natural sense of the word) as could be squeezed into the intervals.

Barbara was inclined to refuse, Aunt Judith to accept, the invitation. Miss Hughes held views on the subject of her own affability, and its efficacy in winning grateful recognition, analogous to those of Lady Lambton. She was convinced that “poor Mrs. Green” and her friends would be modestly elated by the honor of her presence. “Of course, my dear,” she said, “they are underbred, fourth-rate people. But Mrs. Green has been kind and neighborly to your uncle, in her well-meaning way; and I think William would wish us to be civil to her.”

This argument was decisive with Barbara, and she made no further opposition. As for Aunt Judith’s motives for choosing to go to Mrs. Green’s party, it must be owned that she had a certain

pleasure in the idea of being a Triton among minnows. But the reason she had alleged to Barbara was none the less genuine and operative in determining her. Hypocrisy was not among Judith Hughes's faults. And if the clear current of her good intentions was tinged here and there by some earthier tributaries, they were not strong enough to discolor the main body of the stream.

And, then, Aunt Judith was sociable by nature, and was at this time disposed to enjoy herself cheerfully. But a short time had elapsed since Fritz Hofmann first beheld Barbara Copley in the Cockney halo of a butcher's gaslight, and yet those weeks had brought an appreciative increase of prosperity to the Hugheses' humble household. William had been unexpectedly enabled to go to Switzerland and look after Claude—an object which they all had much at heart; Barbara had been engaged by Lady Lambton at the moment when she was about to lose her pupils, the Ketterings, for the winter; and, best of all, the news from Vevey was reassuring as to Claude's health.

Claude's letters home had been much less querulous. It is true that he still set forth various subjects of discontent, but they were not such as to cause much uneasiness on his behalf. He was quite unconstrained in writing to his Aunt Judith, of whose judgment he stood in no kind of awe. And he justified his preference of Mrs. Armour's society over that of the other boarders, not only by praises of his charming friend, but by the most contemptuous description of the rest of Madame Martin's inmates. And on both points Aunt Judith sympathized with him.

Claude had not mentioned in his letters that Mrs. Armour was a daughter of Dr. Kirby. He had omitted that information simply because it had not interested him, and had slipped from his memory. To him the name of Kirby had no special significance. And warmly as he admired the fascinating Juliet Armour, the point on which his attention was focused was her attitude towards himself.

Altogether, Aunt Judith saw reason to be hopeful and cheerful at this time. Young Hofmann's visit had contributed to raise her spirits still more; and she was prepared to enjoy the company of Mrs. Green's select circle of friends.

It was a favorite saying with William Hughes, and in keeping with the serenity and cheerfulness of his philosophy, that the poor

have a keener enjoyment of small pleasures than the rich! "Small pleasant things are continually happening to Cræsus," he would say. "But they pass unnoticed, being matters of course. Whereas Cræsus is very sensitive to small *unpleasant* things—such as his soup not being flavored to perfection, or his wife's diamonds being eclipsed by those of Mrs. Dives."

Aunt Judith would meet such speeches with a shake of the head, and the remark that William, of all people, ought to know how hard poverty is, poor dear!

But on the present occasion the good old lady offered in her own person a lively illustration of William's argument; for what fine lady, dressed by the most expensive of man-milliners, could feel one tithe of the interest and pleasure in her court-gown which Miss Hughes took in the trimming of a new cap for the "conversazione"?

Mrs. Green's dwelling consisted only of the front room (which she called the studio) and a small closet where she slept. A larger room, with a north light, at the back of the house was William Hughes's painting-room; and he had, as we know, given his neighbor leave to use it in his absence. This increase of space enabled Mrs. Green to hold her "conversazione" on a scale of unexampled dignity. Tea and coffee were served in her own studio, while William's was devoted to the more spiritual entertainments of the evening.

When Miss Hughes and her niece arrived, some two dozen persons were already assembled in the front room, whence was heard a buzz of voices mingled with the chink of cups and saucers. The female guests were received on the landing by a young woman (a seamstress in the neighborhood), who took off their cloaks and shawls, and carried them by a back way into Mrs. Green's bedroom.

It was a work of some time to divest Miss Hughes of her galoshes, her cloak, her knitted shawl, and a big black-silk hood, and to substitute for the latter the newly trimmed cap, which had been brought in a paper parcel. And while these operations were being accomplished, Barbara heard fragments of the talk going on in the studio.

All at once she caught the sound of a name which drew her attention with a jerk, as when one is suddenly plucked by the

sleeve. It was a name that she had heard only on one occasion ; but the occasion was too momentous to her to be forgotten.

She looked quickly at her aunt. But Miss Hughes was absorbed in the adjustment of her new cap. Perhaps, too, her hearing, although still good, was less acute than it had once been. Barbara remembered every word of the tragical family story which her aunt had narrated to her, and she was quite sure of the name of the man who had played so fatal a part in it. That name she now heard repeated several times—"Mr. Christopher Dalton," and once "Chris Dalton."

Her first impulse was to rejoice that her uncle William was not there. To herself, the associations connected with that name were sad, but not heart-rending. Barbara made no exaggerated pretences. But to her uncle they would be painful in a very different degree.

Just as she and Aunt Judith were entering the studio, a burly, bald-headed man was saying, in a pompous tone, to a lady near him, "Oh, cousins! Yes, no doubt, in the event of—oh, in case of a division of the property, a first-cousin would, of course—but why should we assume that Mr. Christopher Dalton will neglect to make a will? I was pretty deep in his confidence at one time, and I can tell you that I have reason to believe he won't do anything of the kind!"

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. GREEN, the hostess, came forward to welcome Miss Hughes and Miss Copley in a manner which made Aunt Judith whisper to Barbara, "Poor soul, she is indeed delighted! I am very glad we came."

Mrs. Green was a short, fat woman of sixty, with a light-brown curly wig, and a florid, good-humored face. She was dressed in black cotton velvet trimmed with white crochet lace, and she wore, tied round her throat by a red ribbon, a nondescript ornament of tarnished silver set with colored stones, which she called, generically, "an antique," but whereof the specific purpose and designation were unknown.

As she shook hands with Miss Hughes, the two women presented a singular contrast to each other. Mrs. Green, fussy, vulgar, and with something in her manner as well as her dress suggestive of cheap imitations, but still with that look of alert and prompt intelligence which is acquired by those who fight the battle of life in great cities. Miss Hughes, in her plain silk gown and daintily frilled cap with pale lavender ribbons, her silky white curls, soft dark eyes, and apple-rosy cheeks, seemed to bring with her a perfume of old-fashioned refinement, and a kind of bloom of simplicity—worlds removed from stupidity—which neither years nor sorrows had brushed away.

The other guests looked at her with some curiosity; and Blanche Shortway whispered to her sister Eleanor, "What a lovely old lady!" Whereto Eleanor, who was in a temporary phase of enthusiasm for what may be termed the lorn and lanky school of Art, answered, critically, "Too conventional."

On their part, the new-comers glanced about them, observing the scene and its occupants.

The room was lofty in proportion to its size. The walls—of a gray tint—considerably toned down from the brightness of its original purity by the smoke of many London winters—were hung with specimens of Mrs. Green's flower-painting; and above the high, carved, wooden mantelpiece was fixed a group of fans painted by her, and brought forth from their wrappings of tissue paper expressly to grace the present festal occasion. There were no curtains to the three long, narrow windows, daylight being precious, and not plentiful; but dingy holland blinds were drawn down at night. The room was brightly illuminated with gas, and warmed by a good fire, and looked cheerful, if neither elegant nor luxurious.

A large round table, which in the daytime was pushed into one corner to make room for the drawing class, and which usually held a miscellaneous assortment of articles, such as pencils, color-boxes, old gloves, groups of half-faded flowers in water, one or two dog-eared books, dusty photographs, newspapers, and a bundle of Mrs. Green's cards of terms for teaching, had been covered with a white cloth, and drawn into the middle of the room. It now supported a large and varied collection of cups and saucers, plates and dishes, as well as a huge metal teapot, and an etna, over which



"All at once she caught the sound of a name."

a little tin tea-kettle boiled and bubbled. The tea was fragrant, and the cakes, sandwiches, and bread-and-butter were excellent in quality and abundant in quantity. Mrs. Green had her illusions; but with respect to eating and drinking she kept a firm grasp on the realities of life. She knew quite well that the most enthusiastically æsthetic of her guests would greatly prefer a liberal allowance of palatable food and strong tea served on common crockery, and poured from a cheap teapot, to stingy fare out of rare china and Queen Anne silver.

The assembled company comprised several individuals whose acquaintance the reader has already made. Besides Blanche and Eleanor Shortway, their mother was present. She had with difficulty been persuaded to take the trouble of coming. But there she sat, smiling and handsome, dressed in a species of sage-green bag (designed by Eleanor), which would have made most women look frightful. There was even some hope that Mr. Shortway might appear before the evening was over, Saturday being his free night. There was Mr. Percival Snagge, who posed as the lion of the evening; and Mr. Coney, looking as intensely Shakespearian as baldness, full knickerbockers, and a falling collar could make him; and Mr. Toller and Mr. Green, nephew of the hostess, and it was currently rumored that Mr. Mortimer Hopkins might be expected by and by.

There were, moreover, two or three girl art students, with fresh, pretty faces, and a Russian girl whose sallow face was neither fresh nor pretty, and whose pale blond hair was cut short, and stood upon end above a low, flat forehead, but who was reported to have a magnificent contralto voice. She was studying singing with a professor unknown to fame, but pronounced by his friends (on his own testimony) to be the first singing-master in Europe, and to possess a unique and infallible method of forming the voice. Indeed, it was surprising how much acknowledged genius there was among Mrs. Green's guests.

However, if inglorious, they were by no means mute. The babble of talk rose higher and higher until people were shouting in each others' ears, all unconscious of the pitch of their voices. But all at once Mrs. Green, having succeeded in attracting the general attention by rapping sharply on the tin tea-kettle with the handle of a spoon, invited the company to pass into the adjoining room.

A momentary silence followed this request, which seemed mysteriously to have chilled the atmosphere. Nearly all present understood that the real business of the evening—that which Mrs. Green intended to signify by the word “*conversazione*”—was now to commence, and that some gifted individual was about to entertain them. But the invitation was not to be resisted. Some even obeyed it with alacrity. These were themselves gifted individuals who intended to do their share of entertaining by and by; and the social contract which obtained on these occasions made listening to your neighbor’s performance the indispensable condition of being allowed to perform yourself.

A few persons, however, lingered in the tea-room. Among these was Miss Hughes. She had been installed, by Mrs. Green’s especial care, in a comfortable chair near the fire, and supplied with a cup of tea, which she emphatically pronounced to be excellent.

And then, quite near to Miss Hughes, sat Mrs. Shortway. She shared her daughter Blanche’s admiration for the pretty old lady, and having learned that she was related to Mr. William Hughes, the artist, she begged to be introduced to her. Aunt Judith, on her side, had been attracted by Mrs. Shortway’s handsome, good-tempered face. She was very sensitive to beauty—like most persons who possess, or have possessed, it themselves—and her bow and smile were very gracious.

Mrs. Shortway was perfectly contented with the old lady’s slightly condescending salute. She was the most humble-minded of women as regarded her own claims and merits. About Maurice and the girls, indeed, she could be almost boastful. But that was a different matter.

It was not long, however, before Aunt Judith’s little icing of dignity melted completely. Her warm heart responded to the simple kindness of the other woman’s nature. And she discovered in the very first sentence of their conversation that Mrs. Shortway, though homely, was not vulgar. “She is really very nice,” thought Aunt Judith to herself. “What a pity she has nothing better to wear than that hideous gown!”

And in a few minutes they were chatting together with the pleasantest air in the world.

Meanwhile, Miss Copley had been consigned by the hostess to

the care of her nephew, young Green, and by him escorted into Mr. Hughes's studio. This room was, of course, familiar to Barbara; but it wore a new aspect to-night. It was always bare enough of furniture, but what little there was had been pushed aside into one corner, with the exception of a couple of rush-bottomed chairs. These had been pressed into the service of the guests, and were placed in company with three or four rows of other chairs, as incongruous in shape and size as the army of Bombastes, and a rear-guard consisting of two dilapidated rout seats and a school bench.

In the absence of gas, the illumination was effected by means of a large moderator lamp on the mantelpiece, and some candles in tin reflectors stuck against the wall. A shabby cottage piano-forte, lent for the occasion by the owner of a small music-shop recently set up in the neighborhood, was placed under the large north window, tastefully draped with cotton sheeting; and many of William Hughes's sketches and studies still hung on the walls. A coke fire, burning in the rusty iron grate, gave a baked flavor to the atmosphere.

At the end of the room opposite to the door stood a little deal table covered with a dingy tartan shawl, and holding a glass water-bottle and a tumbler.

There is no apparatus of such seeming harmlessness—except, perhaps, the perfidious easy-chair of the dentist—that can so depress the human spirit by the mere look of it. A slight gloom overshadowed the faces of the company on the present occasion when they saw that table. But for the most part they did not recognize the cause of their low spirits, and, indeed, many of them did not even know they were low-spirited. They supposed themselves merely to be taking a commendably earnest view of Art and Poetry.

Barbara refused the honor of a front chair, where Mr. Green would have placed her, and modestly sat down on a bench at the back. The young man remained beside her for a while, naming such of the guests as he thought were entitled to that distinction.

“Mr. Percival Snagge—a very remarkable artist; has invented a new system of coloring. His paintings are considered to be quite in the style of Titian; and he lives in Italy himself; so, of course—Mademoiselle Olga Rafalovitch. Splendid voice!

That's her singing-master, Herr Patzke, leaning with his elbow on the piano. He is a native of—well, I don't exactly remember where he comes from, but I *think* from Prague. Wonderful method of forming his voice! I am no musician myself, but I have heard good judges say that none of the most celebrated teachers in Europe are able to touch him."

It occurred to Barbara that the celebrated teachers might the less regret this inability, since Herr Patzke looked extremely in need of a brush and soap and water. But she merely bowed politely, and said, "Indeed!"

"Those two young ladies in the daffodil-colored gowns are daughters of Maurice Shortway, the art critic. Of course you know *his* name."

Barbara had never heard it. But she was willing to attribute the ignorance to her own obscurity, and not to Mr. Shortway's.

"And there," continued young Green, lowering his voice in an impressive manner—"there is Coney, just about to give us a reading. He is one of the most profound Shakespearian scholars of the day."

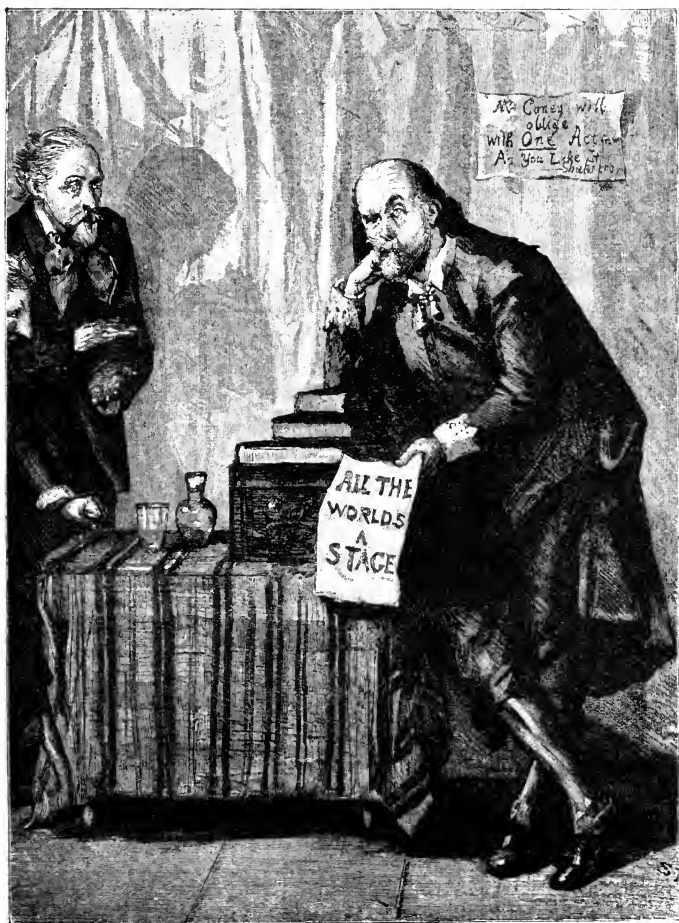
"Is he?" exclaimed Barbara, looking at Mr. Coney with some irrepressible astonishment in her eyes; for she now for the first time saw his figure at full length.

"Yes; he knows at least half a dozen of the plays by heart. You may put him on anywhere. And of course you see the likeness? Striking, isn't it?"

At this moment Mr. Coney stalked majestically to the little deal table, and stood behind it. A faint murmur of applause arose. But from the back of the room near the door came a warmer greeting. Mr. Mortimer Hopkins newly arrived, and resplendent in a crimson velvet waistcoat and white kid gloves, clapped his hands together and cried, "Year, year!" encouragingly.

Mrs. Green stood up and faced the company. "Mr. Nathaniel Coney," she announced, in a loud voice, "will now favor us by reciting an act from Shakespeare's play, 'As You Like It.' One act!" she added, emphatically. Long experience had taught her the necessity of rigidly limiting individual contributions to the general feast of a "conversazione."

Mr. Coney, however, to some degree indemnified himself for



"At this moment Mr. Coney stalked majestically to the little deal table, and stood behind it."

the limit set to his performance by prefacing it with some critical remarks on the actors of the day. These remarks were all unfavorable. Mr. Coney regretted to be severe; but his artistic conscience compelled him to severity. (Where, indeed, shall we look for a moral force so irresistible as that of conscience, when it moves us to find fault?) Yet he would not condemn the whole race of the modern players too sweepingly. There were departments of the drama in which they were not destitute of merit. But with Shakespeare no living tragedian or comedian could deal adequately. And then Mr. Coney proceeded to deal with him himself.

Mr. Coney—like some other distinguished critics—was stronger in theory than practice. As a matter of fact, his style of elocution was founded on that of a leading tragedian whom he had admired at the Theatre Royal, Stafford, in his boyhood; and was just such as one might expect to hear from a third-rate provincial actor. Every craftsman is, of course, *vitiis imitabilis*; and this is a trap for smartness. But what could Mr. Coney do? He was obliged to imitate somebody.

The moment the recitation was at an end, there was a general movement among the audience. Some rose from their seats with an excited expectation of being presently called to perform themselves. Some crowded round Mr. Coney to thank him for the intellectual treat he had given them. (This striking phrase was used by young Green, nervously biding his time with a copy of his own verses in his pocket.) A few persons formed a select audience for Mr. Snagge, who hovered near the little deal table, and held forth about Titian—as a man might talk of some recently patented invention of his own—to all who would listen.

Barbara hoped that she might be able to slip away unnoticed and rejoin her aunt. She had just risen from her seat on the back benches, when she saw a young man wearing a red velvet waistcoat pull young Green by the sleeve, and whisper a few words to him; and the next moment they approached her together.

Mr. Green said, with evident reluctance and hesitation, "Will you allow me to introduce a friend of mine, Miss Copley? Mr. Mortimer Hopkins. I—I hope you won't mind." And with this not too enthusiastic word on behalf of his friend, he left them.

Barbara, in the gentleness of her heart, could not help feeling a little sorry for the young man thus deprecatingly introduced ; and she gave him a kind smile as she said, " I know your name very well."

Now Mr. Mortimer Hopkins, albeit not over-modest or diffident of himself, was deprived for a moment of his usual self-possession. Miss Copley was a very different person from any young woman with whom he had ever talked on equal terms. The very simplicity of her manner seemed to abash him. He soon rallied, however, and said, with his genteelest air, " You allude, perhaps, to my father ? Yes ; he is connected with Art in the way of business. I am only a dillytant, myself. But a few of us who feel a little different to the common herd on the subject of poetry and painting, and culture, are in the 'abit of meeting at my rooms occasionally. My friends consider these meetings rather in the light of an oasis, I believe. I've had the pleasure of receiving your uncle, Mr. Hughes, at one of my little bachelor parties.

Barbara bowed. She had too vivid a remembrance of her uncle's description of that festive gathering to trust herself to speak.

" But I'm afraid I'm keeping you standing !" said Mr. Mortimer Hopkins, naïvely. Barbara explained that she had been about to go back into the next room, finding the one where they were rather oppressively warm.

If she had supposed that Mr. Hopkins would take this statement as a dismissal she was mistaken. He at once begged the honor of escorting her ; and as soon as they were in the adjoining room, he officiously insisted on getting her a cup of tea and finding her a comfortable seat. Barbara glanced at her aunt. Mrs. Shortway was still sitting near her, and one or two gentlemen had joined the group. Miss Hughes was evidently receiving a good deal of attention, and was smiling and chatting with great animation. She did not even perceive her niece's entrance.

It rejoiced Barbara's heart to see the old lady enjoying herself, although for her own part she would a thousand times rather have spent the evening at home ; and she desired nothing so much as to escape the notice of the people around her.

But from Mr. Mortimer Hopkins's notice she could not escape. He was evidently bent upon talking to her. Fortunately, he did

not appear to expect many words from her in return, so she resigned herself to listen.

Mortimer began by giving a sketch of his own artistic views and principles, as being a subject likely to interest Miss Copley. The sketch was rather indistinct; but that might be owing to a taste for what his father called "smudginess of execution"—a taste which has, at all events, the advantage of being far easier to gratify, whether with tongue, pen, or pencil, than the desire for clear outlines. But he did not dwell on this theme long. He soon proceeded—very unaccountably, as it seemed to Barbara—to descant on the gentility of his family connections (by the mother's side) and the brilliancy of his worldly prospects; and at length he startled her by saying, "You may have heard, Miss Copley, in society—for I know the topic has been broached in quite fashionable circles—mention made of Mr. Christopher Dalton. Well, he is a near relation of mine—own grand-uncle; and my grandmother was his favorite sister."

Mr. Mortimer Hopkins had certainly now succeeded in captivating his hearer's attention. With ever-increasing astonishment, Barbara listened to the story of Mr. Dalton's great wealth (which lost nothing, we may be sure, in the young man's mouth), of his eccentric and lonely life, and of the speculations which had arisen respecting the inheritance of his money. She heard, too, that, taking into consideration the possibility of Mr. Dalton's dying without a will, Mortimer and his father had made it their business to look into the family genealogy—which word, the accurate reporter must own, young Hopkins pronounced "geneology"—and had discovered, or so they believed, the names of all Dalton's living relatives. "Not that I'm more mercenary than my neighbors, and have no call to be," said Mortimer. "Only a man likes to know how he stands. There's only two persons nearer than myself—the two surviving daughters of his sister, Mrs. Kirby. One's an old maid, and the other a widow without any children. Then there's a first-cousin by the mother's side—not a Dalton at all—and her family. (There she sits! That very lady close beside Miss Hughes. I believe I'm right in naming Miss Hughes, though without the honor of an introduction.) And one or two collaterals. Astonishing how relations turn up directly there's any money in question! But my friend Mr. Coney

is strongly of opinion that there will be a legal testament; and that your humble servant is likely to be the chief legatee. Of course it is only an opinion. But Coney's an uncommonly hard-headed chap in private life. Hearing him to-night, you might imagine he was wrapped up in poetry and the 'igher literature of the drama, and all that. But when it comes to pounds, shillings, and pence, if I may permit myself the expression in talking to a lady—he's uncommonly shrewd, I assure you."

Strange as all this story was, the strangest part of it, Barbara thought, was that it should have been told to her! Why in the world had this young man chosen her as the recipient of these family confidences?

She might not have guessed why, even if she could have overheard Mr. Mortimer Hopkins mysteriously holding forth to Messrs. Toller and Green that night in his own lodgings, whither the three friends repaired after the conversazione, to refresh themselves with hot grog and cigars.

"Miss Copley," said Mortimer, with a sort of lachrymose loftiness (referable in part to the grog), "is the bright ideal of a poet's fancy, and a perfect lady into the bargain. Enough! To say more at present were premature. Any man calling himself my friend will know how to respect my confidence."

Toller was much impressed by these utterances. But Green, who, apart from his poetry, did not want for common-sense, smiled a little to himself, and shook his head dubiously. However, since every sentiment of good-fellowship must prompt a man to get outside his friend's house before audibly pronouncing him an ass, the trio parted very amicably.

Barbara did not think it necessary to repeat to her aunt what she had heard about Dalton. His fortunes, good or bad, must be, she told herself, apart from theirs forevermore. And why should she cloud Aunt Judith's cheerful mood with the dark memories connected with that man?

The old lady was in high spirits as they drove home (having made the journey to Mrs. Green's partly on foot and partly in an omnibus, they had agreed to give themselves the extraordinary luxury of a cab to carry them home). "Really, Barbara," she said, "everybody was particularly pleasant and civil—uncommonly so. Mrs. Green, most well-meaning, poor soul! And Mrs.

Shortway. Oh, what do you think I have discovered about Mrs. Shortway, my dear?"

Barbara dreaded for an instant to hear Dalton's name. But Aunt Judith went on volubly, "She is Lady Lambton's mother, child! Fancy that!"

CHAPTER XVI.

It was certain that Lady Lambton would have disliked to hear that her mother had made the acquaintance of her *répétiteuse*, as she called Miss Copley, under any circumstances; but that the introduction should have been made by Mrs. Green, the flower-painter, amidst Mrs. Green's friends and associates, she felt to be a peculiar aggravation of her annoyance.

The news was revealed to her a few mornings after the famous *conversazione*, when she was calling in Gower Street. Her visits there had become more frequent since she had taken to catechise her mother about the days of her youth, when she knew Dalton, and to gather up any old stories and familiar allusions that might be woven into her letters, with the view of touching that exiled millionaire's heart, and turning it towards England and his affectionate relatives.

To Amy's amazement and chagrin, she found her mother brimful of enthusiasm about "that beautiful old Miss Hughes" and "that sweet, refined-looking creature, Miss Copley," and describing her introduction to them in her own impulsive and discursive manner.

And the worst of it was that she could not plainly allege all her reasons for being angry. At the bottom of her heart she was chiefly vexed that Miss Copley should have seen her family mixing on familiar terms with people so utterly undistinguished and vulgar. If even Mrs. Shortway had appeared at Mrs. Green's ridiculous party with something of a condescending and patronizing air, the thing would not have been so mortifying. But she knew her mother too well to hope that she had behaved with judicious dignity. "If that horrid woman had wanted some extra

teacups washed, mamma was as likely as not to volunteer to do it!" thought Lady Lambton in her wrath.

But there was more annoyance to come. She very soon learned from her mother that Christopher Dalton had been freely spoken of, and that a young man of the name of Hopkins had told her (Mrs. Shortway) that he was aware of her relationship to the rich, eccentric Mr. Dalton, and had announced himself as that gentleman's grand-nephew.

This news filled Amy's mind with jealous apprehensions. She had already felt an indistinct suspicion that crowds of competitors for the rich man's favor, and candidates for his inheritance, were ready at a word to start up in every direction. And the dreadful idea occurred to her that if Dalton found himself pursued and molested by a pack of legacy-hunters, he might take sudden offence, and bequeath all his money to build hospitals!

Here, at any rate, was avowable cause for being angry. Amy fairly lost her temper, and would have quarrelled with her mother, if her mother had given her the smallest assistance towards doing so. This was the consequence of her being hail-fellow-well-met with every twopenny person who chose to invite them! Why could not the girls confine themselves to business relations with Mrs. Green—pay her for the drawing class, or the model, or whatever it was—without plunging into an intimacy with the woman? Pleasant, indeed, to be publicly claimed as a relation by young Hopkins!

"Oh, he didn't *claim* me, Amy," said Mrs. Shortway, with provoking placidity. "He let me understand that he knew I was only related on the female side. And he would have known that all the same, my dear, whether I had gone to Mrs. Green's or not: wouldn't he, now? So I don't see what harm it could do, Amy—"

"But I do! Harm! *I* have some respect for myself, and some value for my own position. I object to having *my* name bandied about, and my family affairs discussed among a set of shop-boys and milliners' girls."

"Oh, I don't believe that the bulk of the people there took the least interest in us, dear! But as to talking—why, the more distinguished the person, the more he or she is talked about. They talk about the queen herself, you know!"

But Amy was not to be soothed by any such philosophic reflections. She flew home in a towering passion. And, strange to

say, the thought that most persistently rankled in her mind—to the exclusion even of Christopher Dalton and his dollars—was, that Miss Copley should have beheld her mother and sisters familiarly frequenting such low society. To be sure, Miss Copley was the last person in the world to presume on such a circumstance. Lady Lambton freely admitted that. And yet— Her imagination kept busying itself with what had passed at the conversazione. She could fancy the whole scene: her sisters dressed after the latest æsthetic pattern, and talking the latest æsthetic slang; her mother (whom the girls, no doubt, had made a guy of!) beaming upon everybody without any idea that it behooved her to condescend; Miss Copley in a simple—probably shabby—black frock, silent, serene, and gentle as she was accustomed to see her.

The picture irritated her; and she at length finally turned away from it with a sort of mental toss of the head.

London was very dull just now. The Ketterings and many other of her friends were away; yet Lady Lambton did not feel time hang heavy on her hands. She could find life interesting under a great variety of circumstances, provided only that one indispensable condition were present—the excitement of an audience; what she called “sympathy.” And that condition was lacking now, for Fritz Hofmann still remained in town; and Fritz Hofmann made an excellent audience.

She looked forward to enjoying a confidential talk with young Hofmann. She had resolved to speak to him about Mr. Dalton. Since young Hopkins, and persons of that stamp, were freely boasting of their relationship to the rich man, there could be no reason why Lady Lambton should not mention her own. It might even be prudent to do so. It certainly would be pleasant in the case of Mr. Hofmann.

As she thought thus, she wondered that he had not called on her before now. Possibly, he was a little diffident about coming without a more formal permission or invitation than he had yet received. Amy was in her drawing-room meditating how it would be best to word a little note that she was minded to write to him, when a maid-servant brought her a visiting-card, and asked if my lady would receive the gentleman whose name it bore. It appeared that my lady would, and the maid was ordered to show the visitor in.

Amy got up from her chair and cast a rapid glance, first at the looking-glass and then round the room. Her house at Brompton was small, and the drawing-room was by consequence small also. But it was a pretty little room, with a long window opening on to a tiny garden. The garden, however, was surrounded by trees growing in neighboring gardens of more dignity, and was peacefully secluded. The window was shut on this October afternoon, and a bright fire burned on the hearth. Much of the furniture was old-fashioned, but with an unfashionable old-fashionedness that gave the room a quaint air of distinction. Amy had retained many articles belonging to the handsome provincial mansion in which her husband had lived and died. There was an escritoire, a side-table, a tall, narrow bookcase with glass doors and a massive top, like the pediment of a Grecian temple, all of polished mahogany, black with age. These relics of the Georgian era were relieved against a delicate neutral-tinted wall-paper, covered with a design in the very newest old style; while some Eastern rugs on the floor, and posies of autumn flowers disposed on brackets and mantelpiece, gave a sufficient cheerfulness of coloring to the whole. Enlivened as it now was by the figure of a strikingly-handsome and animated young woman, a man must have been either insensible or splenetic who did not find the aspect of the apartment mightily pleasant and attractive. The visitor, who was Fritz Hofmann, certainly found it so.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you! I was just thinking of you," said Lady Lambton, holding out her hand, and showing her fine teeth in a frank smile.

"I am so glad to see you" may be a most commonplace greeting, or a very flattering one. All depends on the tone in which it is said. Lady Lambton said it as if she meant it. And she did mean it: the flattery was enhanced by the subtle and inimitable aroma of truth.

"I dare not be too much elated by that, until I know *what* you were thinking of me!" said Fritz, bowing over the hand she extended to him.

"I was thinking that I should like you to call, and I am thinking now that it is a little provoking that you should have called just at this time. I want to speak to you, and my accompanist will be here in a few minutes. I warned you that I was

engaged on Wednesdays up to four o'clock. You have forgotten."

"Not at all! I remembered it very well," answered Fritz, boldly.

"Did you?" with a quick, surprised look at him.

"Certainly. And that is why I chose to-day. You promised I should hear you sing. It is you who have forgotten."

"Oh, I don't think I promised! Did I promise? Well, well, we shall see. Sit down there. I want, first of all, to consult you."

"I am proud and happy," said Fritz, taking the chair she had pointed to, on the opposite side of the fire.

No woman will ever be a dangerous flirt who has not a certain instinctive sensibility as to the morals and feelings of the man she flirts with. She may be beautiful, she may be clever; she may be accomplished; many men may admire her, and some may fall in love with her. But she will possess no perilous fascination for the male sex in general. In this sort of sympathy—which has no more to do with the heart than have the motions of a skilful angler "playing" a fish at the end of his line—Lady Lambton was almost totally deficient. Her vanity had a touch of masculine robustness. If a man told her he was proud and happy to be consulted by her, or that he loved to hear her sing, or see her dance, or play cards, or eat her supper, she was so possessed with the antecedent probability of his statement that she would accept it literally, and without modification from looks and tones. She thus incurred the risk of being tedious; and although a man may endure being tormented by a pretty woman, he will not submit to be bored.

On the present occasion Lady Lambton did not observe that her auditor seemed rather absent. She plunged at once into her subject. "You remember my telling you," said she, "that I suspected the Christopher Dalton, about whom everybody was talking at Mrs. Kettering's dinner-party, to be a kinsman of mine! Well, it appears that my mother is one of his nearest living relations! They were greatly attached to each other as boy and girl. Mamma had been urging me to write to him, and try to knit up again some of the old family feeling. But—the fact is, there seem to be so many claimants starting up unexpectedly, flocking abso-

lutely like vultures! Isn't it dreadful? It makes me shrink from writing. Although I frankly admit that I see no reason why our side of the family should not get a fair share of his money if it *is* to be divided among his kindred, yet" (with a fascinating smile) "I really do not feel myself to be a vulture! And as for poor dear mamma—who is quite the most unworldly creature I ever saw or heard of—she won't even believe in her cousin's riches! For her, he is still the same Chris Dalton of auld lang-syne."

There was a momentary silence. Lady Lambton leaned forward with an eager gesture habitual with her when she was much interested, or desirous of appearing so. "What do *you* think?" she asked. "Shall I write, or shall I not?"

Again there was an instant's pause, during which Fritz, whose ears were on the alert, made sure that he heard the street door open and shut again.

"Upon my word, I cannot see why you shouldn't," he said, with sudden animation. And the next moment the servant announced Miss Copley.

Lady Lambton made a little grimace of annoyance at the interruption; but she cried out, "Come in, come in, Miss Copley. What a pattern of punctuality you are!"

And so enter Barbara in her shabby frock and hat—she had left the still shabbier cloak in the hall—and salutes her employer, and acknowledges Mr. Hofmann's greeting with her usual gentle grace.

We know that, but a short time before, Miss Copley had been associated in Lady Lambton's mind with some irritating ideas; but these were dissipated the moment she saw her. The thought of the contrast between her sisters and Barbara had been disagreeable; but the sight of the contrast between Barbara and herself was soothing.

Lady Lambton at first declared that she must send Mr. Hofmann away, as she was far too nervous to practise in his presence. But after a little coquetting she consented to let him remain and hear her. Her singing was not very good, but Fritz was honestly ignorant of music, and had but little ear; and then Amy had the rare advantage of looking well while she sang. The songs were interspersed with lively discussions on the musical drama, about which her ladyship said several good things with an air of spontaneous enthusiasm, for she had an excellent memory. As for

Barbara, she played the accompaniments, and held her tongue; and when the hour was at an end she went away promptly, thinking, with a smile, that the course of Mr. Hofmann's wooing seemed to be running very smoothly.

She had not walked many yards along the Brompton Road before a quick footstep coming up behind her slackened; and Mr. Hofmann's voice said, a little breathlessly, "Oh, excuse me, Miss Copley, but I have a message for you from the Ketterings. I received a letter from my cousin Ida this morning. Perhaps part of it may interest you, for they have seen your uncle."

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER William Hughes had finished certain views taken from the lower heights above Vevey, he purposed completing his task by filling some smaller panels with delicate studies of autumn foliage, showing blue or gray glimpses of water between the tracery of leaves and twigs; and, since these could be painted on the borders of the lake, he descended from the farm-house on the hill, and took up his quarters at Madame Martin's.

Aunt Judith and Barbara had urged him, as the weather grew colder and the days shorter, to leave the rough farm-house and seek more comfortable accommodation; and he thought he might fairly allow himself this indulgence, since it was no longer necessary to consider the expenditure of every farthing so anxiously as would have been the case had Claude given up his situation and been thrown immediately on his hands. And then Madame Martin eagerly proved to him that she could be at no loss in taking him as a boarder on reduced terms. "'Tis not as if you took up the room of a ten-franc customer, Mr. Hughes," said the good woman. "You will content yourself of the small attic behind Monsieur Claude's; and, with as many pensionnaires as I have in the house now, what you pay will give a profit, sir. You may see the books."

So it was settled that Mr. Hughes should become an inmate of the Pension Monplaisir,

The arrangement was immensely popular among Madame Martin's boarders. As Miss Jenks observed, exultantly, they were quite looking up at Monplaisir; for the father of the Russian family had arrived from Odessa, and thus they had actually two gentlemen dining regularly at their table—not to mention Mr. Copley, who sometimes appeared there also. To be sure, Miss Curdan repudiated any undignified elation on this score, and observed that it was rather for the gentlemen to feel themselves happily privileged under the circumstances. But this was said chiefly to check the exuberance of Miss Jenks; for Miss Curdan and her sister Susan, as well as old Mrs. Ford and the rest, did honestly admit among themselves that it was a very agreeable change to have some masculine society. "Only," said Miss Curdan, dropping her voice a little, "I do not consider it proper to make such a fuss about them to their faces as Miss Jenks does."

Perhaps Claude Copley was the only person in the house who felt irked by Mr. Hughes's arrival. Not that he was without regard for his uncle, but he shrank from living under his observation. As for Mrs. Armour, it was indifferent to her: she had begun a flirtation with the Russian, who carried it on in an oddly nonchalant manner, something like that of an actor going through his part at rehearsal; so that she was not wholly dependent for amusement on Claude.

Indeed, her attention was diverted from the young man in another way before Mr. Hughes had been a week in the Pension. She began to talk boastfully about a family who were staying at the Hotel of the Trois Couronnes in Vevey. They had been friends of Captain Armour—old family friends; they were people of wealth and influence; they were highly cultivated; they had been beyond measure delighted to discover, by the accidental recognition of her name at the circulating library, that Mrs. Armour was so near them; and so on, and so on.

Mrs. Armour dropped hints about the riches and importance of her friends with a lofty carelessness of manner. But Miss Jenks made it her business to fill in Mrs. Armour's bold outline with more minute detail. By her means many particulars respecting Mrs. Armour's grand acquaintance were diffused through the Pension, without Mrs. Armour herself condescending to impart them directly.

This did not arise from any special friendship between the two ladies. Miss Jenks's curiosity about her fellow-creatures was "as broad and general as the casing air." She found out all she could and retailed it with great zest and enjoyment. On the other hand, it made no difference to her that Mrs. Armour was unpopular. She was the only person quite neutral with respect to the smouldering feud between Mrs. Armour and Claude Copley on the one part and all the rest of the boarders on the other. Miss Jenks took no sides. She borrowed impartially from everybody.

Most persons might have considered it a hopeless enterprise to attempt borrowing from Mrs. Armour, who was neither well off nor generous. But it should be understood that Miss Jenks levied her contributions chiefly in kind, and that nothing came amiss to her. The maid-servants in the Pension declared that articles belonging to every lady in the house had been found in Miss Jenks's bedroom. In the evening, she would give a festal air to her attire by adding something ornamental to her brown stuff gown. One of Mrs. Ford's lace collars frequently figured on it; Miss Susan Curdan would contribute a waist-buckle; her sister, a brooch; Mrs. Armour a knot of bright-colored ribbon, slightly soiled, perhaps, but still effective. Even Madame Martin had been taxed to the extent of a pair of black lace mittens. While, on wet days, the variety of umbrellas that Miss Jenks was observed to carry abroad with her was truly extraordinary. They ranged from Mrs. Ford's neat brown silk, with her monogram engraved on a silver plate in the handle, to the huge, flapping, red cotton awning of the Swiss cook. And she had once sallied forth to walk into Vevey in Miss Susan Curdan's waterproof cloak, which reached an inch or two below her knees—Miss Susan being short, and plump of figure.

She was extremely anxious to make the personal acquaintance of Mrs. Armour's rich friends—a desire which Mrs. Armour was firmly resolved not to gratify. But Fortune, who is said to favor the bold, favored Miss Jenks in this matter, and in the following way: Miss Jenks passed many of her unoccupied hours in the *salle-à-manger*, because its windows commanded a view of the road; and, being there alone one afternoon, she saw a carriage stop at the garden gate, and a servant got down from the box with some visiting-cards in his hand.

With the vigorous promptitude that distinguished her, Miss Jenks at once rushed into the corridor, seized a hat from the row of pegs there (it happened to belong to the eldest child of the Russian family—a little girl of fourteen), threw a scarf of Mrs. Ford's round her shoulders, and hastened into the garden, where (such had been her activity) she interrupted the servant before he reached the door of the house.

"Quoi demandez-vous?" she inquired, majestically. And then, taking the cards from the man's hand, she read the names on them aloud: "'Mrs. Philip Kettering, the Misses Kettering, Miss Stringer.' For Mrs. Armour, no doubt. I will go and speak with the ladies."

It should be explained that Miss Jenks always began a conversation with foreigners in French—or what she supposed to be French—by way of a graceful concession to Continental habits. But to the casual stranger this was rather a trap, and productive of embarrassment; for, after two or three sentences, Miss Jenks continued her share of the dialogue in colloquial and provincial English, conceiving, apparently, that the natives, having had a good start given them in their own tongue, ought to find no difficulty in going on in hers.

It so chanced that the only occupant of the carriage was Ida Kettering. She had been deputed to leave cards on Mrs. Armour for the rest of the family, who were making an excursion, considered somewhat too fatiguing for her. And Ida now beheld with amazement the figure advancing towards the carriage. With her tall and massive form, surmounted by a little round straw hat, trimmed with white ribbon, and wearing a gayly striped Roman scarf over her very dingy brown dress, Miss Jenks presented, it must be owned, a sufficiently eccentric appearance. But that troubled her not a jot. She stalked up to the carriage, and said, laying a solemn emphasis on nearly every other word:

"I am *not* quite sure, but I *believe* Mrs. Armour *is* at home. Won't you walk *in*? Miss Kettering, I presume?"

Ida characteristically replied by a counter-question:

"Are you the mistress of this Pension?"

"No. Miss Jenks."

And then they stared at each other gravely for a second or two, after which Miss Jenks repeated her invitation to walk in,

Now, as Ida had, perhaps, as much native curiosity as Miss Jenks—although restrained by sundry considerations of good manners, which would have been as the filmiest gossamer to the latter lady, supposing they had ever occurred to her—she wished to see the inside of an establishment which contained such singular inhabitants as the specimen before her. Her mother had merely charged her to leave the cards in the course of her afternoon drive. But there could be no objection to her paying a personal visit to Mrs. Armour if she chose to do so. Accordingly, Ida alighted from the carriage, accompanied Miss Jenks to the house, and was by her ushered into the salon, which was empty, save for the presence of the Russian lady and her German governess, who were playing *béziq*ue at a little table.

Miss Jenks bustled out of the room, saying she would send to see where Mrs. Armour was; and presently bustled in again, announcing that the servant had gone to seek her, and “would not be long,” which, considering that Miss Jenks knew Mrs. Armour to be on the way up the lake to Chillon, was a somewhat bold assertion. But she had accomplished her object of securing some conversation with Miss Kettering.

The upshot was that when, after a quarter of an hour, Ida rose to go away, Miss Jenks had gleaned a variety of facts which she had the happiness of imparting to select audiences during the day. The Ketterings, it appeared, had never seen Mrs. Armour before this meeting in Vevey. Mr. Kettering had known Captain Armour many years ago, and had, as a boy, been intimate with his family. “But it’s pretty clear that the *intimacy* doesn’t extend to the *present* time. They are on *civil* terms with Mrs. Armour, but nothing more,” said Miss Jenks. And then, as soon as Mrs. Armour came home, she had rushed to tell her of the visit, and had thrust the cards into her hand triumphantly, wholly unabashed by Mrs. Armour’s angry and indignant reception of these attentions.

But she reserved her grand effect until the whole of the company was assembled in the salon after dinner; when she thus began in a loud voice that attracted general attention:

“Mr. Hughes, I have a message for you.”

William Hughes, who was good-naturedly shuffling the cards for Mrs. Ford’s evening game of patience, looked up and said,

"Indeed!" very placidly. But the female part of the audience, knowing Miss Jenks's manner, perceived that something interesting was coming, and listened with eagerness.

"Yes," proceeded Miss Jenks, "I *have*." Then she cleared her throat impressively, and added, "At least, it is *not* exactly a message."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Hughes, smiling and lifting his eyebrows.

"No, it is *not*, at the same time it is something which you will be pleased to hear. I was talking this afternoon to the youngest Miss Kettering. She and her mamma and her sister, and a lady who I am *not* sure of her exact relationship, but a relation she *is*, are all staying at the Hôtel Trois Couronnes in Vevey, in a very handsome suite on the first floor, looking towards the lake. And she came here in a carriage and pair, with their own man-servant on the box."

Miss Jenks, here pausing for a few seconds to look round on the company, William Hughes said, with great suavity, that he hoped the youngest Miss Kettering had enjoyed herself.

"I found her very affable," continued Miss Jenks, gravely, "and *quite* the lady; and, on my happening to mention that we had Mr. William Hughes, the painter, that the Grand Duke Casimir bought his picture of, staying in the house—for I think it *right* to say a good word for Madame Martin when I can, and to let people know that she has very *select* boarders—Miss Kettering said oh, she knew your name very well, and she should like to see you—*very much* like to see you was her word."

Miss Jenks brought this out with an air of immense complacency. She sincerely supposed that this mention of him would elate William Hughes, and exalt him in the estimation of the boarders at Monplaisir; and she had latterly assumed a tone of intimacy—almost of proprietorship—in speaking of Mr. Hughes, whereof the full meaning had not as yet burst on the lady boarders, although some lurid flashes of suspicion had once or twice darted across the mind of the younger Miss Curdan.

"Well? Is that all?" asked Mrs. Ford at length, when it was plain that Miss Jenks had finished her speech.

"All! Well, and very gratifying, too, if it *is* all, Mrs. Ford. But the fact is, I *did* offer to tell Mr. Hughes whatever Miss Ket-

tering wanted to say to him; but she said 'No; thank you'—that is, *me*—now that she knew where Mr. Hughes was staying, she would *write*."

These last words were accompanied by a triumphant glance at Mrs. Armour, who had affected to pay no attention to what was being said; but who certainly had heard every word. Miss Jenks enjoyed showing that there were other persons at Monplaisir honored by the attention of the rich family, and thus destroying Mrs. Armour's monopoly. Miss Jenks was in general not resentful of petty slights, and, in elbowing her way through the world, endured a good many hard pushes with stoicism. But Mrs. Armour had administered one or two vicious digs in the ribs so accurately aimed that they had made even Miss Jenks wince.

It was now Mrs. Armour's turn to wince. She had allowed herself to romance a great deal about her intimacy with the Ketterings, feeling confident no one at the Pension would have an opportunity of rectifying her statements; and now here was Ida Kettering purposing to write to William Hughes! What could she have to say to him?

The answer was very simple: she wanted him to look at some water-color sketches that she had been making, and to give her some instruction as to finishing them. Ida drew fairly well, and was ambitious. As soon as she heard of Mr. Hughes's presence in Vevey, she begged her mother to let her have lessons from him. There were few requests of either of her daughters that Mrs. Kettering would have refused; and to Ida, in her character of invalid, her indulgence was boundless. But she feared that Mr. Hughes's time might be fully occupied.

"How do you know that he will consent to give you lessons at all?" asked Miss Stringer.

"Miss Copley told me he taught sometimes," answered Ida.

"Oh, I dare say he will, if he's well paid," said Mrs. Kettering, calmly. "Why shouldn't he? At any rate, we can but try. I will write to him."

Accordingly, a politely worded note was despatched to Mr. Hughes; and the result was that he engaged himself to give lessons to Miss Ida Kettering three times a week during the remainder of his stay in Vevey. He happened to be there, making studies in a sunny vineyard, well sheltered from the wind, and

suggested that on fine days the young lady should have her easel carried thither, and should work beside him. This proposal pleased every one; Ida was delighted, because, as she said, it would be working like a real artist, and Mrs. Kettering was pleased, since Ida would thus be following the doctor's prescription of sunshine and fresh air, without fatigue.

"He is rather odd-looking, but I like his manner," said Mrs. Kettering, after their first interview.

"Well, mamma, he isn't the only odd-looking person in that Pension," said Ida, with a vivid recollection of Miss Jenks. "I fancy they must be a regular collection of curiosities."

"I would lay a wager that Mr. Hughes is by far the greatest rarity among them all," pronounced Miss Stringer, in her sharp, decisive tones.

"Why, Sally?"

"Because he's a thoroughly sensible man," answered that lady, dryly.

In this fashion Miss Sally Stringer announced her approval of Mr. William Hughes. And the approval increased with better acquaintance. When Ida took her lessons out-of-doors, Miss Stringer usually accompanied her; and enjoyed chatting with Mr. Hughes, and drawing out his quaint humor.

One day she abruptly inquired what he thought of "that" Mrs. Armour, who was boarding in the same house with him. Mr. Hughes answered, discreetly, that he had not the honor of much acquaintance with the lady.

"Ah!" said Sally, tightening her mouth and nodding her head, "perhaps you're right; but *I* shouldn't have betrayed you if you had told me your real opinion. However, you can't feel sure of that; how should you? Well, I will be more candid — she's a cat; likewise a puss. They're not the same thing by any means; but she's both."

Mrs. Armour, however, had sheathed her claws and presented a velvet paw to Mr. Hughes from the moment she discovered that he had frequent opportunities of seeing the Ketterings. She thought it worth while to conciliate him.

But she found it difficult to draw him into conversation. And being tolerably quick-sighted where her vanity was concerned, she was conscious that her amiable advances were

received by Mr. Hughes with a cool reluctance which was mortifying.

One evening, however, she lighted on a subject which interested him; for in the course of one of her frequent stories about her life in India—stories which all had one heroine (Juliet Armour) and an indefinite number of heroes, comprising all the men, young or old, military or civilians, who had ever seen her, and who consequently pined in hopeless adoration—she chanced to mention the name of Gilbert Hazel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“A YOUNG fellow called Gilbert Hazel,” were the words which struck on William Hughes’s ear, and made him look up quickly from the book in his hand.

Mrs. Armour was lounging in an easy-chair, talking to Claude Copley, who sat near her. At the movement Hughes had made she glanced across the room at him, and saw that he was listening.

“Gilbert Hazel!” exclaimed Claude. “Wasn’t that the name of the man who was your fellow-lodger in a farm-house in Kent, one summer, Uncle William?”

“Yes,” answered Hughes, laying down his book and drawing nearer.

“Oh, a mere chance acquaintance?” asked Mrs. Armour.

“A mere chance acquaintance,” assented Hughes. “Do *you* know him?”

“Oh dear, yes! We knew him when he first joined his regiment—quite a youngster. Captain Armour was very kind to him, treated him like a son. My husband was many, many years my senior, you know. But there was always something rather odd and inscrutable in Hazel’s manner. There was an ugly story, I fancy, about his father having done something dreadful and ruined the family. But I make a point of paying no attention to gossip, and gossip in India above all. However, it is certain that the young man was very reserved, and seemed

depressed. Some people persisted in attributing that to his *passion malheureuse* for—for a lady of my acquaintance.”

Claude murmured something in a low tone, whereupon Mrs. Armour laughed affectedly and shook her head.

“No, no; that was all nonsense,” said she. “Or, at any rate—well, it is all so long ago that it cannot matter. I believe the truth is that he *had* some high-flown, romantic, knight-errant sort of devotion to me; and, after all, I don’t know why I shouldn’t say so.”

“There is evidently nothing to prevent your saying so,” remarked William Hughes, gravely.

“I have not heard or thought of Gilbert Hazel since I left India. And it is odd that the first news I got of him should come just when I happen to be in company with some one who knows him. I often say, ‘How small the world is!’ And it really *is*, you know,” added Mrs. Armour, persuasively, as though she expected her hearers would not very readily accept so original a view.

“Do I understand that you have recent news of Mr. Hazel?” asked Hughes.

“Only yesterday I had a letter from a friend of mine in Calcutta, mentioning that Gilbert Hazel had left the army and gone into trade. My friend—who is a woman very highly connected—writes quite a Jeremiah about the levelling spirit of the age, and the way in which gentlemen nowadays will barter their birth-right for lucre, and so on. But, really, I don’t know that poor Hazel had much to barter.”

“May I ask whether your correspondent gives any details as to what Hazel is doing, or where he is?”

“Oh, he must have sailed from India five or six months ago; and she merely says that she hears he is going into some house of business in England. To me the idea of his attempting anything commercial is too funny. He was looked upon among us as the most unpractical being, with the most absurd, overstrained notions of—of—”

“Honor, perhaps?” suggested Hughes, dryly.

“Oh, of everything! He will hardly be a success as a tradesman.”

“You think soldiering more in his way?”

“Well, yes, he has as much pluck as other men, I suppose; and Captain Armour used to consider him a steady young officer. But, my dear Mr. Hughes, since you have met him yourself, I am sure that you, with your sagacity and practical knowledge of the world, must have observed that there is no dash about poor Hazel. He wants brilliancy, don't you know?”

“In short, the only point that can positively be asserted in his favor is that, in one respect, at all events, he showed excellent taste,” said William, bowing to Mrs. Armour. Then he moved away, and took up his book again. But, although he held it in his hand, he did not read, but fell into a fit of musing.

This behavior was not very encouraging as to any hopes Mrs. Armour might have entertained of charming Mr. Hughes into becoming her friend and partisan. But, in truth, since she was by this time pretty well convinced that he was not likely to make mischief, or to report to the Ketterings any of the flourishes she had indulged in about them, she cared very little whether Mr. Hughes were surly or not. Some little grudge against him remained indeed at the bottom of her mind. But if he would but hold his tongue, she could afford to defy his opinion.

In spite of her hint, Claude Copley had not informed his uncle that Mrs. Armour was the daughter of Dr. Kirby. He had refrained from doing so, partly because the name of Dr. Kirby suggested no sort of distinction, social or other, to Claude's mind; and partly because at the time his uncle was prejudiced against Mrs. Armour by Madame Martin's report. And later, the matter passed from his mind altogether.

William Hughes thus remained in ignorance of the lady's parentage.

Had he known it, he would have known also that she was a young child when the tragedy of his life began. He would have recalled the frequent mention made of her in Winifred's bright letters; he had them still, a bundle of letters written on thin foreign paper, and addressed to him at Rome, tied round with a black ribbon, and yellow like faded leaves, in his shabby old desk; and he would have remembered the name of little Juliet, so much younger than her sisters, and the spoiled plaything of the family.

As for Mrs. Armour, she naturally did not think of connecting the painter, William Hughes, with her former governess, whose

story she knew but vaguely. It was not one to be discussed in the presence of a child. She had an indistinct remembrance that there had been a violent quarrel between her father and her uncle Christopher; and of her mother's tears and anger. But the very name of Winifred Hughes had been blotted from her memory years ago.

She would have been indifferent, in any case, to Winifred's fate. Nor had she ever been interested to inquire into the fate of her Uncle Christopher since she had lost sight of him. The rumor of his wealth had not yet reached her ears; and in truth she knew not if he were alive or dead. Since her widowhood she had wandered from one second-rate Continental boarding-house to another. Her only surviving sister, an old maid subsisting in London on very scanty means, had once written to propose that she and Juliet should join their incomes and live together. But Juliet had refused. She was discontented enough with her present way of life, but she shrank still more from the dulness of a poor household in England, and the companionship of a pious sister who would bore her about religion.

But the accidental meeting with Mrs. Kettering had considerably changed her views. She began to dream of returning to London, and getting access to agreeable society under the auspices of these rich people. If she could sufficiently ingratiate herself with the Ketterings, a future might lie before her which seemed brilliant by comparison with the sordid and dreary existence of the last few years. Mrs. Kettering was very kind, in her placid fashion; and the girls seemed good-natured. But the doubtful point was Miss Stringer. Mrs. Armour did not understand Sally; and she was haunted by a suspicion that Sally did understand her. She was not even certain that Sally was hostile. Only—Sally was certainly odd! At all events, Mrs. Armour resolved to neglect no occasion for cultivating the Ketterings' acquaintance. And yet, when an unexpected opportunity of meeting them shortly arose, it gave her by no means unmixed satisfaction.

William Hughes had, as his manner was, warmly recognized the prosperous circumstances attending his visit to Switzerland. The drawing lessons to Ida Kettering had been a welcome windfall, putting a sum of money into his pocket above his calcula-

tions; and it never occurred to him to complain that it was below his deserts. Not that Hughes undervalued his artistic powers—it may be doubted whether any true artist ever does—but he well knew that their money payment depended on various circumstances which have little to do with merit. And the knowledge did not embitter him.

His was a temperament which brightly reflected even the faintest gleam of sunshine. He was a wonderful *conductor* of cheerfulness. And his first impulse when any good thing befell him was to communicate some share of it to his neighbors.

The time of his departure from Vevey was drawing near; and the Ketterings were thinking of moving on to Montreux. Under these circumstances, William cast about in his mind to see how he could wind up his stay at the Pension Monplaisir by some festive entertainment which should include all his friends there.

He broached the subject confidentially to Miss Stringer, who entered into the idea with great spirit.

“Do you think,” began William, “that something in the nature of a picnic luncheon at the farm-house where I lodged would do? We could get hot water to make tea, and so forth, from the farmer’s wife. The view from there, in its late autumn coloring, is glorious. And although the way up is a little steep—”

“Certainly not. Too late in the year; and altogether too fatiguing—that is to say, if you want Ida to be of the party.”

“I certainly should like very much to invite my pupil, and her sister, if you think Mrs. Kettering would permit—”

Miss Stringer nodded emphatically.

“And may I venture to hope that you also—?”

“Of course. *I* mean to make one, in any case.”

“I suppose an excursion on the lake to—”

“Won’t do at all!”

“But,” remonstrated William, with a twinkle of enjoyment in his eyes—for Sally amused him mightily—“might it not possibly make some difference in your opinion if you allowed me to finish what I was going to say?”

“Couldn’t make the slightest difference.”

“Oh!”

“Not the slightest. Going *anywhere* by water at this season

would be a shuddery business. Let us be thankful we have a roof over our heads, and a railway within reach when locomotion is indispensable."

"Then I am afraid I really don't see—"

"Give an evening party," interrupted Miss Stringer, decisively.

"An evening party!"

"To be sure. It need not be expensive." Then she added, quickly, "I hope you will excuse me for saying that. But the fact is, that, being myself obliged to consider ways and means on all occasions, I have got into the habit of counting the cost of everything."

William's eyes beamed as he turned them on Miss Stringer; for he understood this trait of delicacy very well. "Oh, as for me," he answered, smiling, "I mean to be magnificent! I shall not count the pence too closely."

"Bravo," cried Miss Stringer, clapping her hands. "Then I vote for an evening party at the Pension Monplaisir. Cakes, coffee, and conversation. I'm sure you can do lots of things to amuse them. But if you want to make 'em really happy, let them show off! Let them sing, play, recite, or whatever it may be: you could do nothing half so popular."

"Do you think so?"

"Positively."

William was silent for a few moments. Then a gleam of irrepressible amusement broke over his face. "Well," said he, "I believe they would like that. But I'm bound to warn you that I'm afraid *you* wouldn't. You see, as regards the enjoyment of these social experiments, it makes all the difference whether one is the operator or the subject!"

"Oh, never fear! I know I shall be amused. Why, from what I hear, Miss Jenks alone must be a host in herself."

"Miss Jenks's powers of entertainment I hold to be unrivalled," answered William, with great earnestness and warmth. "But not every one can appreciate them."

"I fancy I shall," said Sally, smiling grimly.

"I think it likely that you may. And let me tell you, Miss Stringer, that, in my opinion, a relish for Miss Jenks's society denotes a cultivated palate—like the taste for caviare or dry cham-

pagne. There are large classes of her fellow-creatures on whom Miss Jenks would be entirely thrown away."

The first thing to be done was to secure Madame Martin's good-will and co-operation. And William Hughes lost no time in speaking to her on the subject. The good woman was enchanted. "Why, 'tis most *aimable* on your part, sir," she said. "And I am sure every one will be very sensible of it. All the society will be charmed. 'Twill make us quite lively. And we are not—*entre nous*, Mr. Hughes—very lively, as a rule."

It must be owned that the strict gentility of most of the boarders, combined with their no less strict economy, did not promote liveliness. Gentility, with its pockets full of cash, or Economy, in shirt-sleeves and slippers down at heel, may enjoy themselves after their several fashions, but they seldom live happily together.

The news that Mr. Hughes intended to give an evening party before leaving Vevey electrified the Pension Monplaisir. A thrill of expectation pervaded the whole establishment. And when Mr. Hughes, in concert with Madame Martin, fixed the date and gave his invitations—which he did by word of mouth—the general excitement grew intense.

Keen as he was to note the oddities and absurdities of his fellow-boarders, William honestly felt kindly towards them, and wished that they should enjoy themselves. "They have all been very good to me," he thought, with his accustomed simplicity of mind. And he thought, too, that there was something pathetic in the eagerness of some of them about so poor an entertainment as he was able to offer them; for it seemed to give the measure of the dulness and monotony of their lives.

Mrs. Armour alone affected a lofty indifference, and observed privately to Claude that it was too killing to see the fuss those ridiculous old women made about so commonplace a matter. But when she learned that some of the Kettering family were expected to be present, her interest was quickened considerably.

The favorable planet which at this time ruled the fortunes of the Pension Monplaisir had not yet exhausted its benign influences, for the contingent of three males which that establishment could boast of was unexpectedly reinforced by the arrival of two strangers on the very day before the famous party.

Madame Martin came to Mr. Hughes with a letter in her hand,

and began to thank him for recommending her house ; and when William disclaimed this merit, from lack, not of good-will, but of opportunity, she answered, " Ah, well, sir, but 'tis through your name that these messieurs have applied. You see you have brought me good chance, Mr. Hughes. It is always good to get an opening into a new connection."

The purport of the letter was to ask if Madame Martin could receive two gentlemen for a few days, and the signature, written in a clear, commercial hand, but surrounded by an intricate flourish, was " N. Coney."

Mr. Percival Snagge having completed the business that brought him to England, was about returning to his home near Florence for the winter ; and he had urged his friend to fulfil an old promise by accompanying him. But this Mr. Coney had declined. One evening, however, when the proposal was being talked of at Mortimer Hopkins's lodgings, the elder Hopkins had jocularly suggested that they should take a run to Vevey, and look up Mr. Hughes, and Coney had at once seized on the suggestion seriously.

Ever since the evening when he had met Barbara at Mrs. Green's, and had learned that Mr. Hughes's niece was named Copley, he had displayed a strange inquisitiveness about the painter's family history and connections ; and no sooner did he hear from Hopkins that Mr. Hughes was still at Vevey, and that a young nephew of his was there also, than he seemed bent on making Vevey the goal of his Continental trip. Mr. Snagge objected and protested ; he would rather go to Paris, and proceed thence to Italy ; it was too late for Switzerland ; and so forth. But Coney was firm.

" I've done Paris over and over," said he. " I want a peep at something new ; and Lake Lemman—'with its crystal face, the mirror where the stars and mountains view,' you know—will be the very ticket !"

" If you get as far as Switzerland, Nat, you might as well come on through the Mont Cenis to Italy," urged Mr. Snagge. " You can afford it well enough." (For Mr. Coney had been a prudent and a saving man, and was reputed by his intimates to have made some snug little investments.)

" Can't be done this year, Percival. ' Thus far into the bowels of the land will I march on without impediment '—that is to say,

I don't mind a second-class return to Geneva, and then getting a squint up the lake. I told you I'd take a short run with you on your way South. 'If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it to the last article.' But, for the present, I can't offer any article beyond Vevey."

And so Mr. Coney, having the stronger will, prevailed, and despatched his letter to Madame Martin.

"Well, Mr. Hughes," said that good woman, with a beaming face, "'tis fine times at Monplaisir, for sure! Your *soirée* and two new gentlemen! Our ladies *will* be in spirits. And as for Miss Jenks"—lowering her voice and indulging in a silent chuckle—"I'm almost afraid to tell Miss Jenks, sir. There'll be no holding her!"

CHAPTER XIX.

PERHAPS there could be no more striking exemplification of the preponderance of the feminine element in Madame Martin's establishment than the circumstance that there was no smoking-room in it. When any stray man did chance to ask for the *fumoir*, if the weather were too bad to turn him into the garden, he was ushered into the bureau—a small den, with two glazed sides to it, where Claude Copley balanced the books of the Pension, and dispensed information as to trains and boats to inquiring boarders.

But Madame Martin was a woman of resources; and in view of the promised accession of gentlemen to her inmates, she organized an impromptu smoking-room in a disused greenhouse, which was a sort of excrescence in the drawing-room, and communicated with it by a glass door. Though somewhat rough, it answered its purpose sufficiently well, being warm, dry, and easily ventilated. On the side opposite to the drawing-room there was a second door, of which the upper panels were glazed, leading into the shrubbery, and to the back premises. Over this outer door Madame Martin hung up an old railway rug, which kept out the draughts as effectually as a Genoa velvet portière. A few cane-bottomed arm-chairs, a centre-table covered with shiny cloth

simulating leather, and a square of druggot on the floor completed the furniture and decorations.

The effect of the whole was considered to be highly satisfactory by the lady boarders, who handsomely declared that they did not believe any odor of smoke would penetrate to the drawing-room; and that if it did, they rather liked it. The only person who demurred to the proximity of the smokers was a fat, taciturn old lady, chiefly remarkable for her enormous appetite; and she based her opposition on the difficulty you had in getting the smell out o' your hair. But as she was known to be completely bald, and always wore a species of brown-silk caul, with a great mob-cap tied on over it, her objection was held to be frivolous, and was overruled.

But although the ladies were delighted with Madame Martin's arrangements, the persons for whom those arrangements were made displayed no extravagant satisfaction with them. It may, indeed, be observed that the cheerful quality of mind, familiarly described as "making the best of a bad bargain," is chiefly exercised on other people's bad bargains.

Mr. Percival Snagge, when he was introduced into the *fumoir* on the first evening of his arrival, appeared profoundly discontented.

"I can't make you out, Nathaniel," he said, glancing ruefully, first at the rough wood-work and patched glass of the greenhouse, with its drapery of worn railway rug, and then at the unmoved countenance of his friend.

"Can't you, Percival?"

"No, I can't. You give up Paris, you rush through Geneva, to come into this confounded old rat-trap full of nothing but old cats!" said Mr. Snagge, with some confusion of images but unmistakable distinctness of meaning.

"Oh, come, the dinner wasn't half bad. The old girl, Madame Martin, is a jolly old soul; our rooms are clean and comfortable; and the terms are very low. And—look here!" Mr. Coney pulled from his pocket a capacious travelling-flask. "This Cognac fine champagne is A1. A friend of mine who travels in wines got me a lot—a bargain. And I never take a journey without a flaskful. It's a regular lick-cure, sir," said Mr. Coney, with emphatic approbation. "I intimated to the bun, as they call 'em on

this side, that hot water and sugar would be required. And here she comes with 'em. That's right, put 'em down there. *Mercy, mah belle!* which is a figure of speech, for you're about as ugly as they make 'em, even in these parts; and that's saying a good deal."

These latter remarks Mr. Coney uttered *sotto voce*, as the stout Swiss serving-maid disappeared behind the railway-rug and went out. He then, with great care and dexterity, mixed two tumblers of hot brandy-and-water, and, handing one to his friend, bade him, in a solemn tone, to quaff and spare not.

Having quaffed, Mr. Snagge's mood grew blander; and as, under the soothing influence of a good cigar in addition to that of the Cognac, Mr. Coney also felt his heart expand with friendly sentiments, they soon slid into a confidential and familiar chat.

"That fellow Hughes has been working here for more than three weeks, I understand," said Snagge. "Well now, I'll tell you what it is: I hold that man to be a traitor."

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Coney, looking up sharply.

"Oh, understand me, Nat; I'm not accusing him of dishonesty in the common parlance. But to Art—to the worship and cult of the Ideal—he is a traitor and a renegade."

"Oh!—he *is* commonplace," admitted Mr. Coney, with a candid air, at the same time passing his hand thoughtfully over his big bald skull.

"What," pursued Mr. Snagge, snorting ironically, and tossing back his hair, "what, sir, is the object and scope, as I may say, of his being in Switzerland at this moment? Is it to steep his soul in Nature? I think *not*."

Mr. Coney thought not, too; and nodded to that effect across his tumbler.

"Is it even the single-minded desire of interpreting Nature by means of the 'igher inspirations of artistic insight? I think *not*."

Again Mr. Coney nodded, and observed, in an explanatory tone, "It's a job Hopkins got for him."

"Ay! It *is* a job Hopkins got for him; and it would be a precious long time before Hopkins offered such a job to *me*."

Mr. Coney was conscious of such entire concurrence with this opinion that he felt it would not be civil to express it, and mur-

mured, "Oh, I don't know about that, Percy. I dare say he would if he had the opportunity."

"No, sir; Hopkins wouldn't offer such a job to *me*, because he knows I wouldn't accept of it. It's house-painting; that's what it is."

"Well—but, Percy, haven't some of the biggest big-wigs in the painting world done decorative panels and things of that sort? I've read it in the papers."

"Ah, but *look at the price they get for it!* But how does *this* chap up'old the dignity of Art? Yah!" And Mr. Snagge swallowed a gulp of brandy-and-water, and threw himself back in his chair with a face of scornful disgust.

"Did you notice that young fellow sitting near the old lady at the top of the table?" asked Mr. Coney, after a pause.

Mr. Snagge had so much difficulty in withdrawing his thoughts from the contemplation of William Hughes's degraded baseness of spirit that the question had to be repeated before he answered. "Oh, a sickly-looking chap with black eyebrows? Yes; I saw him. He's the clerk, somebody said. Rather a peculiar start having him at table! Not that I am exclusive. I don't object to a touch of Bo'emia; but—hang it all!—*let* it be instinct with soul, Coney!"

"He's Hughes's nephew," said Mr. Coney.

"The clerk is! Ah, I think it's a pity his uncle did not confine himself to the same line of business!" And with that he pushed his tumbler across the table, as a hint to have it replenished.

Coney refilled it with a liberal hand, and mixed a second tumbler for himself, after which he sat silently puffing out clouds of smoke for several minutes, while Percival Snagge, with his legs stretched out on a second chair in front of him, and his eyes up-turned to the ceiling, sipped his grog, and muttered a fragmentary soliloquy after a fashion habitual with him.

At length Mr. Coney, drawing his chair closer up to the table, and leaning his elbow on it, so as to be nearer to his friend's ear, said,

"I'll tell you a rum thing, Percy."

"All right," returned Mr. Snagge, with his cigar between his teeth.

"You have heard me speak with Hopkins about a certain rich eccentric party I came across in the States some time ago?"

Snagge nodded. He had, indeed, heard a great deal more than he cared to hear on the subject. He had been irritated by the frequent introduction of it at Mortimer Hopkins's parties for two reasons: firstly, it gave old Hopkins an opportunity for bragging about his late wife's family connections, and, secondly, it interfered with the discussion of Mr. Snagge's own favorite topics—himself and Titian.

"I have not mentioned this to any one but John Hopkins as yet," pursued Mr. Coney. "But to an old and trusted friend of boyhood's hours like yourself, Percy, I can speak as man to man and heart to heart, partic'larly as you are off to Florence in a few days, and not very likely to come across any of the parties interested."

Mr. Snagge received this touching expression of confidence without emotion, merely observing, in general terms, that he didn't know the parties interested from Adam, and, not being a party interested himself, didn't want to.

"Quite so," answered Coney, approvingly. "Well, sir, you may remember hearing me say that the individual in question being once laid up with a sprained foot in the same hotel where I was, out West, we were thrown a good deal together. He was curious to hear all I could tell him about the Hopkinses or any other members of his family. I was sitting beside his sofa one day when the post brought him a bundle of letters from England. One of 'em, I could see, was in a lawyer's hand; indeed, he had told me that he kept up communication with a London firm of solicitors, though he never let out the name. Uncommonly queer and close he was in some things, while about others he'd jaw away thirteen to the dozen. Well, he read this lawyer's letter, and puckered up his eyes as he always did when he was thinking hard. And all of a sudden he asked me if I had ever come across any people of a certain name that he mentioned. I hadn't; and he said no more; and the name, having nothing to hook it on to, so to say, went out of my head."

"Ah!" drawled Mr. Snagge, lazily, watching a ring of smoke. "It wasn't my name, I suppose?"

"Stop a bit, Percy. No, it wasn't your name. Once or twice

afterwards I tried to return to the subject, and get him to tell it me again. But directly I touched it—mum! He shut up like an oyster. But the very moment I was introduced to that niece of Hughes's, at Mrs. Green's, it came back to me in a flash. The name, my boy, was Copley. And, what's more—rare thing, memory! (the divine W. calls it the warden of the brain; but, by George! it goes to sleep on its post pretty often)—what's more, I recollected then seeing the name of Claude on the first page of the letter as it lay on a chair beside the sofa. Now, Copley ain't a very common name, but, combined with Claude, it's downright uncommon."

"And what then?" demanded Mr. Snagge, curling his lip and tossing back his hair.

"Why, my idea is that these Copleys may represent some branch of the family that we don't know of. And I intend to follow it up."

"What'll be the good of that?" retorted Snagge, still more scornfully.

Mr. Coney, in his effusive mood—for which the fine Cognac was partly responsible—got up from his chair, and, stretching forth his right arm, and raising his voice, said, "It interests me, Percy—call it waywardness, call it a mere hobby, if you will—it interests me. I was the first to stumble across the man when not a soul belonging to him knew where he was. And my being an old friend of John Hopkins—our firm has supplied him with the patent adjustable brass-screw picture-frame rings for upwards of fifteen years—gives the thing a touch of romance. Since my return to England I've taken a great interest in hunting up the pedigree and surviving relatives of Mr. Christopher Dalton, and—what's that?"

This exclamation was caused by the sudden noise of some object falling to the ground on the other side of the glass door. A little green silk curtain fixed across the upper part of it prevented any one in the greenhouse from seeing into the drawing-room. But Mr. Coney, gently opening the door a little way, saw a lady on her knees, hurriedly picking up the contents of a small work-box—thimble, cotton-reels, scissors, and so forth—which, together with the box itself, lay on the floor. The only other occupant of the room within his range of vision was a fat old woman in a mob-

cap, dozing by the fire. But in a moment a tall female figure bounced across the room, with a movement hard, strong, active, and ruthless, as the flight of a cricket-ball, and proceeded, with many ejaculations, to assist the kneeling lady in gathering up the scattered articles.

Mr. Coney softly closed the door again, and returned to his place.

"It's that tousle-headed woman in blue," he said, "dropped her work-box. She must have been right close against the door. I wonder if she could hear what we were saying? That room was very quiet."

The interruption had checked the current of Mr. Coney's confidences. He resumed his usual manner, and suggested that perhaps they might now adjourn to the "salong."

"Well, I suppose you don't mean to spend the rest of the evening here in the outhouse," returned Mr. Snagge, fretfully.

At Coney's suggestion they first retired to their respective rooms, to have what he termed "a brisk up." This was effected by means of cold water and hard hair-brushes. To these refreshing appliances Mr. Snagge added a liberal sprinkling of cheap eau de Cologne over his moustaches and pocket-handkerchief, with intent to overpower the smell of tobacco hanging about him—which was well meant, but futile.

When the two strangers entered the drawing-room at Monplaisir for the first time, they had no cause to complain of being coolly received. The room was by this time well filled. Madame Martin was there in person to do the honors; and every boarder was present with the exception of Mr. Hughes, who had walked into Vevey after dinner, but was expected to return presently.

Mr. Snagge mentally corrected his phrase about the old cats, as he looked round the room. They were not all old cats. Miss Susan Curdan was bright-eyed and buxom, and her elder sister a presentable middle-aged woman enough. Mrs. Armour, of course, considered herself (and was, perhaps, considered by some other persons) to be still in the category of charming women. Even Miss Jenks—but somehow one never was able to associate Miss Jenks with any particular age. The parish register, no doubt, declared her years to be so many. And there are learned treatises which enable us to determine the epoch of a rock. But the un-

informed could never guess how old it was by looking at it. So with Miss Jenks. There was a rugged strength about her that belongs neither to early youth nor advanced age. But, within those extreme points, the imagination wandered without landmarks.

A certain flutter of excitement had prevailed among the ladies during the past week in respect of their preparations for the forthcoming party. Indeed, the comparatively deserted state of the drawing-room during the earlier portion of the evening was connected with this circumstance; for nearly every woman in the house had been up-stairs, looking at Miss Susan Curdan's new dress, spread out in silken sheen upon her bed. Not every one at Monplaisir could afford a new gown, but every one had prepared some new adornment. It was even remarked that fat old Mrs. Hobday intended to wear roses in her mob-cap to do honor to the occasion!

But, from all similar excitements and anxieties, Miss Jenks was absolutely free. She, indeed, was a traveller who might sing in the face of highwaymen on her journey through life; for surely none ever made it with emptier saddle-bags. While the other women were hemming, and frilling, and trimming, and trying on, Miss Jenks serenely contemplated their proceedings, and made up her mind which articles it would be possible to borrow.

When Messrs. Coney and Snagge joined the party, Miss Jenks was standing in an erect and martial attitude, with her back to the stove, engaged in a little altercation with Mrs. Armour, who had just exclaimed, sharply, "Nonsense! What was there to start at? I nearly fell asleep, and my work-box tumbled off my lap, and that woke me."

"Mrs. Armour," rejoined Miss Jenks, with unshaken firmness, "you deceive yourself. Your eyes were wide open, for I could see you quite plain from my corner, and you gave a sudden jerk, and down went the box, and I ran and helped you, and—"

"Well, my good soul, have it your own way," said Mrs. Armour, with a sudden change of manner, from waspish irritability to languid disdain, for at that moment she caught sight of the two strangers. Leaning back in her chair, in an attitude which, although affected, was not ungraceful, and apparently occupied with her embroidery, she yet watched the new-comers keenly, and

listened with particular attention when they spoke. Their voices were very dissimilar—Snagge's thin and high-pitched, Coney's full and deep. The fair Juliet, therefore, soon resolved her doubts as to which of them had so loudly and emphatically pronounced the words about Mr. Christopher Dalton and his surviving relations that had caught her ear. Was it to her Uncle Christopher he had been alluding? And what could this man know of her Uncle Christopher? Some persons would have simply proceeded to ask those questions. But that was not Mrs. Armour's method. She waited.

Presently Claude Copley came and sat near her.

"I believe your uncle is a friend of these—gentlemen?" she said, with a pause before the epithet, which made it infinitely contemptuous.

"He knows who they are; but it is scarcely likely that they should be friends of his," rejoined Claude, bristling a little.

"I don't know. He seems to have a most catholic tolerance for vulgarians. He is not so fastidious as a certain relative of his whom I could mention."

This, accompanied by a glance and a smile, flattered the foolish boy. He was weak enough to enjoy the intended compliment, even at the expense of his uncle—even against his own better knowledge. For flattery, like other insidious draughts, need not overcome our reason in order to be greedily swallowed. It suffices to bribe our passions.

"Well, and who *are* they?"

"Oh, one is an upper sort of bagman, and the fellow who wants his hair cut calls himself an artist, I believe."

"I see *I* am to be pestered by one of these creatures, at any rate!" said Mrs. Armour; for she observed Mr. Coney look in her direction, and then say something earnestly to Madame Martin.

Mrs. Armour coquettishly passed her fingers over the frizzy locks of hair on her forehead, and prepared to receive the stranger with a nicely adjusted mixture of condescension and fascination. But, to her blank surprise, Madame Martin waddled across the room to young Copley, and saying, "Come now, Monsieur Claude, one of these gentlemen wants to talk to you, my dear," seized him unceremoniously by the arm and waddled off with him.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. CONEY, having not the most distant idea that a young fellow in Claude's position would be otherwise than gratified by his notice, was not quick to perceive that young gentleman's supercilious airs. The notion of a clerk in a boarding-house "putting side on," as he would have expressed it, in communicating with him, Nathaniel Coney, was one which he would naturally be slow to receive. He set down the lad's manner to shyness, and addressed him encouragingly.

"Pleasure of knowing your uncle," said Mr. Coney, holding out two fingers, which Claude feigned not to see.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes; don't put yourself about. I merely wished to ask you a question—"

"I must trouble you to be brief," rejoined Claude, drawing his black brows together, "for I am unusually occupied just now."

Mr. Coney began to think that the young man was not shy, but awkward and inexperienced—somewhat of a cub, in short. But he answered, still encouragingly, that he supposed they were all pretty busy about the party which he understood was to come off to-morrow; but that Claude need not be uneasy, since Madame Martin knew where he was, and didn't want him just then. "Now, just sit down a moment," he said, "and I'll come to the point. Do you happen to have any relatives of the name of Dalton?"

Claude was tempted to answer, "What's that to you?" but limited himself to saying, "No," in as curt a tone as possible.

"Ah, but gently—gently!" said Mr. Coney, laying his hand on the young man's sleeve. "Don't be in a hurry. Are you *sure*, now? Distant relation, perhaps! Or connection by marriage?"

Claude, who had been already mortified by being marched off

under Mrs. Armour's eyes in obedience to "the bagman's" behest, as if he were a schoolboy, was still further mortified by seeing that lady regarding him from the other side of the room with a pitying smile, and he replied, stiffly, "I have no relative of that name, sir."

"Do you know the name?"

"No."

"Never heard it?"

"How the deuce can I say whether I ever heard it or not?" exclaimed Claude, irritably. "I may have heard thousands of names that I don't remember."

"Young sir," began Mr. Coney, majestically; but Claude interrupted him. "Well, I really beg your pardon, but I can only say that I know nothing whatever about the name you mention, and am quite unable to assist your inquiries." And Claude, abruptly rising from his chair, walked away without further ceremony.

"I scorn thee and thy fashion, peevish boy!" muttered Mr. Coney, staring after him. "That is to say, if you *are* peevish, and not cracked. I never encountered anything so—'But let the stricken deer go weep, The hart ungalled play; For some must watch while others—conduct themselves in a singularly snappish and ungentlemanly manner. Thus runs the world away.'"

And with this Mr. Coney—who was never more Shakespearian than when under the influence of some mild potatoes—stalked with dignity to a chair.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Armour had been closely watching the colloquy between him and Claude with considerable curiosity, and had expected the latter to return to her side and report what had passed. But Claude had been intercepted and summoned away by his uncle, who had returned from Vevey, and wished to concert with him some arrangements for the morrow.

It seemed, indeed, as though the fascinating widow ran some risk of being entirely neglected this evening. Most of the company gathered round Mr. Coney, who was indemnified for young Copley's impertinent behavior by the attentions of the ladies, and was making himself generally agreeable. While Miss Jenks, still holding her post near the stove, had Mr. Snagge all to herself, for old Mrs. Hobday, socially speaking, didn't count.

Mrs. Armour was aware that the other women in the house disliked and avoided her. It might have been supposed that the first fact rendered the second rather acceptable than otherwise. But it was not so; for, although she did not want their company, she bitterly resented their objecting to hers. But latterly Juliet Armour had not taken the matter to heart as she did some weeks ago. Her scorn for these people had come to have an almost exhilarating effect—like a fiery cordial—ever since she had entertained the hope of getting away from them into brighter scenes, inhabited by rich acquaintances—who, in fact, made the brightness.

After some careful consideration, she resolved to investigate at once what might be the meaning of those words of Coney's which she had overheard. And having resolved, she acted with promptitude. Rising from her chair, she walked straight to the group beside the stove, and said coolly:

"Miss Jenks, I wish you would do me the favor to go to my room and fetch my little Shetland shawl. My tiresome ankle is so lame again to-night!" And stretching out a slender, well-shaped foot in a scarlet stocking and smart slipper, she added, for Mr. Snagge's behoof, "It has never been strong since that carriage accident in India."

Miss Jenks glared at her obdurately.

"I don't know where to find your shawl," she said.

"It is lying folded on the toilet-table with the black lace fichu we were speaking of yesterday. You may as well take that to your room at once, when you are there."

"May I? All right!" returned Miss Jenks, and marched off at once without hesitation. She perfectly understood that the loan of the black lace fichu—previously refused—was the bribe offered for doing Mrs. Armour's errand. But to this Miss Jenks had no objection. It was a bargain that suited her. She had long coveted the fichu, and now looked forward complacently to figuring in it to-morrow evening.

And let it not be supposed that Miss Jenks particularly regretted the interruption of her *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Snagge. She had falsified Madame Martin's half-jocular prognostications by taking the arrival of the two new gentlemen with comparative indifference. This circumstance was noted with surprise by the

other ladies, but served to strengthen in Miss Susan Curdan's mind the lurid suspicions before alluded to.

No sooner was Miss Jenks's back turned than Mrs. Armour, addressing Mr. Snagge without preamble, said, "Your friend is a traveller, I fancy."

Mr. Snagge bowed, and was on the point of adding that his friend had travelled only for very leading firms, when it occurred to him that the lady's words had probably no technical significance. And he replied that Coney *had* been about the world a good deal, and knew many men and many countries.

"Do you know if he ever came across a Mr. Christopher Dalton in his travels? I think I heard him mention the name."

Mr. Snagge's reply to this artless inquiry was of so interesting and unexpected a nature that Mrs. Armour forgot her languid airs, forgot her lame ankle, forgot, even, to watch the effect of her personal fascinations on Mr. Snagge, and, hurrying him to an unoccupied part of the room, made him sit down beside her, and listened eagerly to what he had to say.

Mr. Snagge's information, however, being soon exhausted, he was despatched for Mr. Coney to complete it. "*Imagine* my feelings, Mr. Coney," said Mrs. Armour, with clasped hands, and a spot of bright color on each usually pale cheek, "on being told that you have quite recently—within a year or two—seen and spoken with my uncle, Christopher Dalton—my mother's own, dearly loved brother. For years I have been anxiously wondering whether he still lived. And now—what an extraordinary chance that I should meet you here!"

"Then you, madam," said Mr. Coney, in the deep, guttural tones which his friends associated with the soliloquies in "*Hamlet*," "must be Juliet, third and youngest daughter of the late Richard Bingham Kirby, M.D., formerly of Half Moon Street, Piccadilly."

"I am, indeed! But may I ask how you know so much about my family?"

"Acting from no personal motives whatever, but merely on behalf of a young friend of mine, who is also a friend of Mr. Dalton's family, I have informed myself pretty accurately about that gentleman's surviving relatives, among whom I am proud

and happy, madam, to welcome so graceful an acquisition as yourself," replied Mr. Coney, with a hospitable air.

"Your young friend, a member of my uncle's family?" said Mrs. Armour, sharply. "Who can that be? I have, it is true, been so long an exile from England that there are a hundred points I may require to be informed upon. But I believe I know pretty well all my mother's relations. At any rate, those near enough to—to—"

"To have any chance of coming in for a slice of the cake," said Mr. Coney, with perfect gravity.

"Of course your friend, no doubt, is in a position to prove his relationship; but I need not tell a man of the world like yourself that in such a case as the present one must be on one's guard against imposture."

Mr. Coney waved his hand in a lordly manner. "No fear of that, madam! We know who all the next of kin are. And if we didn't, the law—the law, madam—would protect the interests of the rightful parties. The 'umblest subject in our realm may declare in the words of the bard, 'The laws of England are at my commandment,' provided he's prepared to pay for 'em." Then, sinking into prose, and looking fixedly at the lady, he added, "Besides, you know, there can be no talk of 'claimants' at present. Mr. Dalton is alive, and his money is his own, to do what he likes with. Only it may be well for the family to be prepared for the possible contingency of his dying intestate."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Mrs. Armour, emphatically. "He ought to be looked after."

Within a few minutes the rumor that Mrs. Armour's long-lost uncle had been discovered by Messrs. Coney and Snagge in the wilds of Western America, the possessor of fabulous wealth, and having no relation nearer than his niece, had spread through Monplaisir. A quarter of an hour ago not a creature in the Pension was aware that Mrs. Armour ever had an uncle; but now some of them appeared to persuade themselves that they had long been wondering what had become of him; and they discussed his story with a copiousness of detail truly marvellous. Such was the contagion of the general excitement that even the Miss Curdans spoke sympathetically of what Mrs. Armour's agitation must have been on so unexpectedly receiving news of a relative whom she had

long mourned as lost. And Mrs. Ford distinctly shocked public feeling by expressing her doubts of Mrs. Armour's having ever mourned him or anybody else!

Mrs. Armour rather encouraged than checked the diffusion of this news. She had been cautious, at first, how she asserted her relationship with Christopher Dalton, having an undefined impression on her mind that he had done something disgraceful. But what could be disgraceful enough to obscure the effulgence of two millions and a half of dollars? And Mr. Coney assured her that competent authorities in the States had set down Chris Dalton's "pile" at not a cent under that sum. In any case, to be known as having "expectations" of such magnitude was in itself a source of social importance.

The buzz of conversation on this exciting theme was at its height; Miss Susan Curdan had not favored the company with one of her three songs; Mrs. Ford had foregone her nightly game of patience; even the Russian lady had paused in her *béziq*ue to have the interesting topic interpreted to her by one of her polyglot children; when Miss Jenks, who had not returned to the salon since leaving it in quest of Mrs. Armour's shawl, suddenly burst into the apartment, exclaiming in a loud voice, "He has come back! Here he is!"

Everybody started. Susan Curdan uttered a stifled scream; and her elder sister pressed her hand on her heart.

"Who's come back, Miss Jenks? Who is it?" demanded Madame Martin, jumping up from her chair.

"Mr. Hughes. I happened to go into the *sallamongjay*, and there he was, talking to Mr. Claude Copley, and looking so pale and fagged that I really think, Madame Martin, you ought to go and give him a glass of wine or something. I begged him to take one for *my* sake; but he—wouldn't," said Miss Jenks, coming to an abrupt close.

"Lard, my dear," cried Madame Martin, feeling that she interpreted the unanimous sentiments of the company, "why in the world do you come startling us like that, about good, quiet Mr. Hughes, who is the mildest of gentlemen, and never thinks of making any *embarras*? When you called out 'He's come back!' in that way, I vow and declare I thought you meant the old gentleman from America!"

"I don't know who you mean by the old gentleman from America," returned Miss Jenks, entirely unabashed. "But I wish you'd go and see after Mr. Hughes. He looks downright ill!"

Madame Martin would, perhaps, have disregarded this request in the case of any one except her favorite, Mr. Hughes. But she would not run the risk of neglecting him, although she put small faith in the accuracy of Miss Jenks's statements, and so hurried off.

"Well, upon my word," said Miss Susan Curdan, indignantly. "Things have come to a pretty pass when that woman publicly announces that she begged Mr. Hughes to take a glass of wine for her sake! *Her* sake!"

"Ah, but he didn't do it," observed Mrs. Ford.

"Oh, Mrs. Ford, it is too monstrous! The way she throws herself at his head! And lately she actually tries to take possession of him."

"Ah!—she *tries*," observed Mrs. Ford, again.

"And he is so refined—so truly the gentleman, that I can't understand—"

"Why, that's the very reason! The poor dear man doesn't see it. Or, if he does, he won't believe his senses."

"You think he doesn't see it? Well, I confess I hoped—I mean, I thought it impossible that he should—"

"Should think of marrying Miss Jenks? *Rather!*" Then, after glancing at Miss Susan's half-averted face, the old woman went on in a gentler tone, "And I'll tell you what, my dear: I don't believe he'll ever think of any woman in that way. He has gone through a deal of trouble. You can see it in his face; and, besides, I've noticed words that Madame Martin has let drop. He has regularly sacrificed himself to his family. That's no secret; and among the other troubles, there may have been a love trouble. I dare say there was, for there's plenty of fire and feeling in those eyes of his. But if there was, it's been dead and buried this many a year. Only—with some men, the ghost of such a trouble walks; and I think he's one of 'em."

Presently Madame Martin came back and told them that Mr. Hughes had a nervous headache, and would go to bed at once. Neither did Claude return to the drawing-room that evening; but,

after making up his accounts in the solitude of the bureau, repaired to his own chamber.

William, whose room adjoined Claude's, was sitting there in the dark when he heard his nephew's step, and called to him to come in and speak with him for a moment.

Claude was graver than usual. He had been thinking, for once, of others instead of being exclusively occupied with himself; and so ennobling was even this passing glance of unselfishness that the lad's face wore a manlier look than his uncle had ever seen on it.

"I merely wanted to say, Claude, in reference to our conversation down-stairs," said William, "that this man Coney is not to blame. He could not know that he was touching on a subject full of such deep sorrow to me. But if he recurs to it, tell him that I have emphatically assured you that—the man is no kith or kin of yours, even in the remotest degree, and bid him never mention his name to me."

Claude stood, with his candle in his hand, looking earnestly at his uncle.

"Don't you think you had better get to rest now, Uncle William?" he said. "I'm afraid your head must be very bad; your face looks so drawn."

"I will—I will, my boy. Good-night."

Claude still lingered. "I don't want to hurry you," he said, "but this man, this Dalton—you say he is a scoundrel?"

"A black villain."

"And he brought injury and disgrace on our family years ago?"

"Irreparably."

"I should like to know—I think I have a right to know—did his villainy affect—my mother?"

"Your mother? It affected us all, but not her chiefly," answered William, as if doubtful of the drift of this question. Then, after a glance at his nephew's face, he added quickly, "Your mother, Claude, was one of the sweetest and most stainless souls on earth. You can *never* think of her too highly."

Claude drew a long breath of relief, and, wishing his uncle "good-night," softly closed the door, and went away.

"I suppose, after all, it was some rascality connected with

money," he said to himself, as he was undressing. "I know my grandfather was ruined by the bad behavior of somebody—Larcher told me that—and the shock killed him. That must account for Uncle William's taking it so deeply to heart."

CHAPTER XXI.

No better balm for William Hughes's spirit could have been devised than the letter from Barbara, which he found beside his plate at breakfast the next morning.

All was going well with her and Aunt Judith. Her engagement with Lady Lambton still continued, but she gave a jesting hint that she expected her occupation there to be gone before very long; for Mr. Fritz Hofmann's attentions in that quarter were assiduous, and my lady appeared to receive them encouragingly. Mr. Hofmann was always pleasant and gentlemanlike in his manner to her. He had hurried after her in the street the other day to show her a letter from his Cousin Ida, mentioning her "great good fortune" in being able to have lessons from Mr. William Hughes. Moreover—and this Barbara thought specially kind and considerate—he had taken the trouble to bring the letter to their house last Sunday evening, in order that Aunt Judith might read the passage herself; and had remained chatting for more than an hour. Uncle William would remember the mention of a Mrs. Shortway, whom they had met at Mrs. Green's conversation? Well, Aunt Judith had struck up quite a friendship with the Shortways, and had made elaborate calculations, showing that if she baked the cakes at home, it would cost "next to nothing" to invite the ladies to tea in return! "And, in short," wrote Barbara, "Aunt Judith and Larcher, between them, are bent on plunging into the vortex of society; and you need not be surprised if you stumble over rout seats in the passage, or find red cloth laid down on the doorstep when you come home. 'When you come home!' how good that sounds! And yet I am afraid that is rather selfish; for your visit to Switzerland has been good for you in many ways, and I ought rather to wish it protracted



“ Claude stood with his candle in his hand looking earnestly at his uncle.”

than shortened. It must have been very good for Claude, too. Aunt Judith is so happy in the news of his improved health."

William's eyes beamed as he read this, and much more in the same cheerful strain. And in answer to the inquiries on all sides, he declared himself quite recovered from his headache, and looking forward to the party that evening with great zest. He was not accustomed to make the most of his troubles; nor had he that curious shame at being easily pleased, and willing to be diverted from painful thoughts, which is observable in many persons. His grief had been keen and cruel; and the old wounds would throb at a touch to his dying day. But he did not renounce cakes and ale for himself, nor—which is common—grudge them to other people, because there were sad things hidden deep in his heart. Nay, his very child-like power of enjoyment was intimately connected with the tenderness of his nature, for it had its root in sympathy.

A sort of rough programme of the evening's entertainment had been privately agreed upon by a select committee of the ladies, it having been feared that without some such precaution the public cause might suffer. They might all fall victims to some exorbitant bore, who, having seized the ear of the house, might persist in holding—not to say tweaking—it at immoderate length. There was, for instance, a general, though unacknowledged, terror of Miss Jenks. She had never been heard to sing, and was believed not to play any musical instrument. But suppose she took it into her head to recite, or to read, or to deliver a lecture! Who should undertake to stop her if she once began? The only chance was to prevent her from beginning.

Miss Susan Curdan had magnanimously limited herself to one song. The eldest Russian girl was also to sing; and the German governess—a powerful performer—was to wreak her executive genius on the aged pianoforte. Mr. Hughes would, of course, perform in various ways, and every one would be willing to listen to him. So far all was satisfactory, when at the last moment, to the general consternation, Mrs. Hobday, breaking forth from her usual state of somnolent taciturnity, announced her intention of repeating "a piece."

She had got it off by heart at school, fifty-four years ago, she said; but she knew it as well as if she had learned it only yester-

day, and she was sure it would please. It had always been thought very pretty.

Hints, and even open remonstrance, were quite unavailing. Mrs. Hobday didn't see why she shouldn't speak her piece. "It 'ud be quite as well worth hearing as a deal that *she* had to listen to every evening!" (This, by the way, was rather disingenuous; for Mrs. Hobday possessed the faculty of going to sleep in her chair at a moment's notice; and used it freely). "And, any way, it was Mr. Hughes's party; and Mr. Hughes had asked 'em all to 'contribute their various talents to give brilliancy to the evening.'" She remembered his very words! So if there was any *caballing* she should speak to Mr. Hughes, and they'd hear what *he'd* say.

The effect of this extraordinary manifestation of spirit on the part of Mrs. Hobday was at first almost paralyzing. It was as though a hippopotamus should begin to roar carnivorously for prey.

"We can only fervently hope and trust that she'll forget it again before the time comes," moaned Miss Susan Curdan to Mrs. Ford.

"Or that her 'piece' may be short," rejoined the latter.

As some counterpoise to this blow, it was ascertained, by the method of direct questions—for all now felt it to be necessary they should know the worst—that Miss Jenks did not purpose entertaining the company with anybody's eloquence but her own.

The usual dinner-hour at Monplaisir had been considerably anticipated by general consent, in order to give the ladies time to dress after it, and to allow the servants to prepare for the festival of the evening. As eight o'clock struck, William Hughes stood at the door of the salon to receive his guests. To such persons as are accustomed to regard the materials of the lantern rather than the quality of the light he would have presented, no doubt, but a poor figure, being dressed in plain dark morning clothes, for he did not possess an evening suit in the world, and said so simply.

He had given the inmates of Monplaisir *carte blanche* to invite each one friend; so that the company was reinforced by some half-dozen outsiders—nearly all belonging to that curious nomad tribe of Britons who frequent Continental boarding-houses of the second class.

Among the first arrivals were Miss Stringer and Ida, the latter muffled up to the eyes in white cashmere and swan's-down, but looking very like an invalid, nevertheless. Mrs. Kettering had begged to be excused ("lazy after dinner," explained Miss Stringer, with a confidential nod); and Olga had accompanied some American acquaintances to a dance at Geneva, where she was to stay all night. "Olga can never resist a dance. But this creature doesn't go to grown-up balls yet," said Sally, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"No; and if I did, I should like coming here better," said Ida, bluntly. "I shall have balls enough in my life, I dare say. But I sha'n't have the chance of seeing—"

But at this point Miss Stringer hurried her young cousin away, on pretence of securing a corner where she would be sheltered from draughts.

Next appeared Mrs. Ford, whose handsome lace cap and ruffles and solid black-silk gown were evidently disappointing to Ida. Basing her hopes on the appearance of Miss Jenks at their first and only interview, she had looked for something much more unconventional. And now entered in quick succession the two Curdans, the Russians with their governess, Mrs. Hobday (at sight of whom, in her mob-cap, with two huge cabbage-roses, Ida cheered up a little)—and Mrs. Armour.

Mrs. Armour, having superciliously swept the prospect with her eye-glass, espied Miss Stringer and Ida Kettering in their corner, and at once made towards them with an ostentation of affectionate familiarity, whereat Ida opened her eyes very wide and Sally shut her eyes very tight.

"What a comfort to find some fellow-creatures!" said Mrs. Armour, taking no particular pains to lower her tone of voice. "This is the queerest *menagerie!* How good of you to come! Really, Mr. Hughes ought to be flattered."

To all of which Miss Sally, steadfastly regarding her with her bright gray eyes, returned no other answer than a sound made with closed teeth, which may perhaps be represented as "H'ms!" and a short nod.

Ida, meanwhile, was looking about her with a steady and inquiring gaze. Presently she pulled Sally by the sleeve, and said, in a tone of deep discontent:

“Now, just look there, Sally, at that young man by the door. Why, he looks quite *proper!*”

“Eh?” said Mrs. Armour, following her glance, and seeing that it rested on young Copley. “Oh yes; that is really a very presentable young fellow—the only one here. Shall I present him to you? He is—”

“Oh no!” cried Ida, with an injured air. “No, please! He looks just like lots of the young men who come to mamma’s dance every season. We don’t want *him!*”

Mrs. Armour—to Sally’s secret amusement—looked very much puzzled by this. But what was her amazement when, the next minute, Ida, clasping her hands, exclaimed, enthusiastically, “There she is at last, and two *lovely* ones with her!” and she perceived that these words were undoubtedly applied to Miss Jenks and Messrs. Snagge and Coney, who just then happened to enter the room almost together.

Miss Jenks had at least one quality usually attributed to high breeding; it was impossible to put her out of countenance. Looked at from the mantua-maker’s point of view, she was this evening “a thing of shreds and patches,” being, in fact, attired by involuntary contributions from the wardrobes of a heterogeneous set of women. Yet she marched up the room with a cool intrepidity and self-confidence which no duchess, conscious of an unassailable toilette, could have surpassed.

Owing to her unusual height, she had found it impossible to wear any other lady’s skirt, so the brown stuff gown had to do duty yet once again; but over her shoulders was thrown the black lace fichu, fastened by a massive pebble shawl-brooch set in silver, belonging to Miss Curdan. Mrs. Ford had supplied some white lace frilling for the throat. But, owing possibly to unskilfulness in its adjustment, at every movement of Mrs. Jenks’s head this frilling caught Miss Jenks’s hair on stiff-starched spikes, as a hedge of thorns catches fleece, and gave her *coiffure* a strangely wild and ragged appearance. On her breast below the brooch was pinned a bow of rose-colored ribbon, rummaged out from the bottom of an old cardboard box belonging to Susan Curdan, and a sash of the same ribbon encircled her waist and fell in short ends behind; Miss Jenks having maintained, in opposition to Miss Susan’s objection to its incongruity on a brown stuff dress, that for her part

she thought coffee-color and pink went uncommonly well together. A string of imitation-coral beads had been contributed by one of the Russian children, and with Madame Martin's black-lace mittens—and if the truth must be told, a pair of her black stockings also—Miss Jenks was satisfied that she made an excellent figure.

As to Mr. Snagge and Mr. Coney, they had drawn forth Ida Kettering's ejaculation of delight by appearing, the former in his picturesque black velvet, the latter in the Shakespearian garb in which he looked so striking.

The company being by this time all assembled, William Hughes, as in duty bound, opened the musical entertainment by getting his guitar and playing a short and simple Neapolitan melody. "He plays, really, very nicely," said Mrs. Armour, with an air of half-surprised condescension.

"I should think so!" exclaimed Ida. "Why, he's a very accomplished man in music, and languages, and everything!"

"Yes; but he never mentions it," added Sally, dryly, "which isn't fair. Because, how are people to know?"

Mr. Hughes now looked round the room, hesitating whom to ask to perform. Susan Curdan tried to catch his eye, and gave him a hint of the programme which had been arranged; but, with a fell promptitude, which no one could have foreseen, Mrs. Hobday stood up broad awake from her chair beside the fire, and said, in husky but distinctly audible tones, "Mr. Hughes, I will now repeat a piece, sir, if you are agreeable."

William was certainly as much surprised as any one by this obliging proposition; but he was much less shocked than the committee of ladies. That arose from the difference between their points of view—theirs being that Mrs. Hobday's absurd intrusion would injure a display of talent which otherwise could not fail to dazzle the contingent from the rival boarding-houses; his being that, since he invited them to perform at all in order to please them, and not himself, there was really no reason why Mrs. Hobday should not have her share of the amusement. It was well for him that they did not suspect how he looked at the matter; for not all his benevolence would have compensated the objects of it for being lumped together in his tolerant kindness and good-will.

With his accustomed gentleness, he turned to the old lady and said, "That is very good of you, Mrs. Hobday."

"These ladies wanted to put me down; but they got hold of the wrong one," said Mrs. Hobday.

"No, no," answered William, in a soothing tone. "I am sure you are mistaken there. We are all very much obliged to you. This is quite a friendly gathering, you know."

"Ah," returned Mrs. Hobday, "that's as it may be. But, anyhow, since you're agreeable, Mr. Hughes, I'll say my piece."

Accordingly, she was ceremoniously conducted to the end of the room, facing the majority of the company, and then, by her own request, accommodated with an arm-chair. A good many persons did not notice what was going on; but a little knot of curious spectators—among whom Ida Kettering pressed eagerly forward—gathered round the chair where Mrs. Hobday was seated, with her hands folded before her, and her eyes upturned. It so chanced that they rested on Miss Jenks, whose tall figure towered conspicuously above the rest, and when Mrs. Hobday thus began: "Who is she, the poor maniac?" she made so sensible a pause here, that a sensation as of a shock from an electric battery ran through the circle. But it presently appeared that, owing to a wheezy shortness of breath, Mrs. Hobday was constrained to cut her sentences into short lengths; and this she did, with an accurate attention to rhythm, and none whatever to reason, by making a full stop at the end of each line:

"Whose wildly fixed eyes.
Seem a heart overcharged to express.
She speaks not, but often and deeply she sighs.
She never complains, but her silence implies.
The composure of settled distress."

And so on through the whole of Southey's verses about "Mary, the Maid of the Inn."

"Well, that is wonderful, isn't it?" said Ida Kettering, when it was over. She had been intensely interested in the exhibition. The full flavor of its comicality in a great measure escaped her. But she knew it was very "queer;" and she had come to Mon-plaisir expressly to gratify her curiosity about the queer people it contained.

"Will and I think so too, Miss Kettering," assented Miss Jenks,

with perfect gravity. "Such a trial of memory for a lady at her time of life! I did *not* quite follow the meaning. But then it is difficult to make out the meaning of poetry unless you know what it's about beforehand."

As to Mrs. Hobday, she was apparently indifferent to public opinion upon her performance. When Mr. Hughes politely escorted her back to her favorite place near the fire, she observed, firmly, and with a tone of inward triumph, "Well, I said my piece," and immediately shut her eyes, and fell asleep for the remainder of the evening.

"Well, I am truly thankful *that's* over!" piously ejaculated Susan Curdan.

"And I am thankful Mrs. Armour didn't hear it!" added her sister. "She would have made some very cutting remarks, you may depend on it; and I dare say she will be worse than ever now, having an uncle with millions, and only she—by what I gathered last night—to inherit! She's quite taken up with her rich friends over yonder."

Mrs. Armour had remained near Miss Stringer, and had been endeavoring, not so much to ingratiate herself with that impracticable lady, as to find out whether it would be worth while to do so. She was still quite uncertain as to Sally's real position in the Kettering household. At any rate, it would be, she thought, politic to let the whole party know of the brilliant expectations which had so suddenly burst upon her. Accordingly, she imparted them to Miss Stringer, with what flourishes occurred to her at the moment.

Sally listened in silence, but with growing interest, until Mrs. Armour mentioned her uncle's name; and then she exclaimed:

"Why, mercy on me, that makes eight I know, counting myself! And you may be sure that a good many more of us will turn up, if Christopher Dalton lasts much longer. Upon my word, I am beginning seriously to doubt whether even ten thousand pounds would pay one for the wear and tear of discovering so many new relations. What do *you* think? But you're a niece, and your share would, of course, be much bigger than that of a first-cousin once removed."

"I don't understand you," returned Mrs. Armour, with a forced smile on her lips, but some very hard suspicion and anxiety in her eyes.

“That proves that you haven’t been living among a certain set in town lately, or you would have been furnished with a surprising number of details on the subject. The copious inaccuracy of people is exasperating beyond words. However, I can promise not to be copious, and I’ll try not to be inaccurate.”

And then Miss Sally proceeded, in very curt but perfectly clear phrases, to relate all she knew about the surviving kindred of Christopher Dalton.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ONE thing is clear: I must go at once to London,” said Juliet Armour to herself, after her colloquy with Miss Stringer.

She was in a state of irritable excitement. Matters of the gravest importance to her interests had been going on without her knowledge—she might never have known them but for the mere accident of meeting with Mr. Coney—and she was feverishly anxious to be doing something on her own behalf. She would trust no one—no one!

This fellow Coney, whom she treated to several contumelious epithets in her thoughts while endeavoring to profit by his information and advice, was evidently a partisan of the Hopkinses. He had probably influenced her Uncle Christopher in favor of the young man Mortimer. What might he not have had it in his power to say or insinuate, seeing that he was the only person cognizant of his family connections who had had access to Mr. Dalton for years! She wished she could be transported to America that moment. She wished she could sit down then and there and indite a long letter to her uncle.

She was now his nearest living relative, except, of course, her sister Dora. She had almost forgotten Dora. She was his own sister’s child. She was sure she remembered that he had been much attached to her mother until that wretched quarrel. How had the quarrel arisen? No matter. It had raged chiefly between her father and her uncle; of that she was quite certain. It could not, surely, be visited on her, who was a little child in the nursery when it happened.

Coney strongly dissuaded her from writing to her uncle. He said that Mr. Dalton had grown so eccentric, so suspicious, and so averse from holding any communication with his former friends that a letter from any of them would but exasperate him. That sounded plausible, but Coney might have his own motives for saying so. At this very moment, for all she knew, young Mortimer Hopkins might be in correspondence with Dalton. She must find some agent to watch her interests on the other side of the Atlantic. But such an agent might be costly, and she had very little money to spare. Perhaps Dora could help her. Dora's income was very small; but then Dora had so few expenses and so few wants.

All these thoughts were rushing through Juliet Armour's brain under the bush of rough, fair hair that covered her forehead to the eyebrows. And at the same time poor William Hughes's party was proceeding with increased spirit and merriment. Mr. Coney had spouted Hamlet and the philosophic Jacques; Mr. Snagge had held forth about the 'igh Ideal of Art; and the host had earned great applause by a burlesque recital of the ballad of "Lord Bateman" (although Miss Jenks had observed indignantly to Ida Kettering that she could see nothing to laugh at in it; for Mr. Hughes spoke the words with *great* feeling. And she did *not* think it showed the gentleman, or the lady either, to giggle at him).

"Idiots!" muttered Mrs. Armour, looking round on the flushed, laughing faces. "Grinning idiots!" For it irritated her nerves to see so many people enjoying themselves in their frivolous way, while her own fortunes were trembling in the balance. But as she glanced distantly about her, she caught sight of one face which was neither flushed nor smiling. Claude Copley stood apart, leaning against the doorway, and looking on at the revels with a countenance as little friendly as her own.

She had not spoken with Claude since last evening; she had not even thought of him. She had no leisure to occupy her thoughts with so insignificant a personage as Madame Martin's secretary. But at this moment he was the only being present whom she felt to be in sympathy with her mood.

She glided up to him, and threw herself into a chair near the door.

"You don't appear enraptured with this hilarious scene," she

said, in a low voice. "Really, your uncle has most wonderful spirits. I suppose those persons who can amuse themselves in any society are to be envied."

"It's easier to stand them when you know you are to get away from them in a few days," answered Claude.

"Oh! Mr. Hughes goes away in a few days? You will miss him."

"I shall not miss him alone. I don't suppose you will remain here very long now."

Mrs. Armour at once concluded that Claude's depression was mainly referable to the thought of parting from her. This idea was gratifying; and she answered, in a soft, regretful tone, that she believed family business would call her to London almost immediately.

"Well, you can scarcely mean to pretend that you are sorry to go," returned Claude, looking down on her gloomily.

"One's feelings may be conflicting, Mr. Copley."

"By George, there'd be no conflict in mine, if any one told me I was to leave the confounded hole to-night, and never set eyes on it again!"

"Might not that depend on whom you were leaving behind you?" said Mrs. Armour, with a pleading, upward glance.

"Well, at any rate, that consideration does not apply to you, so we need not discuss it."

There was a short silence. Then Claude said, "I haven't congratulated you yet. Everybody is talking about your brilliant prospects."

"Everybody is talking a great deal of nonsense, I dare say. But, of course, I am glad to hear that my uncle is still living, and not sorry to hear that he is rich. But I am amused when some of the good folks here talk to me as if I must needs be overwhelmed with amazement at my uncle's wealth, as if I had belonged all my life to paupers! There has always been money among my mother's family. But, really, the whole scale of these people's ideas is so—" Mrs. Armour finished her sentence with a shrug. Then she said, carelessly, "By the way, what did that absurd man"—turning her head towards Mr. Coney, who was standing in a Shakespearian attitude, with finger on his brow—"want to say to you last evening?"



“ Claude Copley stood apart, leaning against the doorway.”

Claude reddened and frowned.

"Oh, he wanted to ask a question about—about my father's family. He had got hold of a mistaken notion that— The fellow has had genealogy on the brain, I think, since he took upon himself to hunt up Mr. Dalton's next of kin on behalf of some young cad or other whom he honors with his friendship."

"Take care, Mr. Copley," said Mrs. Armour, raising her forefinger. "The young cad in question must—if Mr. Coney's information is correct—be a kinsman of mine. However, one does witness strange *dégringolades* in the best families."

But, although she spoke thus lightly, she had noticed Claude's odd looks and his reticence as to what had passed between him and Coney, and she stored them in her memory as one puts by a document for future reference.

"It's enough to give a fellow the blue devils to think of what this place will be next week without you," said Claude, suddenly.

"I am flattered! But neither do you intend, I suppose, to remain here all your life?"

"Good heavens! I think it would be but a short one if I did," he answered.

He spoke in mere spleen and pettishness, but Mrs. Armour looked in his face, and for the first time noticed something in it which gave a melancholy significance to his words—the glassy brightness of the eye, the transparent pallor of the skin, the peculiar plaintive haggardness which disease gives to a young face.

"Oh, we shall meet in London before long, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Armour, smiling, and rising from her chair, for there was now a general movement among the company and their *tête-à-tête* was broken up; but as she walked away she murmured to herself, with a little skin-deep emotion of pity, "Poor boy!"

She believed he would regret her. She knew that he was the only creature in the Pension who would. He alone had ever appreciated her there. Poverty was a curse that made all good gifts of little avail. Of what advantage was it to her to be superior in looks, in manner, in birth, to those wretched vulgarians, if she were compelled to wear shabbier gowns and hire a cheaper room than theirs? Even her new friends, the Ketterings, although they had been civil, certainly, had not treated her with any of the distinction which she thought her due, Bah! they were only

tradespeople, after all, these Ketterings! Their money had been gained by buying and selling—whether wholesale or retail mattered very little.

“Oh, but if ever I am a rich woman they will change their note—and so shall I!” muttered Juliet, with a vindictive flash of her blue eyes.

This peculiar movement of bitterness against the Ketterings was aroused by beholding “that uneducated idiot, Miss Jenks,” as she angrily termed that lady in her own mind, seated between Miss Stringer and Ida, and conversing with them in an easy and familiar style.

Miss Jenks was certainly in great force. She did not particularly wonder to find herself the subject of special attentions from these ladies—Miss Jenks, indeed, like Mr. Thomas Carlyle’s canary-bird, was capable of but a limited quantity of wonder—but it gratified her.

Ida positively hung on her accents, and Sally had once or twice to check Ida’s undisguised attempts to make Miss Jenks display her peculiarities of manner and character, much as she might have tried to make a new chimpanzee show off its tricks at the Zoological Gardens.

But Miss Jenks was very willing to be drawn out. She did not often get such a chance of being listened to.

“But, of course,” said she, with that kind of abrupt plunge into the middle of a new subject which was an interesting feature in her conversation, “you are *his* friends, and the pink of politeness was consequently to be expected.”

“Whose friends?” asked Ida, privately resolving to tell Olga the next time her sister snubbed her for her *brusquerie* that she had been characterized as a pink of politeness.

“When I say *his*, Miss Ida Kettering, I can only mean *him*—Mr. William Hughes. For a more perfect gentleman doesn’t breathe, and a manner to ladies that *I* never saw equalled.”

“Oh, you’re quite an admirer of Mr. Hughes! So am I. I like him very much,” said Ida.

“General admiration must be his due from all. But with me it is something more. You cannot suppose that, having been the object of such pleasing attentions, I could remain insensible to the spell?”

"What does she mean?" whispered Ida to Sally. Whereupon Sally pinched her, and bade her hold her tongue.

"You will all miss Mr. Hughes very much when he leaves Monplaisir," observed Sally, eying Miss Jenks askance.

"No, Miss Stringer; there you deceive yourself. I shall not miss him; for when he goes, I go."

"Lord bless me!" exclaimed Sally, quite taken off her guard.

"Yes, Miss Stringer. I am expecting remittances from Northampton at the close of the week, and shall then give Madame Martin the usual notice. There may have been passing clouds between us about an occasional washing-bill, but we part without unpleasantry on either side."

"But," ventured Sally, who thought the matter was getting beyond a joke, and began to be seriously uneasy on behalf of her friend, William Hughes, "but as your home, I understood you to say, is at Northampton, and as Mr. Hughes is bound for London—"

"Oh, I am not wedded to Northampton, Miss Stringer. Far from that. And it is *not* likely that I should yield to the trammels of a brother and sister-in-law, who offer a home if I like to stay in it, but decline to increase by any cash allowance the small annuity I inherited at my father's death."

"Oh!" said Sally. "But still, if the home is a comfortable one—"

"It is comfortable, Miss Stringer, to repletion; and bed-linen fit for a pallis."

"Indeed! That must be very nice," exclaimed Sally. Then she added, persuasively, "Well, then, since you have such excellent quarters among your own family and friends, would it not perhaps be better for you—"

"No, Miss Stringer, it would *not*," interrupted Miss Jenks, sitting bolt upright and staring straight before her like an inexorable drill sergeant. "I choose to see something of the world. I *have*, now, seen the Continent—which will ever be to me a hallowed spot, as the scene of my first acquaintance with our mutually agreeable and gifted friend—and next week I shall enter into London society. There is a most respectable and highly recommended establishment near Red Lion Square where they will board me at an extremely low figure,"

When Ida Kettering went away that evening, she declared that she preferred the entertainment at Monplaisir to any she had ever witnessed ; and she thanked Mr. Hughes over and over again for having invited her. But Sally Stringer's mirth was dashed with fear. She was a woman of courageous spirit—albeit not quite so iron-nerved as she wished to appear, and as some of her friends supposed her to be—but she felt herself a mere weakling in the presence of Miss Jenks.

“ Well, now,” said honest Madame Martin, as she bustled about the dining-room, when the strangers were gone, and all her own inmates, except Hughes and his nephew, had retired for the night, locking up the remnants of the feast, and putting out candles, and so on, “ I'm sure it has *réussi* very well, sir ; and every one was most content. But, dear, dear, what a break-up for Monplaisir ! You'll be the greatest loss of all, sir. I don't say it to flatter you, but 'tis the general feeling. And then Mrs. Armour is going, and Miss Jenks, and the two new messieurs, who made themselves very pleasant, poor things, though, between you and me and the post, they're not much like *gentlemen*. But what would you ? One mustn't cry for the moon. Ah, well, Monsieur Claude and me, we shall be left to console each other, eh, Monsieur Claude ? ”

Claude made some jesting reply, and the good woman patted him encouragingly on the shoulder. She would have been willing enough to part with young Copley, for any value she set on his services ; but if it were a help or a kindness to Mr. Hughes to keep him, she would make the best of him as long as possible.

But after William Hughes had lain down to rest that night, Claude came softly into the room, and, setting down his candle so that it should not illuminate his face, said, hesitatingly, “ Uncle William, may I say a word to you ? ”

“ Yes, my boy, but don't be long about it, for I'm desperately sleepy.”

Claude seated himself beside the bed, but spoke not a word.

“ Well, Claude,” said his uncle.

“ Well, I'm afraid you'll be vexed.”

“ I hope not, Claude. Have you got into any scrape about money ? ”

“ No, no ! No scrape at all. But I—I don't think I can stay here when—when you're all gone. I thought I could stand it.

But to-night, when I began to picture how it would be, I—it seemed so beastly lonely—I couldn't—”

And suddenly dropping his face on his hands, he burst into tears.

“Claude!” cried William, starting up, and stretching out his hand to take the young man's in his own, “For God's sake, Claude, what is the matter? Are you ill?”

“No—yes; I think I *am* ill—or, at least, not ill, but nervous. I get so strangely hipped sometimes, down into my boots! And then again I'm all right. I believe it is purely nervous. This place is so depressing in damp weather. Uncle William, if you'll let me come home, I'll find some work to do in London. I don't care what it is. I will buckle to; indeed I will!”

Thus he pleaded, almost as a child might plead, all the while twisting and untwisting his handkerchief, damp with tears.

“Don't speak so, my boy, as if I were an ogre! And, for mercy's sake, don't fret in this way. Of course you shall come home if you are unhappy or unwell here. But I had no idea—When I first arrived you seemed to fancy—”

“Ah! that was because I was determined to do my best, and put a good face on the matter,” said Claude, instantly elated by those words, “Of course you shall come home,” and beginning to make out a good case for himself—partly for the satisfaction of his sensitive self-love, and partly that he might not be at too great a disadvantage with his uncle. “I knew you wished me to stay, and I made a strong effort. Even Barbara must allow that I did, although Barbara is always hard on me. But latterly I have been convinced that this climate is really injuring my health. And, after all, it can't be so difficult to find something for me to do in London. You know a good many people. Perhaps that fellow Coney could recommend me to some good house of business. He might not be sorry to introduce some one a little above the level of his usual associates. I suppose education goes for something, even in the city?”

“We will see. We will do our best,” said William, with patient gravity. “Go to sleep now, Claude; and remember our first thought must always be for Aunt Judith and your sister. Our first duty is to take what care we can of them.”

“Never fear!” answered Claude, confidently. “In fact, I dare

say my coming home may be the best thing that could happen for them ; for, of course, my salary will make a difference to the housekeeping, and I shall be at hand to look after Barbara when you are away. Good-night, Uncle William. Then will you speak to Madame Martin in the morning ? I'm sorry I made a fool of myself by breaking down. But it was purely nervous. Good-night."

"Good-night, Claude. God bless you !"

Then William Hughes, having watched his nephew out of the room, bent his head and shoulders a little with the action of one who feels a weight there. And so remained for a long time, sitting up in his bed in a deep meditation. But the articulate thought in his mind as he at length lay down to sleep was, "Poor lad ! He is far from strong, and he has been used to be petted. Oh, we shall manage very well. I'll take him back with me. And anyway"—breaking into a tender smile—"Aunt Judith will be happy. She loves him so, poor dear soul !"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT Sunday-evening visit of which Barbara wrote to her uncle was only the first of several others paid by Mr. Hofmann to the Hugheses' poor little dwelling.

As he walked up to the door on the following Sunday he was devising some pretext for this second call, since he could not always have a letter in praise of Mr. William Hughes in his pocket. But the moment he found himself in the ladies' presence he became conscious that excuses would be superfluous and impertinent, and he did not speak them. Why, indeed, should any excuses be needed for doing what was received so simply ?

"Fritz, thou art but a Philistine," said he to himself ; "why shouldst thou think it needful to account for spending an hour with these ladies in their neat little parlor—thou who hast so often suffered thyself to be jammed with a frivolous crowd of strangers on the staircase of some rich woman's house, as though that were the most rational and natural thing in the world ?

How the vulgar, stupid conventionalities cling to one like a burr!"

Whatever faults Fritz Hofmann's immediate family might lay to his charge, a too great servitude to conventionality would assuredly not be included among them. He was qualified to practise as an advocate, but he had done very little in that way. Then four or five years ago his father had urged him to accept an excellent bureaucratic post in Berlin, and he had done so; but neither to this line of life was he able to accommodate himself. The department to which he was attached was at that time under the immediate control of a statesman as notoriously intolerant of scrupulous subordinates as Napoleon Bonaparte was of ideologues. Fritz Hofmann's principles, as well as his theories, clashed at every turn with the duties required of him, and he gave up his post.

His family was much chagrined by this step, for the social status conferred by such an appointment as Fritz had held was an object of ambition among many of the higher *bourgeoisie*; and, besides, Fritz's reasons for resigning it were almost as objectionable as the resignation itself. But he was his own master. His father died about this time, and while his elder brother inherited and chose to carry on the flourishing commercial business of the house, Fritz was at liberty to do what he pleased with the handsome independence that fell to his share.

Fritz was of a philosophic turn of mind, and, having the means of living without work, he indulged himself in publishing one or two short pamphlets, containing various political and social speculations of a liberal cast, worked out with that admirable serenity of view which is imparted by the certainty of one's daily dinner. These, being anonymous, were held by his family to be harmless. But Fritz made no secret of his intention to engage in the writing of a substantial work which should bear his name, and which should be an effort in the direction of comparative sociology.

His mother had feared that the declaration of Fritz's doctrines and intentions might offend her wealthy bachelor brother, Arthur Maddison; for, unfortunately, Fritz spoke disdainfully of many things that Mr. Maddison had been accustomed all his life to value. This danger was, however, averted. Fritz refrained from discussing his theories with Mr. Maddison, for the simple reason

that he considered Mr. Maddison incapable of understanding them ; and thus no serious collision of opinion had ever taken place between them, and it was understood in the family that Fritz was to be his uncle's heir.

But it was well for the continuance of good relations between them that they did not see very much of each other. For Mr. Maddison was of a captious, arrogant temper, and loved to assert his importance by various petty acts of tyranny. Now, Fritz could be coaxed into doing many things, but morally coerced into none.

In one of her recent letters to him, Mrs. Hofmann, alluding to his frequent and eulogistic mentions of Miss Copley, ventured on a playfully worded warning to him to take care of his heart ; for this young teacher of music seemed to be a dangerously fascinating person. And Fritz, who had always been in the habit of writing fully and freely to his mother, answered these hints at some length.

"You know," he wrote, "that I am no Orlando Furioso. And, moreover, I will confess to you what I have never said to any one else: namely, that while I believe myself to be not wanting in affection, and to have my share of human passions, I am yet intimately convinced that the woman does not live for whom I could break my heart. I shall not marry a woman whom I do not love. But I should—if I know myself at all—speedily cease to love a woman who did not reciprocate my regard. And, moreover, I shall fall in love, if I do fall in love, *with my eyes wide open*. No doubt this is terribly prosaic, and unchivalrous, and anti-romantic, and so forth ; but it is the fact. Pray do not publish it, however ; for I believe such a confession would make me sadly unpopular with your sex, and might spoil all your chances of having that pearl of daughters-in-law whom I intend some day to present to you.

"As to Miss Copley—you know one of my heresies is that the knitting of stockings, although useful and laudable, should not absorb all the intellectual powers that women possess—I fully believe in quite as liberal proportion as *nous autres* ; and Miss Copley is a delightful and cultivated woman. (Please do not conjure up a picture of what used to be called in your young days a blue-stocking ! Believe me, the creature is as obsolete as the phrase.) I dare say I find her quick intelligence and varied information

all the more delightful because they are housed in a very graceful feminine person. Why not? But I am not the least bit in love with her, *Mütterchen!*

"No; if I am cherishing the first spark of a *grande passion* for any one, I think it is for the aunt, old Miss Judith Hughes, who is the quaintest and prettiest old lady ever seen out of a picture. Her stories of old times in Marypool amuse me extremely; and they are full of valuable details for the student of social history.

"I wonder that I have never heard Uncle Arthur mention this family. And I wonder still more that—as you told me in one of your letters—he should have allowed his engagement with Miss Olive Hughes to be broken off! I am told that her daughter is very like her. I fancy the aforesaid Miss Judith owes Uncle Arthur a little grudge to this day. Not that she ever says one word against him; she has too much dignity for that, I assure you! But if I chance to mention his name, her black eyes send out a flash of that Celtic fire she likes to boast of; and she always turns the conversation."

Now this letter by no means reassured Mrs. Hofmann. What mother would it have reassured? It was all very fine for Fritz to talk in that way about falling in love with his eyes open, and to set up for being so cool and philosophical; but what chance had a philosopher of nine-and-twenty against a pretty, clever, attractive girl who wanted to catch him? Besides, without thinking harshly of the young lady, was he acting quite fairly by her? Her Fritz was a man whom any girl might fall disinterestedly in love with. And that her Fritz, with all his advantages, should throw himself away on a little nobody who went out giving lessons by the hour, and whose family had been publicly ruined and disgraced to the knowledge of all Marypool, was a prospect too painful to contemplate.

If the Ketterings had been in town, Mrs. Hofmann would have written to Gertrude, and begged her to ascertain, if possible, the real state of the case. But they were all away in Switzerland. It was very provoking! In her anxiety—for the more she thought the more she was persuaded that *it was not safe* for Fritz to continue frequenting that house—Augusta Hofmann did a very injudicious thing—she confided her uneasiness to her brother Arthur, newly arrived in Hamburg on a visit to her.

The effect of her communication surprised her. She had never seen Arthur so angry. She knew nothing of the letter that Judith Hughes had written to him years ago. It was not one which he would have found it pleasant to exhibit; and he had kept as profound a silence about it as its writer had. But every word of that letter rankled in his memory, even after seven-and-twenty years. It had wounded him in the most sensitive point; it had pierced his self-love. It was not merely the explosion of an angry temper, and the cry of a woman sorely tried. The sting of the matter was, that it too keenly laid bare his own weaknesses, his own motives, and his own selfishness, and deprived him for a long time of the comfort of thinking himself a noble-minded young fellow who sacrificed his happiness to his principles.

He had grown tougher since those days, and cared less for the estimate of his fellow-creatures; but he had neither forgotten nor forgiven that letter.

At first he flew into a kind of snarling, smouldering rage; and threatened to write, commanding Fritz, on pain of his sovereign displeasure, immediately to cease all intimacy with a person whom he (Mr. Arthur Maddison) had the strongest reason to dislike and mistrust.

But Mrs. Hofmann knew her son well enough to be sure that no such high-handed proceeding would avail with Fritz; and she implored her brother not to adopt it. She even ventured—for she was a kind and a just woman at heart—to put in a plea for the Hugheses. “You know, Arthur,” she said, “that whatever might be the truth about her sister—I was married, and away from England, and I never knew the particulars—we always thought that poor little Olive was blameless.”

“Olive! Who is blaming Olive? Olive is dead. But that insolent old harridan—she is at the bottom of this mischief. Understand me, Augusta, I will keep no terms with Fritz if he persists in visiting at the house of Miss Judith Hughes.”

Then Mrs. Hofmann, being fluttered and frightened, did a second injudicious thing—she wrote to Fritz, begging him to break off his acquaintance with the Hughes family, and assigning as her reason that she had recently learned that Miss Judith Hughes had behaved very badly and violently to her brother years ago. She did

not, of course, attempt to dictate to her son as to his choice of friends. That would be absurd. And, indeed, he had always maintained a very high standard in his friendships. But still—since Fritz did not profess any special attachment for these people—might it not be well to draw off from them a little, until he knew what his Uncle Arthur might have to say about them? And she ended by an earnest assurance that she wrote quite by her own impulse, and even without her brother's knowledge.

“Yes, yes, *Mütterchen*,” said Fritz, perusing this letter with knitted brow. “You may be writing without his knowledge, but I can see his cloven hoof printed plain enough on the paper. It is just as well that he and I should join issue about the matter. He must be made to understand, sooner or later, that, not only I decline to sell my soul for the hope of his money, but I will not barter one passing thought, one lightest caprice of it. What lies he must have told to make my dear, good mother propose that I should insult these ladies by suddenly dropping their acquaintance! But she is jealous for me, poor, dear *Mütterchen*! She thinks Miss Copley, like every other unmarried woman who beholds my perfections, must be ready to compass heaven and earth to become my wife. Whereas I will undertake to swear—and I am neither a green boy nor a fool—that Miss Copley has never for one moment deigned to consider the subject; and that whom I marry, or whether I marry, is a matter of absolute indifference to her.”

Then the thought arose in his mind that it would be very agreeable to be an object of interest to Miss Copley. There was something so tender and sweet in her eyes when she looked at her old aunt! and, above all, how she lighted up at any appreciative mention of William Hughes! There was a warm glow to be seen sometimes in that alabaster lamp; and the man might be proud and happy who should be able to evoke it.

The very next afternoon, which was a Wednesday, Fritz went to Lady Lambton's, and sat watching Barbara as she patiently played through my lady's accompaniments, and the difference between the two women struck him in quite a new way.

He had once or twice thought it pretty to see them together—a sort of Rosalind and Celia contrast: Amy so full of color, vivacity, and dash! Barbara so dove-like and gentle!—but to-

day! Why, where could his eyes have been? Miss Copley's neighborhood made the other woman look positively vulgar—like a rouged and spangled figurante brought out suddenly into the daylight. And then Amy was so desperate a flirt, so unscrupulously greedy of admiration!

Poor Amy! It must be owned that the gentleman was rather hard upon her, seeing that he had done his full share of flirting with her ladyship; and had rather a gift that way, to say the truth. But he had no compunction on this score. Lady Lambton, he considered, was thoroughly well able to take care of herself; and there was no question of hearts on either side.

Could the case have been put to Amy in the Palace of Truth, she must have answered that there were other questions besides hearts—settlements, for instance—as to which a woman might suffer much bitterness of disappointment; and that, for her part, she suspected that poets and playwrights and novelists had greatly exaggerated the vulnerability of hearts in general.

But the case was not put to her either in the Palace of Truth or the less crystalline atmosphere of her daily life in London.

That Mr. Hofmann came to her house on Wednesday afternoon was sufficient proof that she attracted him. But although she liked him very much, and had even thought it possible that she might marry him, she had also thought it possible that she might marry better. She began to have her doubts as to whether Mr. Fritz would assist her to make that brilliant figure in the world as a woman of intellect which was the main object of her ambition. Fritz talked, indeed, about his high estimate of woman's mental gifts, and expressed contempt for a narrow and illiberal view of the sex. But Lady Lambton had observed that whenever she tried to talk to him about his philosophical studies, he either broke off into jest and banter, or resolutely changed the conversation.

And, moreover, the pleasure of astonishing him by her power of dramatic singing had scarcely equalled her anticipations. After all, Mr. Hofmann *was* very insensible to music. Ida Kettering had been right there. Neither had he entered into the description of her fluctuating feelings, as to the question of writing or not writing to Mr. Dalton, in a thoroughly sympathetic spirit. When she had asked him whether he would advise her to write,

he had merely replied, as we know, that he didn't know why she shouldn't; and this bald, uninteresting utterance was not due merely to the interruption of Miss Copley's entrance on that occasion, for when she consulted him a second time he made answer that he scarcely thought a letter from her would do much good; but, on the other hand, it was not likely to do any harm.

When she first spoke to him, Lady Lambton had, in fact, already written more than one rough draught of the letter to Dalton; and since then she had polished it into an effusion which she regarded with sincere admiration—even thinking that possibly Literature might be her vocation after all, if once that initial difficulty of not knowing what to say could be overcome; for here, with the subject ready-made to her hand, with what felicity of expression she had treated it!

But then it suddenly occurred to her that she did not know how to address her letter when it should be copied fair. Various possibilities of finding this out presented themselves to her mind, but were successively rejected. She was averse from applying to the Hopkinses direct; but at length a happy thought flashed on her: she remembered hearing Mr. Perikles Rhodonides speak at the Ketterings' dinner-table of some young clerks in his father's house of business who were intimate with Mortimer Hopkins, and entirely in his confidence about Mr. Christopher Dalton. Amy at once sat down and wrote a charming little note to Mr. Perikles Rhodonides, begging him to do her the favor of calling on her to speak a word on *business*.

Her imagination was very busy with this matter on the Wednesday when Fritz appeared in her drawing-room, and sat watching her and her *répétiteuse* with the thoughts that have been recorded; and when, at the end of the practising, he rose to take his leave, my lady gave him her hand with a look full of dreamy sweetness—she was mentally rehearsing a telling phrase with which she would presently explain the reason of her note to Mr. Rhodonides, but gave him no encouraging hint to remain.

So Fritz and Miss Copley left the house together.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THEIR *tête-à-tête* did not endure very long; for when they reached the Brompton Road, at no great distance from Lady Lambton's house, Barbara got into an omnibus that was to carry her towards her home; and Fritz, fearing that an offer to accompany her might be deemed intrusive, bade her farewell.

When the vehicle which carried her was out of sight, he hailed a hansom and drove to his lodgings in Jermyn Street, where he made some notes for the prefatory chapter to that work on sociology which he fully intended to write some day, but of which he was evolving the general plan in a large and leisurely fashion only possible to a man whom neither poverty, publisher, nor printer's devil has power to whip and spur; and then he steadily read German metaphysics until close upon dinner-time.

Finally, he rose, pushed away his book and papers, and looked at his watch with a certain air of triumph. "No bones broken!" he said to himself. "I *had* an odd sort of feeling when I saw that sweet, pale face looking at me from among the frowsy people in the omnibus; but I have been able to read all those pages of Hegel straight on end—in spite of what Schopenhauer calls the 'Hegel-jargon'—without once losing the thread. I wonder if any fellow is really and genuinely mastered at the beginning of a passion he can't resist. At the *beginning*, for if one once begins to slide—! And I wonder how it feels. But, *absit omen*, I don't think I want to know by experience."

Then, being fortified in his conviction that he should fall in love—if he fell in love—with his eyes wide open, he proceeded to consider whether he could better prove his unclouded power of judgment than by falling in love with Barbara Copley.

Barbara, meanwhile, bestowed none of her thoughts on Mr. Frederick Hofmann, unless it were indirectly and in connection with a little item of ill news which she had to carry to Aunt Judith. Lady Lambton had intimated to her that day that she

should not be able to continue the practisings (Lady Lambton never by any chance called them lessons) for which Miss Copley's services had been required. Barbara was not unprepared for the announcement, but it was depressing, nevertheless. Moreover, although Lady Lambton, at the beginning of the engagement between them, had spoken confidently of doing great things for her by her patronage and recommendation, nothing had come of it. Barbara must make an effort to find some other employment for the hours left vacant by Lady Lambton's dismissal of her. She had also lost—at any rate, for several months—her pupils Olga and Ida Kettering. And although all these losses put together amounted to but a very few pounds, yet the Hugheses were so poor that those few pounds represented no inconsiderable portion of their budget. And then the winter was close at hand—always a hard and costly season in such households as theirs. And, on all accounts, it behooved her to exert herself.

And besides all these considerations, there was a little cloud on Barbara's secret soul which she could speak of to no one.

Her uncle had repeated to her in one of his letters the news given by Mrs. Armour about Gilbert Hazel. And whenever she had thought of it since—and she thought of it very often when she was alone—there had come upon her a little dull, aching sensation of disappointment. He was in his own country again; had been here for half a year—"sailed for England six months ago" were the very words in her uncle's letter; she knew them accurately—and yet no letter, no message, no sign had come from him to the friends for whom he had professed such warm regard in the Kentish farm-house only two years ago. There had been nothing like a regular correspondence between him and William Hughes; but he had written to announce his arrival in India; and last Christmas he had sent them a card of greeting, and one or two Calcutta newspapers had come from him from time to time. He had spoken so confidentially with her uncle about his misfortunes and his prospects, the two men had found each other's companionship so congenial, despite the difference in their years, that it was surely no exaggerated pretension to expect that Hazel would naturally remember William Hughes, and naturally give him some account of the change in his way of life, and of his reasons for making it. Perhaps he had forgotten them. Or per-

haps she was foolish in expecting him to write. She was, she knew, inexperienced, and ignorant of the world. But when Uncle William came home, and spoke of him—Uncle William would surely speak of him—she would see in a moment, by looking in his face, she would hear in the very tone of his voice, if he were surprised or hurt by Mr. Hazel's silence.

When Barbara reached her own door, on arriving from Lady Lambton's, she discovered, with a start like one awakened out of a dream, that she had been meditating on this theme nearly all the way home, instead of arranging beforehand what comfortable words she could devise to console Aunt Judith for the news about Lady Lambton. For Aunt Judith, though brave and devoted in the face of great misfortunes, had a rather trying way of taking small ones; being apt to turn them, and trust them, and hold them up to the light, and examine them minutely in every direction, not with any remedial intentions, but solely, as it should seem, for the purpose of demonstrating how entirely they were past mending. However, Aunt Judith must be told, and Barbara, as she hung up the cloak and hat on the accustomed peg, prepared to put as cheerful a face on the matter as possible.

But to her surprise she found Aunt Judith so full of excitement about another subject as to have little attention to spare for anything else. As soon as she heard Barbara's footstep she called out eagerly, in her piping high notes,

"Barbara! Barbara! Come here. Why don't you come in? What are you fidgeting about for in the passage? Here is a letter from your uncle, with such news in it!"

"News!" echoed Barbara, suddenly standing still on the very threshold of the parlor.

"Yes, indeed; news about Claude."

"Oh!" murmured Barbara, in a low voice that sounded faint and far away. "News of my brother!"

"To be sure. Whom else are we likely to get news of? Or to care for news of—except, of course, William? But he keeps us informed about himself pretty regularly."

Then she told her niece that William's return was fixed for the following week, and that Claude was about to leave Madame Martin altogether, and was coming home with him, and handed her the letter to read.

Barbara's way of receiving this announcement provoked the old lady, who, first of all, scolded her for being so cool and indifferent at the prospect of seeing her brother again, and then proceeded to argue that Claude's return would be not only good for himself—as taking him out of a position far below his merits—but eventually very helpful to the family exchequer, since he was sure to find employment before long, and winding up, as usual, by exclaiming,

“And if the poor dear boy were to be at home idle for a few weeks, I'm sure we could very well afford to keep him!”

All this special pleading had, at all events, the effect of leaving her no excuse for fretting over Barbara's news when she recovered her equanimity sufficiently to listen to it. Nevertheless, she agreed with her grandniece that some effort must be made to fill up the vacant hours; and they both set themselves to consider whom they could apply to.

“Don't you think I might leave a card with Mrs. Green?” suggested Barbara. “She gives lessons in schools, and so on, and she is, I think, very friendly-minded towards us.”

Miss Hughes turned her head aside as if to avoid the sight of something distasteful, and said, with a grimace of discontent,

“Mrs. Green, child, is so common! Such a mere Cockney vulgarian! And I did hope you were emerging from all that sort of thing into a different connection altogether.” Then after a minute's silence she sighed, and said, “But if the woman can help you, you ought to work for her—for—all sakes. Duty is duty; and I'll write a line to Mrs. Budge”—Mrs. Budge was the baker's wife, who had withdrawn her two little girls from Miss Hughes's day school, in consequence of some fancied slight sustained by them from one of their schoolfellows—“and ask her to send back Jane and Caroline. Larcher declares she will jump at the chance of doing so; and as for giving way—of course it would be absurd to stand on one's dignity with such people as Mrs. Budge.”

Saturday afternoon was the time of greatest leisure for Barbara, and on Saturday afternoon she knew Mrs. Green to be usually disengaged also. Barbara therefore betook herself on the following Saturday to the house where Mrs. Green lived, intending at the same time to look into her uncle's studio, whereof Mrs. Green had been intrusted with the key, and to cause a fire to be lighted

in the little stove, and the place to be set in order against his return.

Mrs. Green was not at home, but the charwoman who opened the door to Barbara, and knew her by sight, assured her that the lady would be back very soon, and that meanwhile, if she wanted the key of her uncle Mr. Hughes's studio, it was hanging on a nail behind Mrs. Green's bedroom door, and could be produced "in a jiffy."

Accordingly, Barbara went into her uncle's studio, and, as it was now growing dusk, lighted a lamp that stood there and looked about her. The room was not prepared for such festivities as on the occasion of the memorable conversazione. There was always a few dropped in of a Saturday, said the charwoman, but they wouldn't use the studio at all, most likely.

"But I see you have filled the lamp, Mrs. Collins," said Barbara.

Mrs. Collins had a short, shapeless figure, muffled in a dirty woollen shawl tied behind, and a very long and wide canvas apron, also tied behind at the waist, and again at about the level of the calves of her legs, with little tape strings. She had a broad, freckled face, and large, protuberant, watery blue eyes, which she rolled about when she talked, with a play of feature so totally disconnected from the significance of what she was saying that one might have supposed her to be using somebody else's face, and to have not quite mastered the mechanism. The only other remarkable thing about her conversation was its being devoid of full stops, so that her listener's ear was fain to supply those marks of punctuation even as the eye of one who reads Arabic must take certain vowel sounds for granted.

"Oh, as to the lamp, Miss Copley, filling of it ain't no trouble, and it's as well to be ready; not that I should spare myself if it was, though honly a pore widow; and I rejice to hear of Mr. 'Ughes's coming back; for a pleasant way, and asking after your 'ealth, is doubtless treasure laid up on 'igh; and everybody can't command their pecun'ary circumstances to the extent of 'alf a crown as compensation for swearing at you, fit to make the roof fall down in judgment, if you only left the pail on the stairs one minute, whilst you went to fetch your dinner beer."

"Dear me!" said Barbara. "People shouldn't swear at you."

But don't you think leaving a pail on the stairs rather dangerous, Mrs. Collins?"

"Yes, miss; when the two-pair-front kicks it from top to bottom, raging and using the language of a heathen cannibal, I *do*."

Barbara averted further discussion of this point—and possibly, also, further revelations of the violent character of the two-pair-front, imperfectly mitigated by lucid intervals of half-crowns—by giving some directions about the cleaning of her uncle's studio.

She was standing with the lamp raised above her head, looking at some rough water-color studies pinned against the wall, and debating whether she had not better put them away in safety before Mrs. Collins should begin her cleaning operations, when she heard a voice very near her saying, "Charming thing that, indeed! I should say that for handling, and—and—what you may call really *handling*, you know, it is a gem."

Barbara, turning round as she set down the lamp on the table, found herself face to face with Mr. Mortimer Hopkins.

"Pray, pardon the intrusion, Miss Copley," he said, beginning to speak in a flurried manner—for Barbara's face and Barbara's bow, although both were perfectly gentle, had somehow apprised him that he had taken a liberty. "I hope you'll excuse me. The fact is, I—seeing the door open, and being on my way to Mrs. Green's, I—I do hope you'll forgive me!"

He said it so earnestly that Barbara at once reassured him by a kind smile and a word or two of greeting, telling him at the same time that she also was going to see Mrs. Green. She then desired Mrs. Collins to put out the lamp, and lock the door; and as they all three came out upon the landing together, they beheld Mrs. Green putting a latch-key into her own door.

"La!" she exclaimed. "I declare it's Miss Copley and Mr. Mortimer Hopkins! Why, who'd have thought of seeing you two here together? This *is* a pleasant surprise!"

Whereupon Mortimer, being apprehensive lest Miss Copley should be offended at this familiar coupling of their names together, hastened to explain that he had only just looked in to bring a message from Ted (Ted being his crony, young Green); that, seeing the door of Mr. Hughes's studio open, he had ventured to enter; that he hadn't been there a minute, and so on.

We are aware, on his own authority, that Mr. Mortimer Hop-

kins held Miss Copley to be "a perfect lady;" and that this constituted a powerful attraction in his eyes may be inferred from his confidences to Messieurs Green and Toller. Nevertheless, this same attribute of perfect ladyhood tended to make him uncomfortably nervous in Miss Copley's presence, and caused him to suffer many misgivings as to the propriety and good taste of his own behavior—points upon which he had very seldom been in doubt all his life before.

When they entered Mrs. Green's apartment, the good-natured little flower-painter bustled about to get ready a cup of tea, which Barbara at first declined, saying that she could not remain long, and that her visit was a purely selfish and business one.

"Selfish! I'm sure it ain't. Business it may be," said Mrs. Green. And she pressed Barbara so heartily to remove her cloak, and to drink just one cup of nice hot tea, which would be ready in a few minutes, that the girl felt it would hurt her to refuse any longer.

"Now that's friendly," said Mrs. Green. "We can talk a great deal more comfortably so. Miss Hughes won't be uneasy. She knows where you are, of course. And if you want an escort by and by—Tottenham Court Road not being exactly an agreeable locality for a young lady alone on a Saturday evening—I'm sure Mr. Mortimer Hopkins here will see you into a 'bus."

Mortimer, upon this, began to declare that nothing could make him more proud, more—he was about to say more blessed. But, fearing that might be a little too strong at the present stage of affairs, he substituted the miserably inadequate statement that, of course, he should be very happy if Miss Copley had no objections.

CHAPTER XXV.

PROMPTED by his newly awakened diffidence—it was by no means excessive, nor at all likely to quench his spirits disadvantageously—Mr. Mortimer Hopkins offered to withdraw for a quarter of an hour and leave the ladies alone, since Miss Copley said she had some business to speak of. But Barbara assured him that she did not at all wish that.

“Pray do not go away on my account,” she said. “The first thing I have to say to Mrs. Green I believe you know already: my uncle will return to London next week. And the second,” she added, with a little smile, “is of a nature that cannot be known. It is simply that I want more pupils, and have come to ask Mrs. Green to mention my name if she should have the opportunity of recommending a teacher. I teach music chiefly. But I also give lessons in French and Italian.”

She did not mention drawing—in which she was thoroughly proficient—lest she might interfere with Mrs. Green’s employment. But the sharp little woman noticed the omission and supplied it, observing that *her* teaching was confined to flower and fan painting.

“But, dear me, as to lessons in general, my dear Miss Copley—lessons are a drug in the market. Mind, I know very well that your lessons would be much superior to the common run; but what’s the good of that, when the people who want the lessons—at any rate, in *my* connection—don’t know it? They’re only sure of one thing—the price. And, as far as my experience goes, there’s no medium between charging too much and too little. When you rise to a guinea for half an hour, it don’t hurt you to give your lesson badly; but when you sink to eighteen pence, it don’t much help you to give it well. However, I don’t want to be a Job’s comforter; and, besides, you and Miss Hughes have your own experiences, of course. And you may depend on my doing all I can, Miss Copley, with pride and pleasure.”

Over the tea-table Mr. Mortimer Hopkins began to descant on the gentility and importance of his mother’s family connections, among whom he didn’t forget to include my Lady Lambton, and ended, of course, with a reference to the millionaire who, like a burning-glass, was attracting all these scattered rays into one focus. Mrs. Green—perhaps because she had heard it all before; perhaps because she declined to encourage vainglory; perhaps because even her slight hold on the hem of Art’s garment had given her strength to stand more upright before the Golden Calf than her neighbors, and to recognize the beauty and value of sundry things that are not appraised in the market-place; in a word, for these or some other reasons—gave him little encouragement, and manifested but a tepid interest in this talk.

But when the blissful moment arrived when he was privileged to escort Miss Copley through the crowds in Tottenham Court Road towards Oxford Street, he returned to the subject, believing it to be calculated to raise her estimate of himself and his position. He told her that his father had recently received letters from Mr. Coney, narrating how he had chanced to come across one of the two surviving daughters of Dr. Kirby, in Switzerland; and how this lady and her sister were really Mr. Christopher Dalton's nearest blood relations, coming in that respect even before himself (Mortimer), although, as he took care to point out, he had the advantage of being the grandson of Mrs. Dalton's favorite sister; while between Mr. Dalton and the Kirbys there had been a violent and never-healed quarrel.

Barbara, as she listened, thought how strange it was that circumstances of late should so often have brought to her ears the names of people connected with the old, sad story that had blighted her mother's family. But her main anxiety was lest her uncle should be distressed by any casual and unexpected word. She could not request this young man by her side not to mention Christopher Dalton in Mr. Hughes's hearing, being, of course, unable to give him any adequate reason for such a prohibition. And, moreover, an unskilful touch might set many painful chords jarring that now were silent. At length she thought she might venture to ask a simple question, put with as much indifference as she could assume, and she inquired of Mortimer whether he knew if her uncle had ever chanced to hear of the rich man who seemed to interest so many persons.

"Of Mr. Dalton, do you mean, Miss Copley? Oh, certainly. I remember one evening, at my own rooms, where I was having what it were, perhaps, presumptuous to term a *party*, rather let me say a slight symposium in costum—I recollect very well on that occasion that Coney started the subject. In fact, I believe that, next to the Swan, Mr. Dalton is Coney's *chief* subject. There's a sing'lar mixture of the practical and the poetical in Coney, Miss Copley. But I'm wrong to say 'a mixture,' for he keeps them separate, and applies them as occasion warrants—turn and turn about."

So, then, her uncle had heard some of the talk about this man, and knew that he was still living, and had grown wealthy. Well,

she was glad he had heard of it, for he was now safe from the shock of a surprise.

"Besides, Miss Copley," Mortimer went on, after a minute's reflection, "if Mr. Hughes hadn't heard of him before, he must now, for Mrs. Armour—that's the name of Dr. Kirby's daughter—is staying in the same boarding-house with him, and the boarders are all ringing with Mr. Dalton, if I may be allowed the expression; and Mrs. Armour is a great chum—friend of your brother's, Coney says. They haven't mentioned about it in their letters—Mr. Hughes or your brother?" he asked, glancing at her rather curiously.

"No."

"Oh!"

They had now reached Oxford Street, but, after waiting some time, were unable to find a place in any omnibus that would take Barbara towards her destination, although every vehicle rolling in the other direction had space and to spare. And Barbara at length decided, the evening being fair, to walk on westward. "Good-evening, and thank you," she said.

Mortimer lifted his hat and put out his hand, and drew it back as if he hadn't meant it when he saw she did not offer hers, and paused and stammered, and then spoke in a kind of sudden hurry, pouring out his words confusedly—as one may see a liquid, long vainly coaxed to flow from a narrow-necked vessel, all at once gurgle forth with perverse splutterings.

"If—you—wouldn't—mind, Miss Mopley—Copley, of course, I mean—*having* business in your direction, if you would allow me to continue alongside of you—but if in any way objectionable, I will cross over to the opposite side without a murmur!"

"I can, of course, have no objection, since you are coming this way in any case," answered Barbara, politely, but coldly.

(Mortimer observed afterwards to young Green that there was at times the marble grace of the patrician about Miss Copley which froze and yet enchanted, like Diana's kiss. But this was spoken in a glow of confidence and hot toddy.)

Mr. Mortimer Hopkins, however, presently offered so good an excuse for obtruding his company on her that Barbara repented of the slight snubbing conveyed in her manner.

To put the matter more briefly than he was able to do, Morti-

mer informed Miss Copley that he had long desired to extend his very limited knowledge of the French language, and especially to achieve facility in reading and writing it; that his particular friends, Messrs. Green and Toller, of the house of Rhodonides, Greek merchants of high standing, were desirous of doing the same for business purposes; and that hearing what she had said just now to Mrs. Green, he had conceived the hope that Miss Copley possibly might, as a very great favor, consent to allow them to form a class who could wait on her at her own house on Saturday evenings—that being their only free day—for the purpose of profiting by her instruction.

The proposal surprised Barbara somewhat, but after a moment's reflection she saw no reason to reject it off-hand. It would not be right to throw away the chance of any honest gains at such a time as this. And then, as she pondered, a bright thought occurred to her, and she turned so sweet and smiling a countenance on Mortimer that that enamoured youth declared afterwards that he could fain have knelt upon the flagstones beneath the nearest gas-lamp and gazed on it forever.

"Do you know, Mr. Hopkins," she said, "I think we may be able to do better for you and your friends than that."

Mortimer instantly stiffened his neck—literally and metaphorically—and declared that it would be impossible to do better, and that, at all events, he didn't want to do better.

"Oh, but pray wait until you have heard what I have to say. I could not, in any case, decide such a question without consulting my aunt, Miss Hughes—"

"Certainly not!" cried Mortimer, eagerly catching her up. "My aim and object was *to* lay the proposition before Miss Hughes, and I thought that possibly she might waive etiquette—being a business transaction, you know—and allow me to call and speak to her."

"By all means," answered Barbara, with alacrity. "Indeed, if you are not bound on some other errand, as I think you told me, you might come to our house now, and I would present you to my grand-aunt at once."

"Oh, my errand may—may wait," replied Mortimer, checking himself in the consignment of his (wholly fictitious) errand to "the deuce."

Now the candid reader must understand that the whole scheme and proposal of the French class had emanated from Mr. Mortimer Hopkins's unassisted brain. He was its sole author, and the unconscious Green and Toller had no more intention of asking Miss Copley to give them lessons in French than of asking her to teach them English—which latter instruction would, perhaps, have profited them more. But Mortimer cared not a straw about that. He had for some time been cudgelling his brains for the means of gaining an entrance into the Hugheses' house, and Barbara's application to Mrs. Green that evening had suddenly inspired him with this invention. He perceived that he would have much more chance of gaining a hearing, if he made the proposal for a class instead of single lessons. It would always be easy to say afterwards that his friends found they couldn't spare the time, or that they had changed their minds, or—in fact, anything! He was not at all solicitous as to the figure they would cut in Miss Copley's eyes. Besides, all was fair in love and war.

When the little house in the dingy side-street was reached, and Larcher had opened the door and surveyed Miss Barbara's companion with a cool and critical eye, Barbara asked the young man to be so kind as to wait for a few minutes, while she announced his visit to her grand-aunt; and he was ushered by Larcher into the back parlor, and left alone there with a tallow candle.

The back parlor was Miss Judith's schoolroom; and although perfectly neat and clean, like all the rest of the house, could scarcely be called luxurious or cheerful; especially without a fire, and seen by that feeble illumination. But Mortimer Hopkins, sitting astride a school bench, was not at that moment much accessible to external influences. His feelings fluctuated between exultation at finding himself actually beneath the roof of Miss Copley's house, and wonder as to what his governor would say to it all, when he knew. But, on this score, Mortimer was not very uneasy. He had been a petted and indulged son all his life; and it was not very likely—so he argued—that his governor should thwart him in what he had so set his heart upon. He only wished he had as little misgiving about the consent of somebody else! Not that he was disposed to underrate his own advantages, which appeared to him in the most favorable light directly he

thought them over quietly by himself; but which somehow had a tendency to grow dim in Miss Copley's presence—like a coal fire quenched by sunbeams.

He was not left long in solitude. Judith Hughes was not one of those old ladies who require to be elaborately prepared for the reception of everything new and unexpected. Her wits were alert, and her vivacity equal to most occasions.

"Come in, sir," said Miss Hughes, graciously, but condescendingly, when the young man appeared at the parlor door, summoned thither by Larcher. And Mortimer, with his most elegant bow, took the seat to which the old lady pointed.

"My niece, Miss Copley, has informed me of the object of your coming," said Miss Hughes, "so we need not detain you or waste time by going over *that*."

Mortimer tried to murmur that he had plenty of time, and to beg that she wouldn't talk about detaining him, for he was only too happy. But the old lady waved her hand cavalierly, and went on—Mortimer meanwhile glancing furtively at Barbara, who had laid aside her hat and cloak, and was placidly engaged on some needlework at the opposite side of the table.

"I am not indisposed to consider your proposal," proceeded Miss Hughes. "We have never had any adult classes at home; but that is no reason why we never should have."

"I'm sure," said Mortimer, determined not to be repressed this time, "that Miss Copley's accomplishments will meet with the highest appreciation. And as to the figure, if you, madam, will be kind enough to name it, I believe you will find no difficulties made on that score."

"Miss Copley's accomplishments need not enter into the matter," returned Aunt Judith. "I am not sure that such an engagement would quite suit Miss Copley, although she is equally obliged to you for offering it. But we needn't discuss it; for what I would propose—it is my niece's suggestion, in fact, but I entirely endorse it—is that the class should be taken by my grandnephew, Mr. Claude Copley, who is about immediately to return from abroad, who is an excellent French scholar, and who has had the advantage of speaking the language familiarly during several months past."

Mortimer Hopkins was so completely taken aback by this

proposal, and so profoundly dismayed by it, that he lost all presence of mind, and could only sit staring blankly at Miss Judith Hughes with a very lack-lustre and rueful visage indeed.

The ladies seemed infected by his embarrassment; for they, too, remained quite silent, looking at him—as he felt, rather than said—with considerable surprise.

At length, stammering out some incoherent words of thanks and excuse, and the necessity of consulting Green and Toller, and his own regretful misgivings that Green and Toller were not to be entirely relied on to carry out any plan of the kind steadily, being, in fact, unstable and infirm of purpose to a degree which was a source of constant distress to their best friends—with these and other wandering phrases, and a promise that Miss Hughes should hear from him, and some lame and ineffectual attempt to recover his accustomed ease of manner, Mr. Mortimer Hopkins made his bow, and took his leave.

But as he walked away from the house and collected his thoughts a little, he perceived that, under the circumstances of the case, to decline taking lessons from Claude Copley would probably close his acquaintance with the Hugheses altogether; while to accept the offer would give him opportunities of visiting the house, of ingratiating himself with the family, of seeing Barbara. In fact, the personal acquaintance of the young man Claude might afford him the very chance he had coveted, of attaining a familiar footing with Barbara's friends and family. What a fool he had been not to see it! No matter; the thing was not irrevocable. He would write a polite epistle to Miss Hughes the next day, explaining that he had found himself obliged to cast Green and Toller to the winds (so far as making any arrangements for taking lessons in common was concerned); and that being now free to enter into an agreement for himself alone, he anxiously awaited the arrival of Mr. Claude, and hoped to benefit by his instructions in the French language forthwith.

“What a very queer young man, Barbara!” exclaimed Aunt Judith when the hall-door had shut behind him.

“Of course he is vulgar, Aunt Judith, but—”

“Vulgar! Oh, it isn't his vulgarity which makes him remarkable. But he seems so fitful. And what in the world made him

sit most of the time with his head on one side, like a wax dummy in a barber's shop?"

Mortimer had been trying the effect on Miss Copley of his Early Greek profile.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. KETTERING having found agreeable society at Montreux—where she had established herself in a villa—and Ida seeming to prosper and gain strength, it was decided that the two should still remain in Switzerland for a while, and that Miss Stringer should take Olga home and remain to take care of her and keep house for Mr. Kettering until his wife's return to England.

Olga preferred to go home at once. The gayeties of the London winter season were at hand, and, moreover, Olga was rather aggressively English, and declared that she was sick of the Russians on Lake Lemman, couldn't stand the French, and found the Germans whom she met there very inferior specimens.

"I hardly think, Olga, that prize specimens of any nation are selected for exportation," remarked Miss Stringer.

"I'm sure some very nice people travel, Sally," remonstrated Mrs. Kettering, who was nothing if not matter-of-fact.

"I didn't mean that the best sort don't go abroad; I meant that they don't stay abroad. People should travel, like fine madeira, to improve their flavor for home consumption."

"I suppose Mrs. Armour will manage to hook herself on to you and Olga for the journey to England," said Ida, in whose mind the foregoing remarks had awakened a lively recollection of the Pension Monplaisir.

"She'll find the surface rather hard and slippery for her hook," returned Miss Stringer, with her most resolute horizontal tightening of the lips.

But here Mrs. Kettering interposed to say that she saw no objection to Mrs. Armour's travelling home in their company; that Mrs. Armour was a very nice person; and that she was sure Philip would wish every civility to be shown to the widow of his old friend.

Sally made no audible reply to this; but she observed within herself that Philip had not yet seen the widow of his old friend, and that, as a general rule, the result of showing civil attentions to a crocodile was that he ate you up. Nevertheless, Mrs. Kettering's words were not without effect on Sally. She was attached to her cousin Philip and to all the family, and would not willingly hurt or vex them. As for them, they were all fond of Sally in their various ways, and no more thought of resenting her pungent speeches than they would think of objecting to ginger because it is hot in the mouth.

So Mrs. Armour accompanied Miss Stringer and Miss Kettering on their journey home as far as the Victoria Railway Station, and received not one snub or sarcasm from the former on the way. But when Mrs. Armour's cab was jolting in one direction and Mrs. Kettering's luxurious carriage rolling in another, Miss Stringer gave a sigh of relief, and informed Olga that she now knew how a dog felt when his muzzle was taken off.

"I knew my only chance of not quarrelling with her was to hold my tongue as rigidly as human nature could endure. I scarcely even ventured on yes or no. And my head has been nodded and shaken until the bones of my neck ache. But there's one consolation: I think I puzzled her."

As in truth she had.

The travellers had not left Switzerland four-and-twenty hours before Mrs. Kettering received a letter from her sister-in-law in Hamburg. Mrs. Hofmann, more than ever alarmed by the tone of Fritz's reply to her last letter, wrote to Gertrude Kettering, begging that, although she herself was absent from London, she would cause some inquiries to be made confidentially as to Fritz's relations with the Hughes family; hinting her fears that he was becoming entangled with Miss Copley, and setting forth that such an alliance—besides being in any case quite beneath Fritz—would be absolutely the ruin of her prospects, inasmuch as her brother Arthur set his face against it, and threatened direful things at the most distant allusion to it.

"Nor can you," wrote Mrs. Hofmann, "much wonder at Arthur's feeling." (She had wondered at it a good deal herself, as being strangely exaggerated in its intensity; but that is not material.) "When one remembers the severe sacrifice Arthur

made to filial feeling, and to the unblemished reputation and high standing of our parents in Marypool, one understands that he should be intolerant of anything like selfish weakness in Fritz. And would it not be too cruel to have all the same misery repeated over again in the younger generation? But I trust my dear boy is not wholly infatuated. I wish I knew what was best to do. Do you think Philip would mind speaking to him on the subject?"

Now Mrs. Kettering, having only the haziest knowledge of Mrs. Arthur Maddison's love-story, and no interest whatever in it—they had only met once, and had not liked each other—and being altogether too lazy to set herself to unravel the matter, or to write at length about it, simply put Mrs. Hofmann's letter into an envelope and sent it off to Sally Stringer. She was by no means indifferent to Fritz's interests. She loved her nephew almost as well as she loved her own children. But the whole of Mrs. Hofmann's statement seemed to her so incoherent and improbable that it made but small impression on her.

She enclosed with it a few lines of her own to Miss Stringer, which ran thus:

"I cannot imagine what story Augusta has got hold of; nor what she means by writing in that way about Miss Copley. Fritz was *aux petits soins* with Lady Lambton when I saw him last, and I thought that might do very well, only my girls don't much like her. As to Philip's interfering, *you* know Philip well enough to be sure that nothing would induce him to do such a thing. Besides, Fritz is not a boy to be lectured. Will you just look into the matter, my dear Sally? I know I can rely on you so thoroughly. Of course, if I were on the spot, I would not give you this trouble; and, perhaps, it would be as well for Olga not to resume her pianoforte lessons with Miss Copley, as she thought of doing. I am sorry for Augusta, who is evidently worrying herself, though I think it is all nonsense, and so we had better keep clear of Miss Copley for the present."

The receipt of these lines and the letter enclosed with them set Sally Stringer pondering earnestly. Her mind was as active as Mrs. Kettering's was lazy, and she had naturally more knowledge of the past events alluded to in Mrs. Hofmann's letter than

Gertrude, who, when they happened, was a school-girl in Hamburg, with two thick plaits of hair hanging down her back, and no foreknowledge in her pretty blond head that she was destined to marry an Englishman and become distantly connected with the Maddisons of Marypool.

Sally sat with the letter laid on her little leather desk before her, her elbows on the table, and her hands pressed against her temples, for a long time. Then, when she changed her attitude, she shut the letters in her desk with a decisive snap of that lock, and said to herself,

“There can’t be a doubt about it. It’s the same family; and the catastrophe which broke off the girl’s marriage and did so much more terrible mischief was brought about by that precious rascal, my kinsman, Christopher Dalton. The girl’s name was Hughes, to be sure! It comes back to me now. I remember reading the inquest on poor Mr. David Hughes in the paper, which I purloined from papa’s room for the purpose. Dear me, I haven’t thought of all that for a good deal more than twenty years. And how very extraordinary that that man Maddison’s nephew and the daughter of—”

But here the rapid flow of Miss Stringer’s thoughts was checked. “No,” she said to herself, “that part of the story is more doubtful.”

She considered it very likely that Mrs. Hofmann had jumped to a wrong conclusion about her son and Miss Copley. Mothers of only sons were apt to make such mistakes. But what was *not* doubtful to Sally’s perspicacity was that if, as her letter seemed to imply, she had written explicitly, warning her son not to fall in love with Miss Copley, she had done about the most foolish thing possible under the circumstances.

And then there crept into Miss Stringer’s mind another thought, or, rather, peeped into it at first, and, being driven hastily away, returned again and again with ever-increasing confidence, until, at length, it boldly entered—though without the least encouragement—and settled itself as though it could never more be dislodged. This thought was that possibly it might not be so fatal and disastrous a thing, after all, if Fritz did marry Barbara Copley!

However, she made up her mind to pupil Mrs. Kettering’s trust

as well as she could, and to watch Fritz by the light of this unexpected communication.

Opportunities of observing him were not wanting, for Fritz was a frequent and welcome guest at Mr. Kettering's house, and had a standing invitation to drive there whenever it should please him to drop in. It pleased him to do so within a few days of Miss Stringer's and Olga's return. They were all very glad to see him; and the little party made a very cheerful and friendly quartet at the dinner-table.

Miss Stringer, as she chatted, watched Fritz. She watched him when mention was made of Mr. William Hughes at Vevey; and Fritz said yes; he was sure from a work of his he had seen, that Mr. Hughes was an artist of a rare and delicate talent; and that he had not met him yet, but hoped to have the pleasure of doing so when Mr. Hughes came back. And nothing franker, easier, or more unembarrassed than was Fritz's manner of saying this could be imagined. She watched him when Olga praised Mr. Hughes's accomplishments, and remarked casually that he had been his niece's chief instructor in music and language; and Fritz said no doubt she could not have had a better; and troubled Mr. Kettering for some more jugged hare with perfect self-possession.

Then Miss Sally, being heartily tired of lying in ambush, which was foreign to her temperament, advanced boldly into the open, and as soon as the servants had left the room she demanded point-blank whether Fritz had seen Miss Copley lately. To which question he replied cheerfully, oh yes, certainly; he had seen Miss Copley, twice at her own house, and frequently at Lady Lambton's.

"Oh! At Lady Lambton's!" echoed Sally, with an odd sensation of displeasure and disappointment.

"Ay, ay, at Lady Lambton's, eh?" said Mr. Kettering, with the soft voice and suave manner which he cultivated so successfully. "You had better take care, Fritz, how you hover near that effulgence. You may singe your wings."

"My dear Uncle Philip," answered Fritz, filling his wine-glass. "My wings must have been, not singed, but scorched—shrivelled up altogether, if they had been made of inflammable stuff. But they evidently are not. The result proves it. The alternative

would be that the effulgence has no power to burn, which is, of course, a quite inadmissible hypothesis."

Sally looked at him with a brightening face, and the tension of her mouth relaxed.

"Don't be a humbug, Fritz," said Olga, impatiently. "All that stuff about wings and flame is *gammon*—"

"My dear Olga!" interrupted Mr. Kettering, raising his head a little, and his eyebrows a great deal.

"I beg your pardon, papa. I know that is slang; but I don't think there's an elegant word to express what I mean."

"I would advise you then, Olga, not to mean anything that you cannot express with elegance."

"*Goodness*, papa!" exclaimed Olga, with a face of almost tragic protest against so intolerable a limitation of human intercourse.

Miss Stringer, at this point, rose to withdraw, and Olga, of course, followed her example. But as she did so, she said, "It's no use your pretending, Fritz. Why, all last season you flirted with Lady Lambton no end!"

Fritz stood, holding the door open for the ladies, and as his cousin passed him he said, demurely, and dropping his voice a little, "not quite *no end*, Olga."

"Has the end come then?" asked Olga, eagerly. But her father, bidding her run away and not keep the door open, she was obliged to depart without any explicit reply.

But she was in high spirits when she was in the drawing-room alone with Sally; and, after having rattled through a brilliant waltz on the piano, she whirled round the room on the point of her toes very lightly and gayly.

Fritz, not lingering long down-stairs, soon joined them, and reported that Mr. Kettering had retired to his study to look over some papers, but would appear presently for tea.

"Yes; Philip likes a little nap after his dinner," said Miss Stringer. "I wonder why people are so often ashamed of going to sleep. It's the most innocent thing a great many men do in the whole course of the twenty-four hours—but, perhaps, *that's* why."

"How much your playing has improved, Olga!" said her cousin.

Olga made him a saucy little courtesy.

"Oh, of course," he went on, "you think me a complete ignoramus about music. But I know as well as anybody when dance-music is played with spirit and good rhythm; and I *can* waltz. I am not so utterly deprived of what Lady Lambton calls the birthright of a German as not to be able to waltz."

"I admire modest confidence," returned Olga, "but can you do the new step?"

"Can *you* do the old step?"

"You bet!—Don't tell papa!"

"There's nothing like practical proof. Miss Stringer, just play us the dear old 'Blue Danube,' like an angel!" And Miss Stringer complying, the two cousins were soon engaged in demonstrating their proficiency in the art and mystery of every variety of waltz-step—slow, fast, gliding, hopping, *trois-temps*, and *deux-temps*, until Miss Stringer struck, and refused to play any longer.

"A thousand thanks, Miss Stringer! That was capital. *Du, Olga, du tanzest wie eine—Deutsche!*" said Fritz. And Olga, laughing and panting, raced off to rearrange her dishevelled hair before papa should appear for tea.

"Well? If this is a specimen of your modern love-lorn swain, all I can say is that *nous avons changé tout cela!*" remarked Miss Sally to herself, triumphantly. She was persuaded that Mrs. Hofmann had found a mare's-nest; and her resolve to fulfil Mrs. Kettering's behest by "looking into the matter" was rendered all the easier because she now had no fear of what she should find when she did look.

To this end she purposed taking a step that she had already contemplated quite apart from any reference to Fritz. She made up her mind to call on Miss Hughes and her niece. If any excuse were needed for this step, it would be furnished by the acquaintance and liking which had arisen between herself and William Hughes. Mindful, however, of Mrs. Kettering's hint, she would not take Olga with her for the present.

"But I shall tell the young man beforehand what I am going to do," she said to herself. "After his mother's letter he might suspect me of springing a mine on him, and the Guy-Fawkes-and-dark-lantern business is really not at all in my line."

So Miss Stringer called Fritz across the room to her, and began without preamble:



“Miss Stringer, just play us the dear old “Blue Danube,” like an angel!”



"We were talking just now about Mr. William Hughes. I mean to call on his aunt. You know these ladies—Miss Copley I know slightly myself from having seen her here—I suppose they would have no objection to my visit?"

"I should think it would gratify them very much," answered Fritz, heartily. "And, if you will allow me to say so, I think it would also gratify you. It is a very unusual and interesting little household—combining poverty and dignity, simplicity and culture, in a singular degree."

"Hah!" returned Miss Stringer, with a short nod, "that sounds very symmetrical and satisfactory. But I'll tell you what has occurred to me, and I want to ask your opinion about it. Do you think it possible—for it seems you are on pretty good terms with them—that this old lady might object to any advances on my part because I am Chris Dalton's kinswoman? Perhaps she doesn't know the fact; but she's sure to know it sooner or later—else wherefore can jays scream and magpies chatter?"

"Why should it matter to Miss Judith Hughes that you are connected with Mr. Dalton?" asked Fritz.

"Well, of course, it would be unreasonable to make us all—even to a first-cousin once removed—answerable for his iniquities. But then people who have been so deeply and cruelly injured may shrink from a touch that wouldn't hurt you and me."

Then Fritz made it plain, to his hearer's great surprise, that although he knew something of Arthur Maddison's former relations with the Hughes family, he was quite ignorant of all the details; and so it fell to Sally Stringer to narrate to him the sorrowful history of Winifred Hughes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALL that Sally Stringer told him drew Fritz nearer and nearer to the conclusion that the best use he could make of his free will in that matter of falling in love would be to exert it for the purpose of marrying Miss Barbara Copley. Whether Fritz's philosophical self-analysis led him to right or wrong conclusions about

himself, it was certain that there were some convictions which he arrived at without any self-analysis at all, and which he held with generous and unreasoning ardor.

One of these was that the Maddison family owed some reparation to Olive Hughes; and that, since Olive Hughes was personally removed from the need or the possibility of such reparation, they ought to make what amends they could to Olive's children. Fritz scouted the idea of admiring his Uncle Arthur's self-sacrifice and high principle. "He was just a selfish coward and a miserable slave to their English fetich, Mrs. Grundy," said Fritz, with the most unphilosophical heat and haste.

His mind was so full of the story, and Miss Stringer, in her loyalty to his mother, received all he had to say upon it with such inflexibly closed lips, that Fritz was moved to open his heart on the subject to his cousin Olga.

Olga listened with warm sympathy and eager interest; sharing her cousin's views about the hard fate of that poor Miss Olive Hughes, and the sorry figure made by Mr. Arthur Maddison; and, in her ardor, she announced to Sally Stringer that she had got papa's leave to resume her pianoforte lessons from Miss Copley, and, being determined to work hard, meant to have at least three lessons a week.

Great were her surprise and disappointment to be told that Sally could not consent to this arrangement in the absence of Mrs. Kettering, who had, in fact, written from Switzerland to say that she did not wish it.

"Mamma has written to say so!" exclaimed Olga, in amazement. "But, Sally, I only thought of it myself yesterday!"

Miss Stringer made an impatient movement of the head.

"I can't help that, Olga," she answered. "I've got to obey orders. 'Obey orders and break owners,' as they say in the merchant service. And," she added to herself, "I shouldn't so much mind breaking owners if I hadn't to break my own head with all these mysteries and botherations."

Olga appealed to her father against the prohibition to employ Miss Copley; Mr. Kettering mentioned the matter at the breakfast-table, and finally Sally demanded a private interview with her cousin, laid his wife's and Mrs. Hofmann's letters before him, and left him to decide as he thought fit.

"I will now resign the dark lantern into your charge, Philip, if you please. Likewise the fagots. As for the gunpowder, that appears to be pretty generally diffused throughout the atmosphere," said Miss Stringer.

Mr. Kettering was more displeased at the idea that his wife's nephew could contemplate marrying a girl in Miss Copley's social position than might have been expected from the liberal theories he was fond of enunciating.

"I cannot believe that Fritz will be so foolish," he said, over and over again, holding Mrs. Hofmann's letter in his hand, and glancing at it from time to time with an air of great vexation. "I cannot believe that a young man of his distinguished intelligence will do anything so disastrous."

And Sally's remark that it would, indeed, be an absurdly leveling and democratic proceeding, seeing that Miss Copley had nothing to recommend her but her good looks, good principles, and a good education, did not appear to put him into a better humor.

"My dear Sally," he said, with immense and even severe politeness, "you will excuse me for observing that that sort of irony is misplaced here. This is a case for the exercise of common-sense—simply and solely common-sense."

"Certainly. The commonest of the common!" assented the irrepressible Sally.

Mr. Kettering supported his wife's objection to having Miss Copley in their house just now, and in communicating his decision to Olga he thought fit to explain his reasons for it—he had great confidence in Olga's good sense.

Whatever were Olga's thoughts as to this revelation, she kept them to herself, and refrained from saying a word more to her father on the subject of the pianoforte lessons. But the next time Fritz began a confidential chat with her—it was a gray, cold November day, and the cousins were taking a brisk walk round the Regent's Park—she said in her favorite phraseology, but with a tremor of feeling in her voice,

"I think Miss Copley is no end of a brick, Fritz; the kind of girl any man might be proud of being spoons on."

Fritz pressed the hand on his arm fraternally, and, looking round at her with a cordial answer on his lips, said, suddenly, "What is the matter with your eyes, Olga?"

“With my eyes? Oh, they—they smart a little. I think it must be the frost in the air.”

“You do not know how happy it makes me, Olga, to find you so sound-hearted on this point. I detest from my soul the kind of cant that my Uncle Arthur, as well as a good many other people, indulges in, mouthing out the Lord’s Prayer while they are on their knees before Mammon. If a man tells me honestly that he thinks money and the world are the things best worth living for, at any rate he is sincere according to his lights. But to be bit-
ted and bridled by Mrs. Grundy, and at the same time to boast that you are prancing over the prairie at your own free will, is despicable humbug; and I confess that it—it—”

“It raises your dander. Yes; I know.”

“But you are above all that, Olga. It gives me a glow of delight to know it. You and I have always been good friends, but we shall be better friends than ever now, dear; sha’n’t we?”

“Everything on the square. All serene, Fritz. I—I do think there is a dreadful sting in the air!” And Olga drew out her pocket-handkerchief, and blew her pretty little nose vehemently.

Fritz did not make any explicit confidence about Miss Copley to his cousin; finding, indeed, that he had nothing to say which he could well put into words. But he resolved to call at the Hugheses’ house on the following Sunday, for the purpose of making William’s acquaintance, since he assumed that the latter must have returned from Switzerland by this time.

William Hughes and his nephew had, in fact, been at home nearly a fortnight already. And the family was falling into a routine of life which necessarily differed in several particulars from the life they had been leading before. Claude’s presence made changes; and to none of the party—not even to Aunt Judith, after the first flush of delight in seeing her boy at home again—were the changes pleasant ones.

For the first few days after his return to England his health seemed to be better, and his spirits brighter than at Vevey; and his uncle was happy to observe this improvement. But it proved to be but brief. Although he had complained bitterly of his life at the Pension Monplaisir, he had not been long at home before he began to regret it. He missed the movement, the amusement of seeing new faces, the excitement of Mrs. Armour’s society. In

his uncle's presence he exercised some self-control; but with the women alone he soon grew peevish, exacting, and irritable.

Moreover, the confident expectations of finding employment which Claude had expressed in Vevey did not appear to animate him in London. At all events, they did not animate him to make any energetic efforts in that direction; and when he had answered half a dozen advertisements without avail, and taken a long journey on the top of an omnibus to obtain an interview with a gentleman who was sorry to have troubled him, but had engaged a secretary last week and forgotten to countermand the newspaper announcement that he wanted one, Claude appeared to think he had done all that could be expected of him.

It was then that Aunt Judith brought forward the proposal of Mortimer Hopkins. She had argued at first that it was scarcely worth while to do so, since Claude would be sure to find something better very shortly. But as the days went by, and Claude, while adding considerably to the household bills, made no addition whatever to the means of meeting them, the old lady could not reconcile it with her conscience to keep back the proposal any longer.

She mentioned it to William as they sat at breakfast one morning. Barbara and William breakfasted early, in order to go out betimes to work; and Aunt Judith arose by candle-light all through the winter as bravely and briskly as though the seventy years that had whitened her hair had fallen light as snowflakes.

"Is Claude not down yet?" asked William, contracting his brows a little.

"He sleeps so heavily in the mornings! Don't be angry with him, William!" pleaded Judith, looking up, anxiously.

William, for all answer, patted his aunt's brown little hand and settled a cushion under her feet.

"Oh, *I'm* all right, my dear," she said, quickly, answering unspoken words. "It don't hurt *me* to get up. Old people need less sleep than young ones. I wanted just to tell you of an idea that has been broached of Claude's giving French lessons—only while he is waiting for something better, you know."

Then she told him of Mr. Mortimer Hopkins's visit; and mentioned that she had had a letter from him since. "Here it is. I haven't answered it yet. I waited to—to consult you, of course, William."

William was greatly astonished by this step on the part of Mortimer Hopkins; but as he read the letter, he thought he perceived an intelligible motive for applying to his family rather than to any well-known teacher of French. Mortimer plainly expressed his hope and expectation that the lessons would be cheap. He had a considerable turn—inherited, no doubt, from the paternal side of the house—for making a bargain, and getting the most that could be got for his money. And having been—as he mentally put it—jockeyed into taking lessons from Barbara's brother, he was anxious not to be jockeyed also in the price.

William, without hesitation, recommended that young Hopkins's proposal should be accepted. It might lead to more pupils, and to Claude's earning his bread altogether by teaching. But Claude, when he was told of the contemplated arrangement, made a very wry face. Aunt Judith privately urged him to make no objection. "The young man will come here to you. It will not give you much trouble, and, although odd in his manner—"

"The fellow is a cad, of course!" interrupted Claude, loftily.

"Well, but he is quite respectful—quite knows his place. And it will give you a little pocket-money, my dear. And, in any case, it will be but for a time, you know."

So the matter was settled by Aunt Judith's writing a polite note to Mortimer Hopkins, naming a very low price for the lessons; and fixing the following Saturday evening for the first of them.

Meanwhile, Barbara waited and hoped that her uncle would volunteer some mention of Hazel. Day after day passed, and he made none. In the morning, when he rose from breakfast, she thought, "He will speak to-morrow." But he said nothing. He little guessed what was in Barbara's mind when she looked at him so wistfully. He little guessed how large a share of her thoughts Hazel had occupied since they parted at Thornfield Farm. He had written to Barbara the news given by Mrs. Armour, because it was his habit to write everything of interest in his daily life to Barbara. But he had reflected afterwards that it was useless to call back those Thornfield days to her memory, since it was not very likely that Hazel should come again within their ken.

It was not to be desired, for Hazel's peace of mind, that he

should be near Barbara until time should have brought him consolation or forgetfulness; and he did not believe that Hazel's was a nature to which either could come quickly. But he had now, it seemed, new occupations—work to do. And work, as William Hughes knew by experience, is, if not a cure, at least an anæsthetic, for many heartaches. Since Hazel had made no sign, William understood that he feared to put himself again within reach of Barbara's influence, lest he should be tempted out of his self-sacrificing silence.

It did sometimes occur to William when he mused upon the subject—and it was often in his mind—that perhaps Hazel held an exaggerated idea of the means he ought to possess before he could venture to woo Barbara to be his wife. Things surely must have improved with him, or he would not have given up his profession. But William Hughes would no more have hinted a thought of this kind to Hazel, had he stood bodily before him, than he would have plainly importuned him to marry his niece. Barbara was something too tender, delicate, and sacred to be discussed or weighed against so many pounds sterling per annum. And William's pride on her behalf was intensely sensitive.

At length Barbara, having considered the question with all the earnestness and sincerity of her character, came to the conclusion that it was not fair or loyal to Hazel to let the matter go in silence. There might be good and sufficient reasons why he had not written, and it was her duty to elicit those reasons if they existed rather than let unkind or disparaging thoughts of him play on her mind. So one night, when Aunt Judith was gone to bed, she called up all her courage, and told her uncle that she wondered Mr. Hazel had not written to give him the news which he heard by chance in the boarding-house at Vevey.

"I could hardly expect Hazel to write to an acquaintance such as I am, in the midst of all the business of so great a change in his life," answered William, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and preparing to put it in its case for the night.

Barbara stood beside him, with one foot poised on the fender, her elbow leaning on the little mantel-shelf, and her hand shading her face from the last glowing embers of the fire.

"But, Uncle William," she said, "you were something more

than a mere acquaintance of Mr. Hazel's. He talked to you with the open confidence of a friend. He seemed to understand and appreciate you. I should be sorry to think his feeling towards you was less warm and sincere than it seemed. It would lower him irrevocably in my esteem."

And Barbara, who had begun to speak in a somewhat low and tremulous voice, ended firmly, and raised her eyes to her uncle's with a bright, clear glance of proud affection.

William smoothed back the hair from her forehead tenderly. But he answered, with one of his quaint smiles,

"I know, my dear, that there is but one true touchstone of merit. But I believe Hazel is not really deficient in that regard for me without which let no man hope to win Miss Copley's good opinion. But we agreed, he and I, not to engage ourselves in a regular correspondence. If ever we come across each other, we shall meet on the old terms, I doubt not. You mustn't think hardly of poor Hazel, Barbara."

But Barbara, although she longed with all her heart to think well of him, could not help a little aching sense of disappointment.

But she held her peace. There was trouble enough on her uncle's shoulders without her adding to its weight by so much as a grain. The loss of Lady Lambton and the Ketterings had not been replaced by any other pupils. Claude's return home had fulfilled his sister's foreboding; he was a charge upon the household, and a ceaseless care to them all. William had no fresh commissions, and, according to Mr. Barker the picture-dealer's account, still owed that benevolent tradesman a part of the money advanced to enable him to paint his last picture. The gleam of good fortune which appeared to have broken on the family a few months ago had faded again, and the clouds were gathering darkly.

But in the midst of it all, Aunt Judith seemed to be upheld by some mysterious source of cheerfulness. It could not be the pleasure of having Claude with her, for the poor soul passed many painful hours on his account, and was constantly on the watch to screen him from his uncle's displeasure. Neither was there anything very encouraging in the prospects of her little day school, which barely paid its way. Nevertheless, Miss Hughes's spirits rose to "set-fair," and stayed there steadily.

Barbara concluded at last that her grand-aunt had been more gratified than the occasion warranted by a visit from Miss Stringer. Barbara and her uncle were both out, but Miss Stringer had taken advantage of their absence to speak very highly of them both behind their backs, as Aunt Judith reported. And Miss Stringer had expressed regret that Lady Lambton had relinquished her lessons from Miss Copley, and had said that Mr. Hofmann had mentioned having met Miss Copley at Lady Lambton's several times, and having also called on Miss Hughes; and she had asked if they had seen him lately. "But," said Miss Hughes, "I took all that part very coolly. I answered that he had been here not very long ago, as well as I remembered. I would not allow Miss Stringer to imagine that we were eager for Mr. Hofmann's visits, or prized them in an exaggerated degree."

"No, I suppose not," said Barbara, with a transient look of surprise. "But among all the items of Miss Stringer's conversation, did she allude to the engagement between Mr. Hofmann and Lady Lambton?"

Aunt Judith turned her dark eyes searchingly on Barbara before answering, in a tone which Barbara would have thought triumphant had it been possible to imagine any cause for triumph in the case—"No, my dear; she did *not*. And, moreover, as I have told you once or twice lately, I don't believe that any such marriage is in contemplation at all."

"And I," answered Barbara, playfully, "have always asked, in reply, why in the world should such a marriage not be in contemplation?"

"For a reason that used to be thought a pretty good one in my young days," answered Miss Hughes, briskly: "namely, because Mr. Hofmann is no more in love with Lady Lambton than I am with the muffin-boy!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THAT meritorious knowledge of his place which Miss Hughes had observed in the demeanor of Mortimer Hopkins towards herself and her niece totally disappeared in his intercourse with Claude.

He wished to be civil to Miss Copley's brother—nay, more, he wished to make a favorable impression on him. But he took it for granted that the same methods which had made him, as he flattered himself, a brilliant and popular ornament to the society of the Greens and Tollers would avail with Claude.

Nevertheless, contrary to what might have been expected beforehand, the two young men got on together amicably enough. Claude swaggered a good deal about his family, and held forth with magnificent disdain on the subject of the Vevey boarding-house and his employment there; adding that he should certainly not accept any similar position again, but rather thought of getting an appointment as manager of the foreign correspondence in some leading city house. While Mortimer—privately well pleased that his future brother-in-law should hold such lofty and gentlemanlike views—discoursed of Art and Culture, and promised himself the pleasure of inviting his friend Copley to some of those select gatherings at his lodgings which shed a lustre on Anson Street; and of impressing Green and Toller with the gentility and superiority of the Copley connection.

But whatever might have been the case as to the refinements of social intercourse, the study of the French language decidedly languished on the Saturday evening when Mortimer was supposed to be applying himself to it. It made all the less progress when, after one or two lessons, it was settled, at Claude's suggestion, that in future the lessons should be given at Mortimer's house instead of at his own. Mortimer agreed to this without difficulty, because he soon found that he scarcely ever saw Miss Copley on Saturday evenings. He had figured to himself that she would be always in the room, and that he should have many

opportunities of improving his acquaintance with her and with Miss Hughes. But this was not the case. The ladies sat in the little schoolroom during the French lessons, and left the front parlor free.

Claude's reason for desiring the change was made up of mingled motives. The first and strongest of these, perhaps, was the mere vague, restless desire for change, which often possessed him. Then there was the consideration that he would be able to smoke as much as he pleased in Mortimer's lodgings. And, lastly, he would be free from even the slight supervision exercised over him at home. Barbara's silent presence—even the knowledge that Barbara was in the house, and might appear at any moment—irked her brother in certain of his moods; and was almost as great a constraint on his boastful self-assertion as the presence of William Hughes himself.

The elder Hopkins had been much impressed by Mr. Coney's story of the mention of Claude Copley's name in a lawyer's letter to Christopher Dalton. And although he had long ago made minute and searching inquiries into all the branches of Dalton's family connections, yet he took advantage of the opportunity afforded him by Copley's visits to his son, and cross-examined Claude as cautiously as he could.

Claude, of course, could but reiterate his assurance that Mr. Christopher Dalton was not of his kin, even in the most distant degree. But not content with this, he spoke with so much bitterness and animosity of Dalton—whom it was clearly impossible he could ever have seen in his life—that Hopkins was more and more puzzled.

At length, however, some word of Claude's seemed faintly to illuminate the twilight in which the picture-dealer's conjectures were groping.

"Tell you what it is, Mortimer," said he to his son one evening after Copley's departure. "Mr. Dalton, in years gone by, must have got the better of this young chap's father, or grandfather, in some money dealings. Dalton's evidently a shrewd, capable man—the kind of man that some person would be likely enough to accuse of sharp practice. You know what Mr. Hughes is: he has his good points, Mortimer; but don't mention him and a bargain in the same breath, because I'd as soon have a baby in

long clothes to deal with! Well, that being the case, nothing more likely than that other members of the family might be similarly feeble-minded, and having walked up to their middles in a bog of speculation with their eyes open, screamed out that Mr. Dalton led 'em there! Did you notice what the young chap said about ill-gotten gains, and that his family might ha' been rich at this day if others had been as scrup'ulously honorable as them, and all that sort of bunkum? Now, what'll you bet that when they heard of Dalton having made this big pile out in the States, they didn't write and try to revive some old claim on him? The young chap's name being mentioned in a lawyer's letter and all—seems to me that the thing's as plain as the nose on your face! Anyway, search high, search low, there's no such name as Copley, nor Hughes neither, to be found among your mother's family."

"Shouldn't wonder if you were right, dad," answered Mortimer, who had been listening attentively; "and, of course, if any one made such an application to Mr. Dalton, he'd only get a rap over the knuckles for his pains. But, 'pon my word, I don't know. I can hardly believe they'd try it on. It would be such a jolly soft thing to do!"

"Soft! Far be it that I should wish to bear 'ard on a fellow-creature, Mortimer; but there is, at times, a softness about Mr. Hughes, in matters of a pecun'ary nature, that outrages your feelings as a man."

"Still," said Mortimer, after reflecting for a few minutes, "I don't think, somehow, that Mr. Hughes's softness usually takes the form of asking for anything. *That* would be more in Copley's way, I fancy. And, look here, dad; I've an idea! We've agreed that it's best for me to be open and above board with all the family. Here am I; my relationship to Mr. Dalton is so-and-so; capable of proof in any court of law. I have nothing to hide nor to scheme for; I'm ready to hold out the right hand of fellowship to any of the other heirs-at-law; and it may save attorney's expenses at a future period, and nip any danger of Chancery proceedings in the bud, for us to understand each other at once! That's about the ground we take, isn't it, dad?"

"There or thereabouts. With the proviso that we take no ground whatever in black and white, but confine ourselves to word of mouth, and not too much of *that*."

“Very good. Well, now, there’s this daughter of Dr. Kirby’s that Coney met at Vevey. He reports that Copley and Mrs. Armour—that’s her name—were mighty intimate and confidential. In fact, there was a good deal of philandering going on between ’em. Now, it strikes me that she’s as likely as not to be able to give you a clue to the mention of Claude Copley in that letter Coney got sight of. And what’s to prevent us going to see her? ‘Here am I; my relationship to Mr. Dalton is so-and-so,’ et cetera! She’s in London. Besides, Coney considers her sharp and scheming. It would be well to look her up, *I* think. What do you say, dad?”

Mr. Hopkins seeing no objection to this proposal, they resolved to carry it out without delay.

The London address given by Mrs. Armour to Coney, to the Ketterings, and to a few other persons was that of her sister Miss Kirby’s house. The house was Miss Kirby’s own property, bequeathed to her by her father, together with three similar houses, the rents of which constituted the chief part of her income.

Looked at purely from the point of view of an address—something to be written on an envelope or stamped at the head of a sheet of paper—it was unexceptionable, and even attractive. “No. 5, Clifford Villas, Clifford Gardens, W.,” looked uncommonly well; but viewed in the light of a concrete dwelling that you had to live in, it was less satisfactory. Clifford Gardens was a short street branching off at right angles from a road on the borders of a canal, and Clifford Villas turned off at right angles to this, again, and was, therefore, parallel with the canal, and apparently at the back of everything. Clifford Villas consisted of six groups of semi-detached houses, three on each side of the way; and these houses were so extraordinarily small that, surveying them from the outside, one was impelled to imagine the front opening all at once like that of a doll’s house, and the two upper windows as being a sham, unjustified by any intersecting floors. The strip of ground between the street and the house—dignified by the name of the front garden—was so narrow that the railings appeared to be poking their spikes in at the parlor window. And the street itself was so unfrequented that some squares chalked a week ago on the pavement, for

the popular game of hopscotch, remained there unobliterated by passing feet, and slowly disappeared by the mere action of the weather.

But No. 5, Clifford Villas, was an excellent address, nevertheless, and Mrs. Armour retained it for the greater part of her correspondence, even after she had ceased to live there constantly herself. The deadly dulness of the place Juliet would have endured for a time in the interests of her pocket; but the inquisitorial nature of her sister's zeal for her spiritual welfare was particularly irksome to Mrs. Armour, who liked to keep the outside blinds of her soul down, and hated a rush of open dealing, as some persons have a horror of fresh air. Moreover, Clifford Villas was so remote from every place that she wanted to go to—whether for business or pleasure—that she found the cost of locomotion serious, not to mention the loss of time. She therefore looked about for a lodging in a more central position, and, profiting by some information she had obtained from Miss Jenks at Monplaisir, she hired a bedroom in the boarding-house near Red Lion Square which that lady patronized.

To her sister's complaints and remonstrances she opposed the necessity of her being able to accept dinner and other evening invitations.

"You know, dear, if I go to the Ketterings', for instance, my cab costs me a mint of money, and I don't get home before midnight. And I must go into society a little. It is absolutely necessary."

"I shouldn't think anybody you *ought* to visit lives near Red Lion Square, Juliet," answered her sister, querulously. "I know papa and mamma would not have allowed any of us to visit in such a locality. I am not in a position to entertain in my own house, nor do I go into society; but I would rather inhabit a desert than sink to Red Lion Square."

"Well, for the matter of that, you do inhabit a desert, so I suppose you are content," rejoined Mrs. Armour, coolly. Then, remembering that she desired her sister to receive letters for her, and to be useful in various other ways, she explained, in a more conciliatory tone, that it was just because Red Lion Square was so completely out of the beat of their friends and acquaintances that she chose it. No one of her friends would know anything about

her lodging there for a week or so at a time. The place was cheap; and if any one called on Mrs. Armour at Clifford Villas, the servant was to be instructed to say that she was visiting friends in Dorsetshire, but was expected to return the next day. Miss Kirby hesitated to give this order until she had consulted Father Anselm—otherwise known as the Reverend J. A. Lawny—who would decide whether the untruth were necessary or excusable, and whether it came under the category of a material lie, an evasion, or an equivocation. But Mrs. Armour settled the point by privately giving the maid-of-all-work a shilling, which at once convinced *her* of the venial nature of the action.

Thus, when Mr. Hopkins and his son appeared one afternoon at No. 5, Clifford Villas, Matilda was beginning to inform them glibly that “Mrs. Harmour was away in Dorsetshire,” when Miss Kirby opened the parlor door and inquired what was the gentlemen’s business.

She was like her sister Juliet; but there seemed a greater difference between their ages than the ten years which really divided them. Miss Kirby’s nose was at a sharper angle with her face, her eyes lighter, her skin more pallid, and her figure leaner than Juliet’s, and her whole aspect had something eager and anxious. Her gray hair was dry and straggling, and rebelled against the attempt to keep it smoothly tucked back beneath a triangular piece of black lace, whereof one point rested on Miss Kirby’s forehead, and the other two were fastened beneath her chin. Her dress was black; long and trailing in the skirt, tight and ascetic in the bodice, and she wore around her neck, for her sole ornament, a string of large ivory beads, supporting a cross of the same material.

Mortimer nudged his father in the ribs, and whispered to him that this must be Mrs. Armour’s sister, Dr. Kirby’s eldest daughter; and that now they were there, they might as well introduce themselves, and get all they could out of the old lady. This Mr. Hopkins proceeded to do, with the utmost politeness at his command; and as soon as Miss Kirby understood who they were, she invited father and son to walk into the parlor.

Piety is by no means incompatible with curiosity. Perhaps, indeed, the former rather stimulates the latter by furnishing it with a ground for self-approval; since it must clearly be praise-

worthy to be interested in the state of your neighbor's soul, and the most minute and seemingly insignificant facts may bear weightily on that subject. Miss Kirby, at any rate, was decidedly curious; and she listened to all that the Hopkinses said with great eagerness.

Juliet had, of course, informed her of their Uncle Christopher's present fortunes. But many little touches of detail, omitted or ignored by Juliet, were narrated by Mr. Hopkins, on his friend Coney's authority, and drunk in with the utmost avidity by Miss Kirby.

But the interest of all that the Hopkinses could impart to Miss Kirby was surpassed a hundredfold by the revelation she was presently able to make to them; for after being told of the mention of Claude Copley's name in the letter to Mr. Dalton, and, further, that he lived with an uncle and an old grand-aunt who came from Marypool, and were called Hughes, she suddenly clasped her hands together, and exclaimed, "Why, that was the name of the girl—our governess! And I remember quite well that she was a native of Marypool."

And then she narrated—naturally from the Kirbeian point of view—the story of the elopement.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BARBARA was alone in the sitting-room; Aunt Judith had not yet dismissed her school for the afternoon, and William was out. He had gone to seek an interview with Barker, the picture-dealer, and to solicit from him a further advance of money. It was an errand which pained and mortified him to the quick, for he knew by experience that the man would not spare him, and that, although he would probably dole him out a few pounds, they would be given with words and looks hard to bear and bitter to remember. But the interview must be faced—the humiliation was inevitable. There was no other resource open to him, let him look which way he would. And there were age and helplessness depending on him at home; for Aunt Judith, though of indomitable spirit, began to feel the weight of years, and Claude was still idle.



"Mortimer whispered to his father that this must be Mrs. Armour's sister."

Barbara had returned from her day's teaching, and sat musing with clasped hands in the darkening twilight. She was thinking of many things; but chiefly, and most anxiously, what she could do to earn a little more money, and so lighten her uncle's burdens, when Larcher came into the room, and said,

"Here's a letter for you, Miss Barbara."

"A letter! I did not hear the postman."

"No. It was brought by hand. One of them commissioners left it. It's a'most too dark for you to see to read it. Shall I light the lamp?"

"Not yet, Larcher. I can see by the firelight. There's no one waiting?"

"There's no one waiting, Miss Barbara," and the old servant softly withdrew.

Barbara, when she took the letter in her hand, was surprised to find it rather bulky. She did not know the handwriting, but as the firelight glistened on a large, firmly outlined red seal, she saw on it an impression which seemed familiar to her. It was a head of Pallas Athene, very finely cut; and she remembered all at once that her uncle had, last Sunday, seen and admired such a one in a ring on the finger of Mr. Fritz Hofmann.

"Perhaps Olga and Ida are going to resume their lessons!" thought Barbara, opening the letter impulsively. She knelt down by the firelight to look at it, but after reading the first few lines the hand which held the letter sank down by her side, and she lifted up her head, and gazed straight before her like one amazed.

Then after a few minutes she started up and hastily lighted a little colored taper that stood on a side-table, and, spreading out the letter before her, and leaning her arms on the table, with her clenched hands pressed against her mouth, began to read.

This was the letter:

"MY DEAR MISS COPLEY,—I have been hesitating for some time past whether I should write or speak to you. To speak would, I think, have been easier to me. But, perhaps, writing leaves you more free to deliberate calmly upon your answer, and not to give it hastily upon the first impulse. If I am right in supposing this, I have been right in preferring written to spoken words; since I cannot for a moment flatter myself that you are prepared at once to receive favorably what I have to say. I am, indeed, very doubtful whether it will not take you by surprise altogether, because every one who has

the happiness to know Barbara Copley must perceive that among the qualities of her rare nature is an absolute unconsciousness of her own attractions.

"Before I say more, I will endeavor to incline you to give me at least a patient hearing by the most powerful recommendation I can offer to you—our uncle, Mr. Hughes, to whom I spoke before venturing to address you, assured me that if I could gain your favorable consideration for my suit, I should have no opposition to fear from him."

At this point Barbara leaned back in her chair, with her hands clasped on the top of her head, breathing quickly with parted lips. But after a little while, and with a visible effort, she forced herself to resume the reading of the letter.

"Of course, your uncle gave me no clue as to what answer I might hope from you. We did not even touch on that point. With you alone rests the decision. To your decision, be it what it may, I shall bow, with the full conviction that it is dictated by sincerity and goodness.

"I will strive to be at least sincere, and will tell you frankly that the feeling with which I regard you is no sudden overwhelming passion that bears down reason and judgment with the force of a whirlwind. It is true that from the first moment I saw your face amid the squalor of a crowded London street, you have remained in my mind as the ideal of womanly refinement. That impression was made at once and forever. But all the best powers of my mind, instead of being overborne or set aside, have steadily supported and confirmed the admiration you inspired on a further acquaintance.

"To see you in your own home was to love you. The hope of winning you to be my wife has gradually become the leading motive of my life—the goal to which all my plans and ambitions for the future are directed. I know that it is impossible you should in any degree reciprocate my feelings at present. I know perfectly well that you do not love me; and I suspect you have never given a thought to the possibility that I might love you. But if you love no one else, will you not let me try to win you? I will not be importunate. I will not press my suit at the risk of ruffling your tranquillity for a moment. Your kindness—if I may dare to hope for it at all—must be earned by patient devotion.

"As to outward circumstances, one thing I am bound to mention at once. You may have chanced to hear—from the Ketterings, or elsewhere—that I am the heir of a rich bachelor brother of my mother's. This is not the case. I have no expectations whatever from Mr. Arthur Maddison. I possess an independent income, bequeathed to me by my father—an income which will enable me to surround my wife with most of the things which give grace and refinement to the material circumstances of daily life, but with very few which minister to splendor or ostentation. I am of an age to choose for myself, and to have my choice respected. And, believe me, you would be sure of a warm



"She knelt down by the firelight to look at it, but after reading the first few lines the hand which held the letter sank down by her side."

and affectionate welcome from my mother, should I ever have the happiness to present you to her. She has a mind and heart thoroughly capable of appreciating yours.

"I do not ask you to decide the momentous question I lay before you at once. But what I do ask is this :

"Let me see you frequently in your home ; grant me admittance to your family circle as a familiar friend ! And learning thus how much good influence you have upon my life—what an ennobling thing it is to aspire to your love—you may, perhaps, some day give me a little affection, as I am sure you would bestow some on any creature you had benefited ; for there is ever a strain of compassion in the tenderness of the best and purest women for which we men have occasion to thank God from the cradle to the grave.

"One word in conclusion.

"Do not banish me from your presence, whatever be your final answer to my suit. If I may not hope for your love, give me at least your friendship. I will try to deserve it.

"Yours, with unalterable reverence and regard,

"FRIEDRICH HOFMANN."

Almost before Barbara had read the last words of this letter, the noise of children's feet and voices in the passage announced that school was over for the day. And she had barely time to thrust the letter into her pocket before Aunt Judith came into the parlor, and sank down wearily in her arm-chair.

"You should not take the taper to read by, Barbara," she said, noticing the pale flame on the little table by the window. "Blow it out. And, unless you have something special to do, we will not have the lamp just yet. I shall be glad to rest my eyes and my head awhile."

"Have you a headache, Aunt Judith?" asked Barbara, seating herself beside her aunt's knee in the shadow of the great chair.

"No, child ; not a headache. But I get dazed and tired with the noise. I am growing old, Barbara : that's the truth. But don't say a word to William."

Barbara took her grand-aunt's hand between her own—the brave, helpful hand that had led her orphaned childhood so tenderly. And there was silence in the little room. The girl fancied that Aunt Judith had fallen into a doze, and remained motionless lest she might disturb her. But by and by Judith spoke ; and the tone of her voice showed her to be wakeful. "I'm very anxious about Claude, child. I'm afraid he is not going on well."

Barbara pressed the hand she still held, and waited breathlessly to hear more. For some time the conviction had been growing in her mind that Claude would never be strong again. He did not complain of illness; and, indeed, almost resented any display of solicitude from his sister. But there was a look in his face which pierced her heart with pity.

But it was not of Claude's health that Aunt Judith was thinking. By degrees she admitted to Barbara that she was idle, extravagant, and selfish. "From thoughtlessness, you know, Barbara—pure thoughtlessness," she added, as though in compunction for having uttered these hard truths. And the poor soul, feeling the solace of confiding in Barbara, went on to confess that she had discovered Claude to have made some little debts in the neighborhood; and that more than once, when his uncle had thought him asleep in bed, Larcher had sat up for him, and he had returned very late, and not always quite sober.

Barbara released her aunt's hand, and clasped her own tightly together. "Debts!" she murmured. "That is the most terrible of all! What shall we do? What *can* we do?"

Aunt Judith hastily touched Barbara's lips to silence her, for she heard William putting his key into the lock, and his step in the passage; and then the choking, asthmatic cough which sometimes assailed him. The two women sat still, knowing that any offer of help or sympathy distressed him at such moments. And after a while the paroxysm passed, and he came into the room.

It was almost dark, then, by this time; but as he entered, a flickering flame leaped up and shone upon his face and figure—the former so lined with care, the latter so bent and weary! But the old noble gentleness shone out of his eyes, and he said, "Good-evening, dears. How pleasant and welcoming the fire looks! It is the best of all illuminations to come home to," in a cheerful voice, which to Barbara's ear was more pathetic than any complaining wail that could be uttered.

She sprang up, and, taking her uncle's head between her hands, gently pulled it towards her, and kissed his forehead with a long pressure of the lips. Then she ran out of the room; and presently Larcher, appearing with the lamp, brought Miss Barbara's love, and if she were not quite ready by tea-time, would they be-

gin without her? For she had some writing to do, and had gone into the schoolroom.

"We will wait for Miss Barbara, Larcher," said Miss Hughes.

Then William sat down, and told the story of his visit to Mr. Barker, and listened to Aunt Judith's fiery denunciations of that prosperous dealer, which William rather encouraged than checked, knowing them to be a real assistance to her in bearing her share of the family troubles.

"But," said he at length, with his half-sad, half-humorous smile, "I have got ten pounds out of him. So I think penal servitude, with a fortnightly flogging, might meet the justice of the case this time, Aunt Judith. Hanging had better be reserved for a future occasion, especially as it has the disadvantage of being impossible to repeat, and putting a final stopper on the vindictive pleasures of the imagination."

"Ten pounds, my dear! Ten pounds will not go very far," said Aunt Judith, reflecting, with an inward tremor, that Claude's debts, which she knew of—and there might, alas! be more—amounted to more than half that sum.

"They will go so far as to be out of sight before long," answered William. "But what is Barbara about all this time? I don't like her working after hours in this way. She has been looking pale lately."

"She is always pale, William. So was her mother before her, even in the days when she was young and happy and healthy."

"Ay, but that was a transparent pallor with a light of life behind it. I fancy, too, that she is more depressed and silent than formerly."

Aunt Judith rubbed her chin nervously, and, glancing once or twice at her nephew, leaned forward as though she were about to speak, and then drew back again and was silent, in an undecided fashion, very unusual with her. But Barbara's presence now made a diversion.

The tea-tray was brought in, and Barbara poured out the tea as usual, and washed the cups afterwards, and ranged them in the cupboard, and talked and listened—all as usual.

Claude was not present. He was very often from home now. He had picked up some new acquaintances through young Green and Toller, and he declared that it was highly necessary for him

to see people, and to be seen by them, in order to push his fortunes. He had also come across Mrs. Armour; but of this *rencontre* he had not thought it necessary to say anything at home, alleging to himself that his uncle had taken a prejudice against her, and that his grand-aunt and sister would be sure to follow that lead.

In spite of all their good-will and courage, it was impossible but that Judith and William Hughes should betray to Barbara's watchful observation some of the anxiety for the future which weighed upon them. Aunt Judith complained of being tired, and went to rest early, attended by Larcher; and her voice might have been heard for more than an hour afterwards holding forth to that faithful confidant in the privacy of her own room. Among the many services which Larcher had rendered to the Hughes family, none perhaps had been more valuable than her acting as a safety valve to carry off Aunt Judith's superfluous vivacity and loquacity.

When the uncle and niece were together in the little parlor, William took up a book; but rather, as it seemed, by way of an excuse for silent thinking than because he wanted to read, for his eyes were oftener fixed upon the glowing coals in the grate before him than on the page in his hand.

Barbara put down her needlework and drew a chair near her uncle's, but a little behind it. "Are you seeing faces in the fire, Uncle William?" she asked, softly.

"Faces and places, castles and ruins, Barbara," he answered, with a mournful smile. "Many ruins. When one is young, one sees buildings rising; but when youth is gone, those broken walls and hollows mean the slow crumbling of decay."

"I have had a letter, Uncle William," said Barbara; and she gave Hofmann's letter over her uncle's shoulder into his hand.

William's quick, keen sight took instant note of the seal, which he recognized as Barbara had done, and he unfolded the letter, not tremulously, but with a strong, quick movement of the fingers that betrayed excitement. As his eyes fell on the first words he paused and said, "Am I to read it all, Barbara?"

"Yes, all."

He read it deliberately, earnestly, with a set, resolute expression on his face which it did not often wear, but which, when it was

seen there, seemed to belong so naturally to his massive features and square masculine brow. Steadily and silently he read on to the end. Then he refolded the letter, keeping the old creases with automatic neatness of touch, put it back into its cover, and said, without turning round to look at her, "It is a good letter, Barbara."

"It is a generous letter, Uncle William. You—you knew he was going to write it, he says."

"I knew what was in his mind; but I told him from the first that he must appeal to you direct. This is a matter on which your two souls must speak face to face, shutting out all other voices."

"It seems very wonderful and surprising," said Barbara, in so low a voice as to be barely audible. "I never dreamed that such a thing was possible."

"It will not seem quite so wonderful to any one else, Barbara," remarked her uncle, with a little smile playing for a moment over his brooding face.

There was a long silence, only broken by the dropping of some hot ashes on the hearth. And at length William, whose expression had settled into a grave melancholy, said,

"Well, Barbara, you must answer this letter, my dear."

"I have answered it, Uncle William."

He turned round now quickly, but she kept her face averted.

"You have answered it?"

"Yes. I wrote my answer, and copied it roughly while I was in the schoolroom, and Larcher carried it to the post. It is *my* doing. No one has persuaded me; no one has advised me. Here is my answer, Uncle William. It is very short."

She drew a half-sheet of paper from her pocket, and this time the hand with which her uncle took it was not perfectly steady.

Barbara had written:

"The candor and truthfulness of your own words persuade me that you will recognize the truthfulness of mine when I tell you that no distant suspicion of your feeling had crossed my mind. I can never be more highly honored than by the regard in which you hold me. I can never be more grateful than I am to you for the noble generosity with which you write. It would be a base return for both were I knowingly to deceive you by a syllable; and yet, perhaps my poor words may fail to convey to you all the truth.

What I would try to say is this: I have, as you divine, no sentiment of love for you, but I like you, I respect you, and I trust you. I am writing from my own heart, unaided by any better wisdom. I dare not promise yet to be your wife. I will not now accept a promise from you. If you believe that you would too seriously risk your happiness by coming here without a firm, clear bond between us, I shall understand that you act well and honorably to say farewell at once before more sorrow comes to you. Already the thought that I may not see you again for years is a sad one. You see I am trying to be frank and true from the bottom of my soul. But you are older, wiser, more experienced than I. Decide!

BARBARA COPLEY."

William drew the girl near him, and, looking down on her drooping head, said,

"He will take this letter to be encouraging, Barbara."

"Yes; but I think he will not assume more encouragement than my words, taken simply and plainly, convey."

He raised her face with one hand beneath the chin, and looked wistfully into her eyes. She looked back at him brightly and steadily.

"It would be what people call a great match for you, Barbara," he said.

"You would be glad, Uncle William?"

"That is a point you need not now consider."

"But you would? You like him—you think well of him?"

"I think very well of him. How well, judge you, who know I should not fear to trust him with you, Barbara."

"And Aunt Judith would be happy."

"But you, Barbara—you have no misgivings?"

"Only, lest I should not make a full return for so much goodness."

"You have no regrets?"

Barbara suddenly dropped her face, and hid it on his breast.

"What have I to regret but leaving you and Aunt Judith?" she murmured. "But you know I should never go far from you. It would be for your happiness. It would relieve you from all care for me. I could help Claude."

"But, Barbara, my child, it is *your* life that is in question; it is *your* happiness that is at stake!"

Barbara looked up. "And Mr. Hofmann's, Uncle William," she said. "And, perhaps, you know, after all, when he comes here oftener, and sees more of me, and finds that I cannot give

him all the warm affection he has a right to expect—perhaps then he will see that he has made a mistake, and we shall be in the end good friends, and nothing more!”

William Hughes smoothed the hair from her forehead with his favorite action, and looked at her with a tender, amused smile, as he answered, “No, Barbara; to say the truth, I do not anticipate that. I must warn you fairly that I do not think Hofmann will cry off, if you give him the chance to woo you. You are such a deep dissembler, Barbara, that those who know you best, love you most dearly. No, no; if poor Hofmann is to have a chance of escape, you must keep him at a distance.”

“Have I done wrong to write to him as I did?” asked Barbara, quickly.

“You have done as you always do, Barbara. You have been true, and loyal, and simple. And King Solomon in all his glory could not teach you any better wisdom than that.”

“Good-night, Uncle William.”

“God bless thee, my dear, dear child.”

Barbara kissed him, and had reached the door, when she turned back to say, “You would be glad, Uncle William? It cannot alter anything to say so now. I wrote on my own responsibility. You knew nothing of it. But say the truth now—you *would* be glad, Uncle William?”

“I think there is nothing in this world that could make me so glad, Barbara.”

She flew into his arms with a little cry—“Oh, thank you from my heart! That was all I wanted. I am very happy.”

But when Barbara was in her own room, she locked the door and took from a drawer a folded handkerchief with some dried lavender, and an envelope inside it. And in the envelope there was a bunch of withered flowers, and a scrap of paper, with these pencilled words:

“I have been up to the head of the stream this morning to get you the forget-me-not you wanted; I think they are the finest hereabouts.”

“G. H.”

And Barbara sat beside her little table, and laid her cheek down on the paper; and the paper was wet with tears.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE nearest surviving relatives of Mr. Christopher Dalton are sufficiently different from each other in various ways; and it cannot be said that they are united by the common band of family attachment. Dora Kirby and her sister Juliet, Mortimer Hopkins, and Amy Lambton all regard each other with suspicion and mistrust. Lady Lambton, indeed, comes at some distance behind the others in point of kinship; and does not belong to the Dalton side of the family at all; but she will not allow that that lessens her chances of inheriting. Sally Stringer's relationship to the rich man is, in point of fact, precisely the same as Lady Lambton's—namely, that of first-cousin once removed. But somehow she does not seem to any of them to be a formidable competitor; whereas Lady Lambton is admitted to be "in the running," as Mr. Hopkins puts it.

But, however conflicting may be the various hopes, schemes, and claims of the Kirbys, the Hopkinses, and the Shortways—however antagonistic may be their secret feelings towards one another, a subject has arisen in which they display a unanimity of sentiment absolutely uncheckered by any shade of dissent—the subject of Charles Copley's relationship to that Winifred Hughes who was the original cause of Mr. Dalton's estrangement from his family.

They are one and all convinced that the Hugheses have been making an underhand attempt to get money from Mr. Dalton. The mention of Claude Copley's name in the lawyer's letter is thus easily explained. Dalton had evidently been making private inquiries about Winifred's family; and it was not to be supposed he should do that, after all these years, unless they had been forcing themselves on his attention.

Any one who should have concluded the daughters of the late Dr. Kirby to be deficient in moral indignation, from the tone in which they spoke of their Uncle Christopher, must perceive, on hearing them talk now about the Hugheses and the Copleys, that

there is abundance of indignation; only that it is all somewhat arbitrarily directed against the injured family, instead of against the author of their misfortunes.

Old Hopkins begins to question whether Mr. William Hughes's softness in the matter of bargains be not a deep assumption of simplicity to throw him (Hopkins) off his guard. Mortimer does not quite accept this idea, but is willing to attribute any amount of greed and falsity to young Copley, whom he considers—although having undeniably a gentlemanly way with him, even to the point of sometimes treating you like the dirt beneath his feet—to be deemed selfish and sly. But Mortimer exonerates Miss Copley from all blame. Miss Copley is above suspicion. Her brother does not appreciate Miss Copley, who hovers o'er him, Mortimer says, with angel wings! And he has been heard to say that he isn't going to be dictated to by a chit of a girl like Barbara, who knows nothing of life.

Lady Lambton, for her part, is inclined to give Barbara credit for being at the bottom of whatever plots are going. Miss Copley is one of those demure, soft-mannered women whom Amy always instinctively distrusts, as being so opposed to her own frank, impulsive nature.

One result of the excitement about the Copley question is the despatch, by the next mail, of several voluminous letters to Mr. Christopher Dalton, sent under cover to his business agent in New York. This is the only address Mr. Coney can give them, as Dalton's movements are very uncertain; and he thinks nothing of starting on a journey of a thousand miles at a moment's notice. But the Kirbys and Lady Lambton shrewdly suspect that Coney knows how to get at Mr. Dalton more directly, but that he reserves this information for his friends the Hopkinses.

Lady Lambton's attempt to learn Dalton's address through the assistance of Mr. Perikles Rhodonides has failed. But she does not regret having made it; for Rhodonides proves to be very appreciative, and full of sympathy.

It matters the less that he can give her no information about Dalton, because the Hopkinses, father and son, wait personally on her ladyship, in pursuance of their plan of putting Mortimer's position plainly before the family; and show no reluctance to give her the New York agent's address.

"My mother, Mrs. Shortway," says Amy, "was Mr. Dalton's dearest cousin—more to him than a sister; and she has urged me to write to him on her behalf. My mother is so extraordinarily unworldly that she attaches no importance at all to the fact of Mr. Dalton's great wealth; and sometimes declares she does not even believe in it. Now that," adds Lady Lambton, with a sparkling smile, "is very charming; but I frankly own it is not my case. Perhaps the younger generation is more prosaic; or I am of a less disinterested nature. At all events, I make no pretence to romance in the matter. And I candidly tell you that I should be very glad indeed if Mr. Dalton were to remember my mother's side of the family in his will; I think it would be only fair that he should; and I sincerely hope he will."

"Does you credit, ma'am—my lady," says Hopkins, senior, warmly.

And when they leave the house, he observes to his son that Lady Lambton has a deuced deal of sound common-sense, and is, moreover, a spanking fine woman; but that what he, John Hopkins, particularly admires about her is the absence of humbug.

They have talked over with my lady the subject of the common danger from the Hughes family, and have agreed very well about it—except that Lady Lambton has, in Mortimer's opinion, been too much "down" on Miss Copley. But this, he reflects, is a trait common to her sex, and merely denotes one charming woman's jealousy of another.

So the poor little household, all unconscious of what is going on, is discussed, and blamed, and suspected, and calumniated, and gossiped about—above all, gossiped about!—in various circles, from Lady Lambton and the Ketterings to the boarding-house near Red Lion Square, where Miss Jenks is seeing London Society.

Miss Jenks has as yet seen but little more of London Society than is comprised between the four walls of the genteel and inexpensive establishment (so she describes it in her letters to Northampton) where she is lodging. And she finds that section of London more inaccessible in the matter of loans, and generally sharper and less easy in hand than her fellow-boarders at Monplaisir. This arises, in fact, from their being poorer than the little community at Vevey, and from many of them being a sort of social free lances, more or less after the pattern of Miss Jenks

herself. One of them—a gentleman with a red nose and tremulous hands, who describes himself vaguely as being “connected with the Press,” but who is said to be pensioned off by his wife, a hard-working actress, who maintains him in idleness on the sole condition of his staying away from her—even ventures to solicit some temporary pecuniary assistance from her—from her, Amanda Jenks! The inexorability and promptitude of her refusal absolutely cow him, and during the whole time afterwards that they remain under the same roof he is never known to address another word to her, nor to make any kind of comment when she is being discussed by others beyond the utterance of a low whistle, accompanied by a shrinking movement of the shoulders. In a word, Miss Jenks’s native force of character asserts itself in the neighborhood of Red Lion Square as by the shores of Lake Lemana, and she holds her own—and as much as she can clutch of other people’s—with invincible coolness and gallantry.

Miss Jenks’s importance is raised in the eyes of her fellow-boarders by her intimacy with Mrs. Armour, who engages a bedroom in the boarding-house for two months, and has the liberty, by special bargain and agreement, of taking her meals there at a fixed price whenever she pleases. It being quite vain to think of keeping Miss Jenks at a distance by cool and reserved behavior, Mrs. Armour accepts the position, and admits her to a certain amount of familiarity; making use of her in various ways, and sharpening her wit upon her in the drawing-room of an evening; and in the early days of Mrs. Armour’s sojourn in the boarding-house Mr. Claude Copley appears there several times. Miss Jenks does not think Mr. Copley improved by London. He is more insolent and irritable in manner than at Vevey; at once showier and less neat in his dress, and painfully thin and hollow-eyed.

On the first occasion of her seeing him there, Miss Jenks greeted him with peculiar emphasis—the term “warmth” is not applicable to Miss Jenks’s manner at any time; but there are degrees of force in it, as there are in the movements of machinery—and intrusts him with an elaborate message to his uncle, Mr. Hughes, informing him of her present address, and requesting that she may have the pleasure of seeing him—to which message Claude pays hardly any semblance of attention.

But as days go by, and Mr. Hughes is not seen, and young

Copley himself does not reappear, and when Mrs. Armour, on being questioned, suddenly displays a cool—not to say bitter—temper in speaking of her young friend, and begs to inform Miss Jenks that she neither knows nor cares where he is, nor what he is doing, then Miss Jenks became convinced that Claude has not given her message, and she even suspects that he has not told his uncle where she is to be found.

But Miss Jenks is not to be baffled in that way. As she puts it to herself, she is not to be put down while she has arms and legs and powers of speech to help herself. She does not know the address of Mr. Hughes, but she has treasured up the name of the street where his studio is situated, which had been mentioned before her at Vevey, and she intends to call there without revealing her intention to any one.

And all these various sayings and doings—these assumptions, suspicions, and intentions concerning her family and herself—are rife while Barbara is waiting in the little sitting-room for the first visit of Mr. Fritz Hofmann since her answer to his letter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR some reason which lay too deep in her heart for words, Barbara had begged her uncle to communicate Mr. Hofmann's proposal, and her own reply to it, to Aunt Judith.

Barbara came down-stairs unusually early on the morning after she had received the important letter, and desired Larcher to carry Miss Hughes's breakfast up to her bedroom, and to persuade her mistress to lie still for an hour or two longer than was her custom. "For," said Barbara, "Aunt Judith was very tired last night."

Larcher accepted the commission with alacrity. And then Barbara, hastily murmuring some excuse of having to be at a pupil's house earlier than usual, besought her uncle to tell the news to Aunt Judith before he went out.

"But I think she would like much better to hear it from you, Barbara," he said.

"No, no, Uncle William, pray! You will tell her, and you can show her the letter or read it to her, and—and she will have got used to it all before I come home. And I really must go now."

Barbara had seemed weary and heavy-eyed to Larcher's shrewd observation when she appeared that morning; but before she left the house there was a serene brightness on her face. Barbara thought that her uncle looked already less anxious, less haggard than he had looked yesterday. Cares, many and pressing, he still had; but she knew that her welfare and happiness sat closer to his heart than any earthly thing, and that to know her safe from storm and stress would make his daily burden lighter, his nightly sleep more peaceful, his outlook on the future calm and cheerful.

"It would be worth a great sacrifice to achieve that. But I make no sacrifice; I have nothing to give up—nothing but some foolish, vain imaginings, no more real than a child's fairy story. I *was* a child. But one cannot believe in fairy tales forever," said Barbara to herself, as she stepped out into the wintry street.

Miss Hughes, both by her own habitual energy and the loving care of those around her, did not suffer from any of that squalid negligence in her surroundings which is not the least evil of poverty to many natures. Her little room was always neat and speckless. Whatever small luxuries in the way of furniture it had been possible to obtain were accumulated there—an easy-chair, a large footstool, a square of carpet on the floor, and so on. And—greatest luxury of all—a good fire burned morning and evening in the grate whenever the weather was chilly. Miss Hughes was the only person in the house who enjoyed the indulgence of a bedroom fire—at least, she had been the only person so indulged until Claude's return from Switzerland. But Claude was delicate, and could not do without it, Miss Hughes said. And William made no opposition, but only sighed a little in thinking of his budget, and bent his head a little lower between his shoulders.

The old lady was to be propped up in bed when her nephew went up to speak with her; a crimson woollen shawl, of Barbara's knitting, covered her shoulders, and her silken gray curls peeped out beneath a showy, neatly frilled cap. (Larcher washed and got up all such fine articles for the ladies' wear, and professed

to find great delight in clear-starching and ironing up to a late hour every Saturday night.)

Miss Hughes's bright, dark eyes rested inquiringly and anxiously on William when he first came in, but she saw at a glance that his errand, whatever it might be, was not a painful one.

"Where's Barbara?" she asked, after they had greeted each other.

"Barbara," he replied, "had to go to a pupil specially early, and left her love for you, and intrusted me with what she otherwise would have told you herself."

"Barbara spoils me, and she suborns Larcher to spoil me, too. There was no reason why I should not have got up to breakfast. But that treacherous old woman marched in with the tray, and there I was, helpless!"

Aunt Judith's smile, and a little moisture in her eyes, made an eloquent gloss on these words.

"Barbara has some news for you," said William.

The old lady started, and turned sharply so as to see his face more distinctly.

"Can you guess what it is, aunty?"

Judith kept her eyes fixed on him, and answered by the movement of her lips rather than with her voice—"Marriage?"

"Mr. Frederick Hofmann has proposed to her, and—"

"And she has said yes?"

"She has not said no."

"That means yes!" cried Aunt Judith, triumphantly clapping her hands and sitting upright in her bed with sparkling eyes. "Didn't I know it? Didn't I tell Barbara within this very week that he was no more in love with Lady Lambton than I with the muffin-boy? What a turn of fate, William! Or, rather, what a strange dispensation of Providence! Arthur Maddison's nephew—the grandson of old Maddison of Marypool—to choose out our poor dear Olive's daughter from all the world! And it will be a great marriage for our child, William! She will be rich; she will be released from all this drudgery; she will be treated daintily and cared for delicately; and then all the rest of the world will find out what we knew long ago—that Barbara Copley is a pearl of price, and that no setting can be too rich and rare for her. When did he speak? Where did she see him? Why did not Barbara come and tell me this herself?"

William explained that the proposal had been made by letter, and answered in the same way; and that the girl had thought Aunt Judith so tired last night that she would not expose her to any agitation; and, by way of cutting short all further questionings, he put Fritz Hofmann's letter into his aunt's hand.

The good soul was subject to little jealousies at any special manifestation of the attachment between Barbara and her uncle—mere surface jealousies; for at the bottom of her heart she loved Barbara the better for adoring her uncle. But it was no petty whim or temper that moved her now. A deeper feeling had been stirred; and she took the letter with an earnest tenderness, as though it were a tangible portion of Barbara's life; as, indeed, in the truest sense, it was.

While William was taking her spectacles out of their case for her, Aunt Judith said, smiling rather tremulously, "I wonder she trusted you with this treasure, William! How many girls would give such a love-letter out of their hands to please an old woman? But Barbara is not like other girls. I suppose she gave it you this morning before she went out?"

"I have had it in my pocket since last night," answered William.

Judith was settling the glasses on her nose as he spoke. But at his words she hastily pushed them up, and fixed on him for a moment the handsome dark eyes that were still so keen and lustrous. Then she put the glasses in their place, and silently read the letter.

William, seated at the bedside, did not watch her. He watched his own thoughts and fancies, so to say; and it was many a year since they had been so bright and sunny. Something of the radiance of his own lost youth seemed to come back to him as he mused on Barbara and her happy future.

The rustling of the paper in Aunt Judith's hand made him look up, and he saw that she was restoring the letter to its cover.

"You agree with me, aunty, about Hofmann's letter, I am sure," he said, warmly.

Aunt Judith did not take up this point; but asked what Barbara had thought of it, and how she had replied. And William gave her the rough copy of Barbara's answer.

"This, too!" said Aunt Judith, "Is all her answer here?"

“Every word of it, aunty.”

Once more Aunt Judith read in silence, and then folded the paper again.

William watched her now, a little surprised at her unwonted taciturnity; and, feeling the scrutiny of his eyes, she said, almost as if speaking with an effort, “And what did Barbara say of her—of Mr. Fritz Hofmann’s letter?”

“She said it was a good and generous letter.”

“So it is. Oh yes; undoubtedly it is that. And Barbara replies in the same strain. They are both quite—quite model young people,” said Aunt Judith, after a curiously long pause.

But somehow the sparkling triumph and vivacity with which she had received the news at first had quite died out of her face. She leaned back among her pillows, and turned away her head. “I’ll lie still for another hour, my dear, and think it all over quietly by myself,” she said to her nephew. “And, William, tell Larcher not to come until I ring. I don’t want Larcher yet.”

William pressed the little wrinkled brown head that lay outside the coverlet against his cheek, with a caress that had been habitual with him from boyhood towards his second mother. And he went down-stairs and out of the house, and betook himself towards his studio in a tranquilly cheerful frame of mind.

But yet one sad thought obtruded itself among many pleasant ones: he could not dismiss a regretful memory of Gilbert Hazel. William, unlike Mr. Arthur Maddison, was not impelled by any former renunciations of his own to demand and expect sacrifices from other people. Rather his experience of sorrow had made him tenderly sensitive towards the sorrows of others, and eager to spare them when they might be spared compatibly with honor. Hazel had acted rightly in refraining from trying to bind Barbara to his hard fortunes, and wasting her youth through long years of hope deferred. Hazel had done his duty. But William Hughes, in the varied experiences of his life, had not met with so many persons to whom duty is the paramount guide and motive of conduct as to consider the doing of one’s duty a mere matter of course, although he did his own with absolute simplicity of mind.

But, perhaps, on observing closely, it will be found that our

hardness towards our fellow-creatures is apt to be in an inverse ratio to our tenderness towards ourselves.

Whatever it was that Barbara had dreaded in Aunt Judith's reception of her news—whether it were a too demonstrative exultation, or a demand that Barbara should be demonstrative, or an eager haste to fix the vague terms in which Mr. Hofmann's proposal had been answered into a clear and positive engagement—whatever anticipations Barbara's imagination had shrunk from, the first few minutes with her grand-aunt after her return home in the afternoon entirely reassured her. Aunt Judith was affectionate, and there was more of clinging softness in her manner than she usually displayed towards Barbara. But she accepted this great turn of Fortune's wheel with a dignified, and almost sad, composure that was like a soothing balm to the girl's spirit.

The point on which Miss Hughes dwelt with the greatest complacency in speaking to William (she never mentioned it to Barbara at all) was the fact—quite evident to her apprehension—that Arthur Maddison had threatened to disinherit his nephew if he married Barbara, and that Fritz had disregarded the threat.

"But, Aunt Judith," exclaimed William, startled by a suggestion which had never occurred to himself, "that would be an immense sacrifice to make! *We* know our Barbara is worthy of it, but—"

"It is the best feature in the whole affair," said Aunt Judith, with sharp decision. "There *is* something enthusiastic and unreasonable about that!"

William laughed, though he was a little puzzled, too.

"Well," said he, "I won't degrade Hofmann in your eyes by hinting that he is not ready to behave like a lunatic on Barbara's account. But my own notion is that Maddison would not dream of laying such a prohibition on the young man as you suspect. Why should he? If he ever really loved poor dear Olive, I can fancy his receiving her daughter with peculiar tenderness."

Aunt Judith had her own private opinion of Arthur Maddison's tenderness; and her own private reason for believing that he had a grudge treasured up against the Hughes family. But she said no more. Aunt Judith, indeed, appeared to be beaming in these days, a very degenerate descendant of Morgan ap Richard, The-impetuous-flash-that-lights-up-the-dark-secret-of-the-cloud; for she

was a pattern of reserve and discretion. And whatever clouds or secrets there might be, remained unilluminated by her impetuosity.

It was agreed among them that Claude should be told nothing at present of Hofmann's proposal to his sister.

"It is not an engagement," said Barbara. "I cannot hold Mr. Hofmann bound as yet. I have told him so. It would be difficult to make Claude understand, but it would be disloyal to Mr. Hofmann to expose him to the risk of being misunderstood."

Perhaps, too, Barbara feared that the idea of such an engagement might fill her brother's mind with ambitious hopes and wild pretensions.

On the day following that on which she had received and answered Fritz's letter, Barbara sat awaiting him in the humble little parlor. He had sent a note in the morning, not to Barbara, but to Miss Hughes, requesting leave to come that afternoon. He knew their hours and their habits, and might he venture to ask Miss Hughes to give him some tea about five o'clock? There was no written word for Barbara; but the messenger who brought the note brought also a small posy of choice flowers—all pure white—for Miss Copley.

So Barbara sat awaiting him, with a strange calm upon her; a calm strange to herself; it was so like weary apathy.

But when his knock was heard at the door, and his step in the narrow entrance, her heart gave a great bound, and she turned on a sudden deadly pale. The next moment he was in the room, standing near her chair, and looking down on her, as she looked up at him with the wide, wistful gaze of a frightened child. It all passed in a flash; almost immediately she rose from her chair, and gave him her hand with her accustomed modest grace, and thanked him for the flowers. But the look which he had caught upon her face when he first entered, remained stamped upon his memory; and he could see it vividly for many a day afterwards by simply closing his eyes and thinking of that evening.

He bowed over the hand she gave him, and, looking at her earnestly, held it in his own, perhaps a second or two longer than he would have held it yesterday. But that was all. He made absolutely no lover-like demonstration. And Barbara, profoundly

grateful for the quiet kindness of his bearing, soon recovered her self-possession, which had been shaken for the moment.

"It is very good of Miss Hughes to let me come," he said, seating himself. "But I trust I am not in her way? I am not banishing her from her own chimney-corner? I shall begin to think myself unwelcome, and an intruder altogether, unless Miss Hughes will allow me to come and go without disturbing her."

Barbara, with a faint color stealing over her cheek—the first that had dawned there since Fritz's entrance—answered that Aunt Judith was up-stairs in her own room, and would come down presently. "But," she said, timidly, and yet resolutely, "I want to say one word to you, first."

He bent forward eagerly, but watching her countenance as he had done attentively from the beginning, whenever he could do so without embarrassing her, he checked the movement, and answered simply,

"Pray speak."

She sat silently, considering for a few moments with downcast eyes. Then she looked up, and said,

"I have not told my brother Claude of your letter; and I have not told him because the fact that others knew what had passed would be—or might come to be—a clog upon your actual freedom of action."

He was about to speak, but she stopped him with an entreating gesture of her hands.

"If there is any meaning in the terms we stand on," she continued, "it is that you are free, as you have left me free, to gauge your own feelings—to protect your own future against a rash decision."

Again he would have interrupted her, and again she raised her hands entreatingly.

"As to my Uncle William and Aunt Judith, they are different. You felt that when you confided in my uncle, as you told me in your letter you had done. They stand in the place of parents to me. They are incapable of misunderstanding. If my wishes could avail, I would have you keep your own counsel altogether for a while. But I trust you wholly—I am very inexperienced—you must decide."

He, in his turn, was silent for a little space. Then he answered,

“Your wishes ought to avail, and shall avail with me. I will go through my probation—”

“It is also my probation,” she said, quickly, with a pleading look. Then, emboldened by the quiet sense and honesty in the eyes that met her own, she added in a hurried, impulsive manner, while a deep flush mounted to her forehead, “I do think so well of you—I have so strong a regard and esteem for you, that I feel—how shall I say it?—I feel a strange grudge against myself! For I know your goodness deserves—deserves to be better requited. But the only thing I can do is to be true—true and sincere in every word I say to you.”

“You could be nothing else! But I must tell you—to touch once more on what you have been saying, that I wrote a long letter to my mother to-day, and I have always been on terms of perfect confidence with my mother. You approve of that? Well, as to other people, I will obey your behest—for the present.”

Barbara thanked him. And presently Aunt Judith came into the room, and Fritz greeted her with a quaint deference that sat very well upon him, and kissed her hand in foreign fashion. Then the tea-tray was brought, and Barbara made the tea, and Fritz helped her with the kettle and handed Aunt Judith’s cup; and did it all in a simple, homely manner, more like a son of the house than a wooer in the presence of his lady-love. And they all three sat chatting tranquilly around the table.

If this behavior on Fritz’s part were the result of calculation, it was calculation of a very subtle sort; for nothing could have inclined Barbara so gratefully towards him, or so delicately have set her at her ease.

Neither did Aunt Judith’s demeanor jar, by a too great show of feeling, on the placid harmony of the moment. She was kind and gracious to the young man, though with a little extra touch of dignity, perceptible to those who knew her well. But as she saw Fritz and her grandniece gradually falling into their former easy tone of friendly conversation, she grew graver and more thoughtful, and watched Barbara’s face with a strange, wistful, questioning look.



"Aunt Judith came into the room, and Fritz kissed her hand in foreign fashion."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MRS. KETTERING came home in December, bringing Ida with her. Ida was much better, and, as Dr. Slocombe jocularly observed, need not be sentenced to the Riviera if she would but promise to remain well and strong during the rest of the winter.

Miss Stringer's visit to the Hugheses' house had not much increased her knowledge of Fritz's relations with the family, but it had confirmed the generally favorable opinion she had already formed of them. Miss Hughes's manner was that of a gentlewoman; her conversation was marked by good sense; and the house—as far as Sally's sharp eyes had been able to survey it—showed a degree of spotless cleanliness and neatness which in itself gives an air of refinement. But it was poor, it was very poor. And the atmosphere of poverty, as has been stated, was peculiarly distressing to Sally Stringer. Her report of Fritz was very satisfactory. She saw no reason to suppose that his mind and heart were occupied with Miss Copley or any other young lady. And she (Miss Stringer) was strongly of opinion that a visit to the Hugheses' establishment, although calculated to inspire great respect for them, was not likely to foster thoughts of love and marriage.

"Oh, I don't suppose Fritz wants to marry Miss Copley," said Mrs. Kettering, placidly. "I never did think so. Augusta fancies things."

Mr. Kettering hoped that there might be no ground for Augusta's natural anxieties, but he was far from being so easy on the subject as his wife. Nor did her representations that, although Miss Copley was very nice, you know, she (Gertrude) could see nothing in her to fall in love with, reassure him. He remarked, with bland superiority, that that was precisely what no woman ever *was* able to see in another.

"It is quite certain," said Sally Stringer, who happened to be present at one of these conferences, "that if Fritz Hofmann

chooses to marry Miss Copley, nobody can prevent him. But if I were asked to select the surest means of egging him on, and making him obstinately bent on doing it, I should say, 'Let the family combine to lecture him on the subject, and insist on the worldly disadvantages of the match.'

"My dear Sally," said her cousin Philip, who sometimes tried his hand at giving her a Roland for her Oliver in the shape of a little sarcasm—"My dear Sally, you will excuse me for observing that we are not *all* endowed with your strong independence of character; and that it is not a sufficient reason for us all to exclaim 'Yes' because others have uttered 'No.'"

"My dear Philip," retorted Sally, very briskly and cheerfully, "you will excuse *me* for observing that most men have a touch in them of the Irishman's pig, who, if he were required to advance straight forward, must be stimulated by an occasional jerk of his hind-leg backwards; and that if it were not for the knowledge of this constitutional peculiarity, we should never be able to drive 'em at all—the men, I mean, not the pigs."

Mrs. Armour was often at the Ketterings' house in these days, where she had made good her footing, despite the silent hostility of Olga and Miss Stringer, who disliked her heartily. Mrs. Kettering was indifferent at first, but she said she did not see why they shouldn't be civil to Mrs. Armour. And Mr. Kettering, although he really had a higher standard of taste and manners than Juliet Armour was able to reach, was warmly kind to her. He was so partly for the sake of her late husband's family, partly because he liked to assume a position of patronage, and Mrs. Armour was willing to be patronized for the advancement of her present interests. She showed no sign—at least, none that was recognizable by Mr. Kettering—of the rankling resentment which his well-meant urbanity aroused in her mind. And she flattered him not unskilfully. It was not at all unpleasant to be flattered by a woman who, at any rate, thought herself charming.

Moreover, Mr. Kettering was interested in Mrs. Armour's relationship to Christopher Dalton. The possibilities of Mrs. Armour's future were certainly splendid. Of course, they were merely possibilities, but they were interesting. Mrs. Armour, too, soon discovered that her insinuations against the Hughes family were not unwelcome to Mr. Philip Kettering, and that he

was a willing listener to her stories of Claude—the position he had filled in the boarding-house, his laziness, his pretensions, his want of principle, and, latterly, since his return to London, his dissipated, idle life. She had heard a great deal about him from a person named Hopkins, a vulgar sort of man; but—oh, Mr. Kettering knew who he was? Oh yes, indeed; she believed Mr. Hopkins to be a most highly respectable tradesman. In fact, the proof of it was that he distinctly objected to his son's consorting with young Copley, who was, Mrs. Armour feared, a thorough *mauvais sujet*. And much more in the same strain.

"A pleasant sort of family connection for your nephew, upon my word!" said Mr. Kettering to his wife. And Mrs. Kettering replied that very likely Mrs. Armour exaggerated a great deal; and that, after all, it did not matter much, because *she* did not believe Fritz was going to be silly; and she wished Augusta hadn't put such things into everybody's head, for it only made one uncomfortable; and she should never find any one to prepare Olga and Ida for Hammerfaust's lessons next season like Miss Copley. And what was she to do without Miss Copley as accompanist if Rosenheim came to play at their house? And, besides, Miss Copley was so quiet and nice and unaffected, and never made a fuss.

Perhaps Mrs. Kettering was unconsciously influenced by a reaction of feeling against Mrs. Armour's growing familiarity in her house. She was getting tired of Mrs. Armour, who was not good-natured, and spoke ill of people behind their backs, and gave herself airs, and was—in short, was very tiresome. (Tiresome was a word of strong disapprobation in Mrs. Kettering's vocabulary.)

"Cat *and* puss," murmured Miss Stringer, oracularly, to herself.

Hitherto, Mrs. Armour and Fritz Hofmann had not met. Not that Fritz was less often at the Ketterings' house than formerly—in fact, he came nearly every forenoon to accompany Miss Stringer and the girls in their walk; or to escort Olga on a long tramp into the country; Olga being by far the best pedestrian of the family. But he did not appear there in the evening, or at what Ida called "company hours."

Mr. Kettering thought this circumstance rather suspicious, and inquired of his wife and daughters whether Fritz were going much

into society this winter. "No; very little," answered Olga, quickly. "But he is working seriously at his book. He often talks to me about it."

"Oh, *that's* what you're always colloquing about together, you and Fritz?" said Ida. "I've often wondered what you could find to talk about."

"I should hardly have thought Olga would be good audience for Fritz's views on philosophy and sociology," said her father, with a smile. "But I suppose an author loves to talk of his work to any one who will listen."

Mr. Kettering was considerably reassured by this statement, which accounted for much that was unusual in Fritz's behavior of late. And then he proposed to his wife to invite Lady Lambton to a little quiet dinner, and to get Fritz to come too. "And I think, Gertrude," he added, as though it had been an afterthought, "that you might as well ask Mrs. Armour at the same time. That will make four ladies—for you will be here still, Sally? In fact, you *must* stay. I make a point of it. The girls can dine early, and join us afterwards. And we'll get Mullet and some other man to make up eight at table, and manage a rubber for the general afterwards. It will be just a cosy little friendly affair."

"Quite a happy family," remarked Miss Stringer. "Three of Chris Dalton's relations feeding together—and not on each other!"

It was quite evident to Mrs. Kettering's wifely observation that her husband had not improvised these arrangements; but that he had considered them and made up his mind about them beforehand. But she told Miss Stringer that she thought it a very good idea to bring Fritz and Lady Lambton together. It was a long time since they had seen anything of Lady Lambton, and if Fritz would but make up to her again, there would be something to relieve Augusta's mind.

So the party was arranged, although not exactly as Mr. Kettering had projected. General Mullet, on whom he had counted, was unable to come, having engaged himself to dine early at his club with an old comrade about to return to India, and it was found impossible to replace him at a short notice. Perikles Rhodonides was secured. And Olga was included in the dinner-party in order to make up the eighth. To Fritz was assigned the honor

of taking Mrs. Armour out to dinner; the host, of course, escorted Lady Lambton; Rhodonides gave his arm to the hostess; and Olga and Sally Stringer had to bring up the rear together. It was a very informal arrangement, but the best that could be made under the circumstances. And, as Mr. Kettering said, it only gave the party still more markedly the character of a cosy, familiar, unpretending little gathering, which was what he desired.

Mrs. Armour was in a state of suppressed excitement. She desired, of course, to make a charming figure in Mr. Kettering's eyes, and in the eyes of every male creature present. But she also desired to fascinate the ladies of Mr. Kettering's family; and Juliet Armour was one of those women to whom these two desires appear to be, in the nature of things, conflicting.

She had taken great pains with her toilet; and when she left the boarding-house, where she had dressed, she was very well satisfied with her own appearance. Her light hair was roughened, and frizzed high on her head; her gown was of the palest blue; her complexion, naturally colorless, reduced to a dead white by the plentiful application of toilet-powder. Miss Jenks had pronounced her to look "like a fairy" (and not in hypocritical adulation. Miss Jenks's ideal of a fairy had been formed, in early youth, at a Christmas pantomime in the Theatre Royal, Northampton, and Miss Jenks's impressions were lasting.) But when she saw Lady Lambton, who was in high spirits, and looking extremely handsome, Juliet felt a bitter pang of envious revolt against her poverty. If *she* could be so dressed and cared for—if *she* could have arrived in a snug brougham, instead of a draughty street-cab, she would not have feared to match herself against the younger woman. But who could fight against money?

She put a strong constraint on her discontented temper, in order to be gracious and agreeable to Fritz Hofmann when he was presented to her in the drawing-room before dinner. She had heard his cousins speak of Fritz, in Vevey, and knew him to be worth conciliating. She had to watch the others, too; and to do her best to shape her behavior, as her observation of them prompted; and she was at the disadvantage of being the only stranger in the circle.

In spite of Mr. Kettering's urbanity, and Mrs. Kettering's hospitable amiability, and the excellence of all the material part of

the repast, the dinner was not so successful as such entertainments usually were in that house. In the first place, Lady Lambton, who had been put to sit near Fritz at the round table, perversely bestowed all her smiles, and sparkling glances, and lively conversation on Mr. Rhodonides, seated opposite to her. While Fritz, taking only so much notice of Mrs. Armour as the barest courtesy demanded, engrossed his cousin Olga's attention, instead of leaving her free to talk to Rhodonides, who was placed on the other side of her.

Mr. and Mrs. Kettering exchanged glances of annoyance. Pericles Rhodonides had been a great deal at their house last year, and had singled out Olga for a great deal of attention. Her father and mother had said to each other that Olga was very young, and that they would not dream of forcing the thing; but that, really, it might do very well—for the young man was good-tempered, good-looking, well-mannered, and the heir to great wealth; and here was Fritz spoiling sport in the stupidest and most tactless way!

His Aunt Gertrude privately attributed it all to Mrs. Armour, who was not attractive enough to make Fritz talk to her; while his Uncle Philip supposed Fritz was jealous and out of temper at not being able to engross Lady Lambton.

When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, things were not much better. Lady Lambton was unusually effusive and affectionate to the Ketterings; but was seized by short attacks of unconsciousness, or absence of mind, whenever Mrs. Armour volunteered a remark. And even when she did speak to that lady, Amy's manner, if it had a fault, might have been taxed with excess of condescension.

Mrs. Kettering soon told Olga to go to the piano and play something softly; and this request was enthusiastically supported by Lady Lambton, who declared that nothing was so deliciously soothing and so conducive to confidential conversation as soft music.

It was conducive also—at all events in Mrs. Kettering's case—to a gentle nap. The hostess leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Miss Stringer, with a kind of rigid politeness, drew nearer to the two guests by way of offering herself to be talked to, should they be disposed to talk, but she did not initiate any

subject of conversation. Ida took up an illustrated book, and Olga softly played the "Blue Danube" waltz—for which, it seemed, she had a special fondness—over and over again, like a strain of music heard in a dream.

Mrs. Armour, who had been specially watchful, amid all her other watchings, of Lady Lambton, now decided that the present moment was a favorable one for unsheathing her claws a little. She had kept them hitherto in a velvet case—to the intensification of her silent resentment. But now, with a feline suddenness that suggested a noiseless spring, she began to speak of her beloved uncle in America, and said point-blank to Lady Lambton,

"My sister and I, as his nearest and dearest relatives, have been absolutely shocked to see the greedy rush made at the poor dear old man by needy outsiders, who belong to the veriest fringe and tags on the hem of his family." Then, with a pounce and a flash of blue fire from the hard, watchful eyes, "But I really beg your pardon. I forgot that *you* have written to him, Lady Lambton."

What answer Amy would have made to this unexpected attack, or whether she would have made any, must remain unrecorded; for at this moment the door was opened, and the gentlemen entered in a little knot together.

"Oh!" murmured Mrs. Kettering, opening her eyes, "you are early, Philip. Ida, ring for coffee."

"My dear," said Mr. Kettering, speaking more quickly than usual; "here is General Mullett."

The general advanced with an air of solemn importance, his face looking very red above his white cravat.

"I must apologize, Mrs. Kettering," he said, "but the fact is, I have seen a piece of information which may not yet have reached you; and in which I know that you and Miss Stringer" (with a bow in her direction), "and Lady Lambton" (another bow), "and—and, in short, various persons whom I have the pleasure of knowing, are interested. I drove Jack Bingham down to the Victoria Station—he's off by the Indian mail train to Brindisi—and there I bought an evening paper, and the first thing I see is—Here it is, among the deaths: 'On the 15th ult., at Gallup, New Mexico, U. S. A., suddenly, Christopher Dalton, Esq., formerly of Cannes, France.'"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OF all those present, the person on whom the announcement of Mr. Dalton's death made incomparably the strongest impression was Mrs. Armour. She gasped for breath, and clutched at the arm of her chair, as though she were about to faint. But in another moment she rose to her feet, and unceremoniously snatched the paper from General Mullett's hand. She was rough in her movements, and sharp and short of speech. For once in her life she was too thoroughly and intensely in earnest to care a straw for effect.

"Do you take this to be accurate? I suppose they wouldn't insert an announcement of this kind if it were not true?" she said, abruptly turning on General Mullett. To which he answered, nervously, that he was afraid it must be true, although he really could not vouch for it; but he was very sorry to have been the bearer of ill-tidings, and to have told this sad news, in ignorance (in pure ignorance, he begged her to believe!), without any preparation, to a lady who might—who was—who, in short, appeared to have a special interest in Mr. Christopher Dalton.

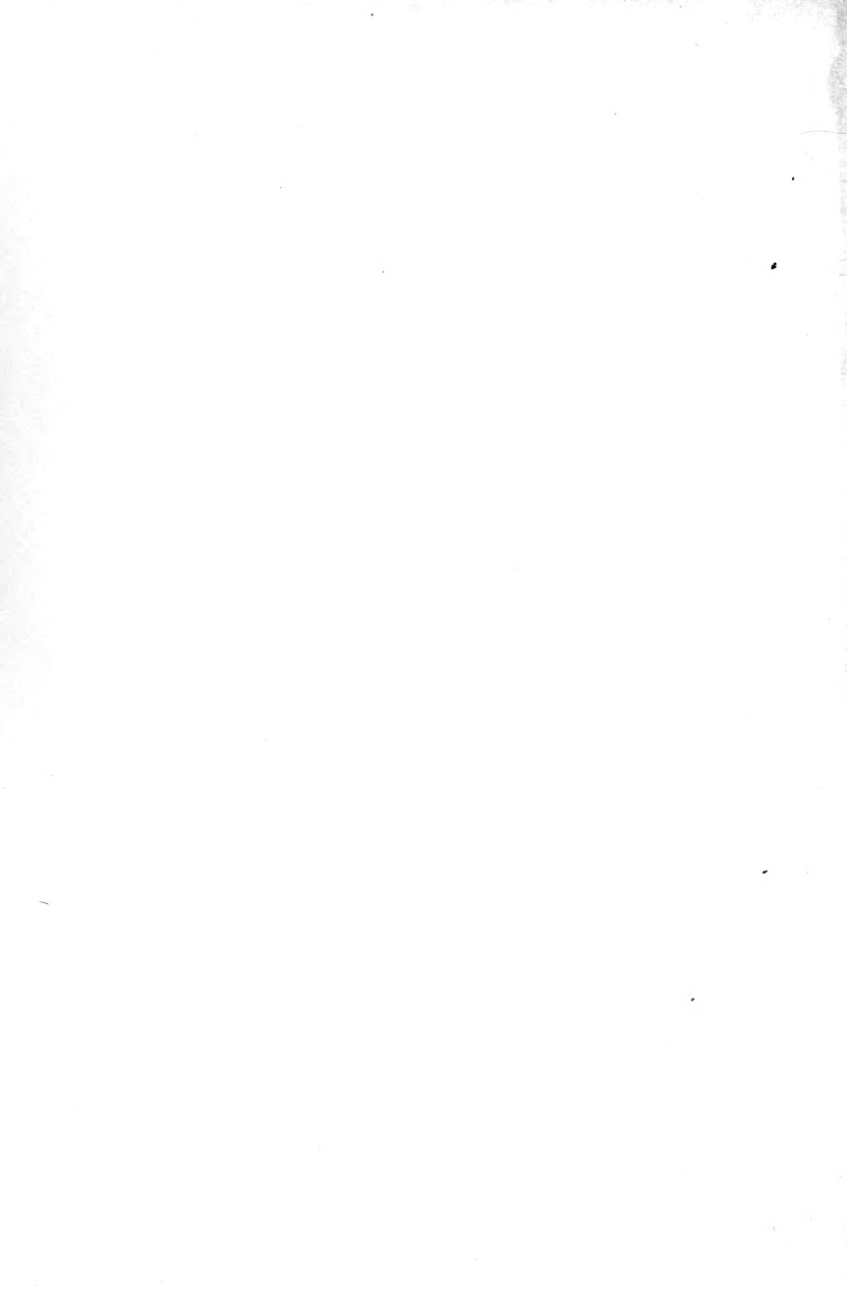
"I'm his niece," said Mrs. Armour, shortly, and then turned her back on him to look again at the newspaper.

Lady Lambton, to whom the matter was of less vital importance, had some thought to spare for appearances, and displayed a very interesting and becoming degree of agitation. General Mullett was much struck by the different demeanor of the two ladies under these circumstances, and whispered admiringly to Miss Stringer that Lady Lambton was so essentially womanly!

"Ah!" said Sally, after a steady observation of young Rhodonides, who was hovering near her ladyship with his mouth ajar, and a general expression of rather imbecile sympathy, "I dare say. And I think Mr. Rhodonides is so peculiarly manly! Don't you?"



"In another moment she rose to her feet, and unceremoniously snatched the paper from General Mullet's hand."



Ida had pressed forward, close to her father, in order to hear all that was going on; and Fritz, standing in the background beside the piano, where Olga still sat with her fingers on the silent keys, observed the others without joining in the general buzz of excitement.

Mrs. Armour, rolling the newspaper up small in her hand, and not relinquishing her tight hold of it for an instant, begged Mrs. Kettering to have a cab sent for immediately, and went downstairs at once to put her cloak on, attended by her host, who—divided between his inclination to express congratulatory hopes and his sense of propriety, which demanded something like a condolence—could only repeat, with Grandisonian courtesy, the recommendation not to excite herself unduly under the strain of this shock; and to remember that, if he could render her any assistance, he should be proud of the privilege of doing so.

Juliet was able by this time to command herself enough to thank him, and to look up languishingly into his face, and to murmur plaintively that he was very good to a poor little woman, left to buffet her way through the world alone, and that she knew no human being on whose ripe judgment she would so implicitly rely as his. For the stakes were not won, and the hazards of the die were many. But as the cab jolted away with her towards Red Lion Square, her heart swelled with the hope that that might be the last time she need submit to Mr. Kettering's patronizing benevolence, and with exultant anticipations of cutting out those fools of Kettering women with her splendor, and trampling Lady Lambton under foot!

That charming woman was a little annoyed at Mrs. Armour's precipitate retreat, because she feared she was bound in decency to follow her example (especially after all she had said of her mother's tenderly, sisterly affection for Chris Dalton), and she would have preferred to remain and spend the evening, and get hints as to what line of conduct it would now behoove her to pursue. There was the excuse for remaining that her brougham was not ordered for an hour yet. But General Mullett, in his gallantry, placed his carriage, which was waiting, at her disposition, and she could not refuse to avail herself of it.

"Good-night, dearest Mrs. Kettering," she said, bending down to kiss that lady's plump, peach-like cheek—an unwonted caress,

but attributable to unwonted agitation. General Mullett gave her his arm down-stairs, but Rhodonides hovered near her in the hall, and Ida, who ran after her ladyship with a fan she had dropped, overheard her say to that mercantile Adonis that she hoped he would be able to come to her house to-morrow about five, as she had a great many questions to ask, and wanted his *business* opinion and advice particularly.

The Kettering family—including Fritz—was soon left alone, for General Mullett and Rhodonides went away together. And then Mr. Kettering, standing with his back to the fire, with an aristocratic air of repose on him, and speaking in his softest and most polished tones, said: "Perhaps, my dear Sally, you will come in for a slice of this big cake. I hear on all hands that the cake is very big."

Although it was out of the question that he should ever turn the cold shoulder on Sally, even though she were to become penniless, and although he would certainly, in that case, give her a home in his house, and treat her with undiminished regard, yet, in some indefinable way, it was undoubtedly equable to him personally, and quite apart from his good-will towards Sally, to contemplate the possibility of her inheriting several thousands of pounds. He was also very complacent about Mrs. Armour's prospects, and said, with dignified enjoyment, that there could be no reasonable doubt of her coming in for a very large sum, since Dalton's wealth was immense, and she was his nearest surviving relation.

"There's her sister," put in Miss Stringer, with great distinctness of articulation.

"Oh, her sister? Of course, there is her sister. Who has an equal claim. Naturally—only—"

"Quite so!" returned Sally, nodding affirmatively, as if he had completed his sentence. "The sister has grizzled hair, and wears a hideous black gown, and, judging by appearances, does not possess such a thing as a powder-puff. One can't think of *her* as an interesting heiress."

Mr. Kettering's withers being unwrung, he merely laughed with good-humored toleration, and retorted that women who wilfully wore hideous gowns could not expect to be interesting. And he then withdrew to his study to smoke. Fritz declined his uncle's

invitation to join him there, and even resisted the temptation of some special and wonderful cigars newly arrived.

"No, thank you, Uncle Philip," he said. "As our evening has been broken up, I will go home and read metaphysics for an hour or two."

But, in spite of that resolution, Fritz still lingered after Mr. Kettering had left the room. He had seated himself near the piano, where Olga still kept her place, and was touching the keys with delicately poised fingers, that woke only the most subdued sounds, while Mrs. Kettering, Sally, and Ida eagerly discussed Christopher Dalton's death, and the possible bearings of that event on the fortunes of many people whom they knew.

Occasionally Miss Stringer's sharp ears caught something of the dialogue going on at the piano; and all that she heard confirmed her persuasion that Fritz Hofmann was a great deal too much occupied with his own hobbies to have much attention to spare for Miss Copley or Miss Anybody Else!

"I believe you would thoroughly understand all that I have written so far," Fritz was saying to his cousin. "You know German as well as I do."

"German? Oh yes; it isn't the language, but the ideas, that would floor me. I have always considered myself an awful little duffer about anything intellectual."

"You are not in the least a duffer, as you call it! I have never met with any one clearer-headed. And it would be a useful test for me if you wouldn't mind reading a few chapters. My aim has been to write as plainly as possible, and to avoid philosophic technicalities."

"Ah! The philosophers have a slang of their own, then?"

"Precisely. And if *you* found anything unintelligible in the introductory chapters, I should know it was my fault, and would rewrite the passage."

But, by degrees, their voices dropped into a still lower key; and the waltz melody flowed on above their words, like a trickling brook over grass and pebbles. And Fritz said,

"That is the 'Blue Danube' that you are playing, isn't it, Olga? I haven't a good ear, but I always recognize that."

Then, after a pause, partly filled by the soft music, he went on:

"Do you know what I always think of now—and always shall,

I believe—when I hear that waltz? I think of the evening when we danced here together, all by ourselves, and of that cold day when we were walking in the Regent's Park, and you spoke so nobly. Somehow it all seems mingled with the music in my mind. Do you feel that, Olga?"

Olga bent her head down very low over the keys, and whispered: "Yes, Fritz."

Miss Stringer broke up the conference over the fire by rising from her chair, looking at her watch, and observing that it was time for Ida to be in bed; Ida being still under Dr. Slocombe's orders, who enjoined early hours. And then Olga, when Fritz moved away from the piano, rose too, and said she would go to bed also. As she came forward into the light, she shielded her eyes with her hand, complaining of the glare after the shaded corner where the piano stood.

"Aunt Gertrude," said Fritz, rather anxiously, "I think you ought to get Slocombe, or some one, to look at Olga's eyes."

"At Olga's eyes!" and, "Goodness, Fritz, what nonsense!" exclaimed the mother and daughter respectively.

"I mean what I say. I'm afraid there must be some weakness. Don't you remember that cold day in the Regent's Park, Olga, when you felt the sting of the frosty air so severely? And now the light affects you."

Olga's face flushed crimson, and she stamped her foot impatiently.

"Fritz!" she exclaimed, in a trembling voice, "if you talk such bosh, I'll never speak to you again!" and with a hasty general "Good-night," she ran out of the room, followed, more deliberately, by Ida.

Fritz was beginning to assure his aunt that Olga's eyes ought not to be neglected for any caprice of her own against seeing Dr. Slocombe, when Mrs. Kettering stopped him.

"Oh, you don't understand girls, Fritz. Olga has been put out, I'm afraid. Look here! I want to say a word to you about Olga. Sally knows all about it. Just sit down a minute."

Fritz drew a chair near the hearth for Miss Stringer, but she preferred to remain as she was, standing with one foot on the fender, and shading her face from the fire with a little hand-screen. Then Fritz sat down opposite to her and near his aunt.

"Now, of course, you noticed," began Mrs. Kettering, "that Lady Lambton did her best to engross Perikles Rhodonides's attention at dinner."

"Did she, Aunt Gertrude?"

"Oh, that wasn't your fault, of course. But if you had not kept Olga chattering to you all the time, Rhodonides might have had a few words with her in spite of Lady Lambton. But you didn't give him a chance, Fritzchen."

"A—chance!"

"Of course, I don't know that Olga wished to talk with him. Very likely not. And she certainly did not wish it enough to make opportunities for him. Although she talks slang for fun, Olga is not that sort of girl. She has plenty of dignity. At the same time, you were rather blundering, my dear Fritz. Brothers never think of their sisters in that way. And as you are just like a son of the house, I give you this hint for another time."

All this Mrs. Kettering said in her usual placid manner, and with her usual slow, lazy accents. Fritz's face—keenly watched by the pair of steel-gray eyes behind the hand-screen—showed at first mere bewilderment; and then, with the growing comprehension of Mrs. Kettering's meaning, it clouded over until it became quite stormy.

"Good heavens, Aunt Gertrude!" he exclaimed, when she had finished; "you don't mean to say that Rhodonides is thinking of making up to Olga? Why, the fellow's an ass!"

"Civil to Olga!" observed Miss Stringer, *sotto voce*.

Fritz went on too impetuously to heed Sally's interruption.

"The idea of *his* aspiring to Olga is preposterous! Olga is a girl of a very fine nature, and a very original mind, too. It is not every one who can appreciate Olga."

"One can hardly expect people's fathers and mothers to appreciate them," put in Sally, in the same tone as before.

"Rhodonides! It's preposterous!" said Fritz again, and began to walk impatiently up and down the room.

"My goodness, Fritz!" exclaimed Mrs. Kettering, with her handsome blue eyes very wide open, "what is there preposterous in it? Philip does not think it at all preposterous. Rhodonides is a very nice young fellow, and he will be immensely rich."

Fritz stopped short in his walk, and turned round. "Does Olga know anything of this?" he asked.

"Anything of what? She must know that Rhodonides paid her a great deal of attention last season. A girl can't help knowing that. But she is not likely to make any sign. Of course, she would have to be courted and sought for. I can't say that Rhodonides would succeed, if he did court her. Perhaps not. At any rate, Olga will be left free to decide for herself. Her father and I would not breathe a word to persuade her against her will. Only the young man ought to have his fair chance, that's all. And I don't understand what you can have against him, Fritz."

"Nothing, Aunt Gertrude—except that he is an ass."

Mrs. Kettering pondered for a minute or so, while Fritz resumed his pacing up and down, muttering to himself all the while in German. Then she said, with the air of a person illuminated by a new idea: "If you are vexed with him about Lady Lambton, I can tell you she wouldn't have taken so much notice of him if you had been as attentive to her as you used to be. There is such a thing as pique, Fritz."

Fritz came and stood close in front of his aunt's chair; and, as she looked up at him, she thought what a well-built, manly fellow he was, and what fire and vigor there were in his face and attitude. "Aunt Gertrude," said he, "and Miss Stringer, too, for I want Miss Stringer to be kind enough to hear me." (Sally nodded, to imply that she heard, and kept the steel-gray eyes unwinkingly fixed on him.) "If you are not joking about Lady Lambton—very good! I see you are not. Then I must take leave most earnestly to assure you that, whether Lady Lambton chooses to flirt with Rhodonides or any one else, I care no more than the man in the moon—or than she cares for me! I can't put it more strongly than *that*. She and I have been very good friends, and I hope we always shall be. But the idea of comparing my interest in Olga—or, indeed, of putting Olga into the same category with Lady Lambton at all—is wildly absurd!"

"Well, don't get so excited about it, Fritzchen," rejoined his aunt. Then she added, with provoking phlegm and persistency, "And I do believe—of course, I have no authority for giving you any encouragement, but I cannot help believing—that if you

would get over your pet, and come round a little, Lady Lambton would meet you more than half-way."

"Good-night, Aunt Gertrude," said Fritz, with a despairing shrug.

"Good-night, *lieber Fritz*. Have you a warm overcoat? I think it must be freezing outside."

"Mr. Hofmann will thaw it," said Sally, giving him her hand, with an odd little smile that seemed to be rather in the eye than on the lips.

She was very silent after he had gone, and listened—or seemed to listen—to Mrs. Kettering's placid reiteration of her views as to the state of affairs, without one word of criticism. Indeed, so subdued was she that Gertrude once or twice waited, from sheer force of habit, to be contradicted, and waited in vain!

"Well," said Miss Stringer, as she took up her candle to go to her room, "I am truly thankful that I never married and had boys and girls of my own. With my temperament, I should have worried myself to death—and them, too. Whereas now I can dismiss love-making, and all such irritating nonsense, from my mind, and think of the deceased Mr. Dalton and his dollars, which will be extremely soothing."

Nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that of all the apparent, presumptive, and possible heirs to Chris Dalton's money, not one thought so little about it as Sally Stringer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE announcement of Christopher Dalton's death had been telegraphed from New York; but so slow had been the transmission of the news to that city from the place where he died that he had been in his grave three weeks before the statement appeared in any English print.

Mr. Coney became a personage of great importance to all the Dalton connection in those days, and was applied to on all hands for the address of the deceased man's London lawyers. But he did not even know their names, and could only refer inquirers to

Mr. Reuben Wilford, Dalton's agent and man of business in New York.

Several letters were despatched to that person by post; but before the steamship that carried them was half-way on her voyage across the Atlantic, an advertisement appeared in the *Times* and other newspapers, setting forth that all persons having claims on the estate of the late Christopher Dalton, Esquire, etc., etc., were to apply to Messrs. Rivett and Plumb, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Within an hour of seeing that advertisement, Juliet Armour presented herself at the office of Messrs. Rivett and Plumb, and, sending in her card (on which she had pencilled the words "Niece of Mr. Christopher Dalton"), desired to speak with one of the principals.

She was so early that neither of the principals had arrived yet. Mr. Rivett, she was told, was, in fact, out of town on business; but Mr. Plumb was expected shortly. Declining to leave any message or to call again, Mrs. Armour resolutely sat herself down to await Mr. Plumb's arrival in a queer, many-angled little closet of a room, lighted—if the word may be applied to the admission of so murky an atmosphere through so dirty a medium—by a skylight, and containing nothing comfortable to the human mind or body except a good fire. One of the clerks civilly endeavored to provide some amusement for her in the shape of yesterday's newspaper, and then withdrew to his desk.

There she sat alone, holding the paper in her hand, but with her eyes fixed on the fire, where she saw who shall say how many shifting pictures in the red coals—pictures of her own wealth and pride and predominance; pictures of returning to old haunts, where she had once been poor, and planting her new riches; pictures of paying off old grudges, and revenging old slights with interest heaped up and running over; but never a picture of poverty relieved, gallant struggles assisted, bygone kindness repaid, humble friends remembered! As for Juliet Armour, no; not one!

At last Mr. Plumb appeared—a tall, silent, sandy-haired gentleman, with a large beard, who did not seem at all surprised by her visit, and who was perfectly acquainted with her name and her relationship to his deceased client. After a brief greeting be-

tween them—its brevity being haughty on her side and merely business-like on his—the lady said,

“I suppose you were in communication with my uncle recently, Mr. Plumb?”

“Up to within a week of his death, madam.”

Mrs. Armour bit her lip. It was extremely disagreeable to her to acknowledge to a stranger her uncle’s total silence towards his family and total neglect of herself. But it was clearly quite vain to hope to deceive Mr. Plumb on the subject.

After a short pause she said, in as steady a voice as she could command, and with a hard stare that was perfectly steady,

“You are aware that I am—that my sister and I are Mr. Dalton’s nearest of kin surviving, and are consequently heirs-at-law.”

“In the event of there being no will, madam, you mean.”

“Yes.”

“Quite so. But there is a will.”

Juliet started up from her chair. A dull red color flushed into her face, and then faded, leaving some feverish streaks and spots upon its pallor, like an angry sunset on a cloudy sky.

“There *is* a will!” she exclaimed. “How do you know that?”

“The document is in our possession,” answered Mr. Plumb, quite unmoved.

“In your possession! How? When was it sent to you?”

“It has never been out of our hands. Mr. Rivett drew it, under our client’s direction; and it was at once deposited with his other papers in our strong-box.”

Mrs. Armour stared at him with her fierce, pale-blue eyes, as though some enchantment compelled her to stare. “But then this will must be at least six-and-twenty years old!” she said. “He may have made a dozen since.”

“This will was made on the 3d of October last, and witnessed the same day, on the occasion of Mr. Christopher Dalton’s last visit to England,” said Mr. Plumb, very deliberately. It was impossible to discover any emotion in his dry, indifferent voice; but Juliet fancied she detected in his countenance a gleam of cool satisfaction, as if he were conscious of having astonished her and made a point.

"My uncle has—revisited Europe!" she said, speaking rather breathlessly.

"Several times."

"Unknown to all his family?"

"Unknown to every one except ourselves; by his own express desire."

Juliet put her hand up to her head. She felt confused and dizzy.

"I have despatched a communication to you," continued Mr. Plumb.

"To me?"

"To you, and to your sister, Miss Kirby, and to all the parties interested; inviting your presence at the reading of the will here in our office on Monday next."

"I am interested in the will, then?" said Juliet, quickly.

Mr. Plumb bowed.

"And you—you knew my address?"

"We knew where to find Miss Kirby, who has inhabited the same house for many years. And your letter was addressed under cover to her."

Mr. Plumb had risen from his chair when Mrs. Armour rose from hers, and he remained standing without inviting her to resume her seat—a sufficient hint that he considered the interview at an end. But Mrs. Armour still lingered. At length she said, abruptly, "What are the contents of the will?"

"Mr. Rivett drew it, madam."

She suppressed a quick frown that lowered on her forehead, and said, with a forced and ghastly effort to smile archly, "But I have no doubt you could make a shrewd guess at its general tenor if you chose!"

"I should not—excuse me!—consider that to be any part of my duty."

"I am *sure* you know more than you choose to say!" she exclaimed, suddenly losing her temper.

"Most persons do, madam," answered Mr. Plumb, keeping his.

And then Mrs. Armour, with a curt, and almost savage, gesture of the head, which it would have required extraordinary leniency of construction to interpret as a bow, flounced out of the room.

The letters of invitation to hear Mr. Dalton's will read created a greater stir and excitement among the recipients of them than even the tidings of his death; for that he must die some day was certain; but it was very uncertain, indeed, and had been the subject of numberless hopes and fears, whether he would make a will, or leave his vast property to be divided among his surviving relations without troubling himself to apportion the shares.

The news was rapidly transmitted from one to another that the lawyers were to read the will at noon on Monday, December 17th; and even those members of the family who had received no invitation resolved to be present. An oversight was so possible—nay, so probable! And how could Messrs. Rivett and Plumb be sure of every one's address?

By a quarter before noon on December 17th, the Hopkinsons, father and son, had already arrived at the lawyer's office. They were shown into a room considerably larger than that in which Juliet Armour had waited for Mr. Plumb; but equally gloomy and equally barren of anything pleasant, save a good fire; and even that, although it diffused heat, did not break the general dull monotony by any flame or sparkle.

Mortimer was dressed in mourning. He had his hair tightly curled, and wore a huge imitation pearl in his black cravat. He was pale and nervous; disconcerted, moreover, by the absence of a looking-glass, and furtively endeavoring to see himself in the lower panes of a glazed book-case. Mr. John Hopkins—perhaps by way of emphasizing his son's gentility, and separating his own inferior position from that of Mortimer's family connections by the mother's side—was dressed in his ordinary clothes, and seemed to have selected a peculiarly shabby suit. The father and son sat alone in the room for several minutes, almost in silence; and the few words they did say were said in whispers.

The next arrivals were Lady Lambton and her mother. Her ladyship saluted the Hopkinsons very graciously; and looked very well in her rustling black-silk gown and lavender bonnet. Mrs. Shortway was evidently ill at ease, and sat behind her daughter in the most obscure corner she could find.

Then came, almost simultaneously, Miss Stringer, Mrs. Armour, with her sister Miss Kirby, and Mr. Coney. The entrance of the latter caused some surprise among the members of the family.

But he took his place with a face of solemn and stolid importance, which, if not Shakespearian in one sense, was eminently so in another, for it suggested the official manner of Dogberry. Mr. Rivett and Mr. Plumb had entered the room together just before Mrs. Armour and her sister. Mr. Rivett was a spare, bald, wizened man, between sixty and seventy, with very harsh and powerful voice, which, however, he kept in so subdued a key that it sometimes sounded like the stealthy grating of a saw; but with nothing in his appearance or manner to distinguish him from hundreds of his compeers.

"I presume, sir, we are all now assembled?" said Mrs. Armour, in a rather arrogant tone.

She had taken upon herself the air of the principal personage concerned; but her sister sat very quiet, and looked at every one in turn with the kind of disinterested curiosity of a person who has lived so much apart from the world that he has come to regard his fellow-creatures in general as a spectator in the theatre regards the players on the stage.

"Not yet, madam," said Mr. Rivett, in reply to Mrs. Armour. "We are expecting another person, and"—looking at his watch—"it is barely seven minutes past twelve. We must allow a little grace."

"I cannot conceive that there is any important member of the family absent from this assembly," returned Mrs. Armour, haughtily.

Before any reply could be made the door was opened, and a clerk ushered in a young man, in whom Juliet was astonished and startled to recognize Claude Copley.

The sight of him caused a shock of uneasy surprise to most of those present, and the glances directed towards him varied in intensity from grudging mistrust to open dislike and resentment. Whispers went about from one to another that, no doubt, these people had been importuning Mr. Dalton for money in an underhand fashion, and had probably succeeded in securing a legacy; and that they (the whisperers) didn't so much object to *that*, as to the sneaking, surreptitious way in which it had been accomplished—secrecy, greed, and meanness being so truly repulsive!

And yet Claude's appearance might have excited pity in the breast of even a rival legatee. He was more emaciated than

ever; his cheeks were sunken, his deep-set eyes shone feverishly. There hung about him an indefinable air of vulgar dissipation; and a peevish frown, expressive of mingled suffering and ill-humor, constantly contracted his dark brows.

The lawyers motioned him to a chair, and he seated himself with a little bow, half sullen, half haughty—a salutation which Mrs. Armour, to whom it was chiefly directed, openly refused to return.

There ensued a dead silence while Mr. Rivett unlocked a tin box that had been placed on the table before him, took from it a voluminous document, unfolded it, and began in his rasping monotone to read it aloud.

After the formal preamble, which was set forth with all possible legal verbosity, and wherein Reuben Wilford, of New York, and Nathaniel Coney, of London, were appointed executors, came the following bequests:

“To the executors aforesaid, one hundred pounds each; to Sarah Stringer, spinster, daughter of a first-cousin of the deceased, one thousand pounds in English government consols, as a recognition of her never having importuned him with professions of regard for himself, which it was impossible she should feel; his house and land in Essex, in trust to be sold, and the proceeds to be invested for the benefit of Helen, wife of Maurice Shortway, the income to be hers absolutely during her life, and after her death the capital to be divided equally among her four younger daughters, the eldest being already sufficiently provided for; to Dora Kirby and Juliet Armour, his nieces, five hundred pounds each; to Mortimer Hopkins, grandson of his beloved sister Isabella, also five hundred pounds, to furnish him with pocket-money; the testator desiring to leave it on record that he made only this limited bequest, well knowing that his grandnephew would eventually possess ample means for one in his station of life.”

Mr. Rivett here paused, and blew his nose resoundingly. A curious thrill seemed to run through the company. Amazement was on every face—on many, consternation; on some, fierce, pale anger.

“But what—what,” began the elder Hopkins, starting up and stammering with rage, “Where is the bulk of the fortune? Here are only a few paltry thousands accounted for, and—”

"I have not finished, sir," said Mr. Rivett, severely. And Mortimer, with a white, scared face, plucked at his father's coat, to make him sit down again.

Mr. Rivett gave a rapid glance at the countenances around him, and went on.

Stripped of technical verbiage, what he read was to the effect that, after payment of the preceding legacies, Christopher Dalton bequeathed the whole of the remainder of his real and personal estate in trust for Claude, only son of the late James and Olivia Copley, and grandson of the late David Hughes, formerly of Marypool. The said Claude Copley to come into absolute possession of the property on his twenty-first birthday; but in the event of his death before having attained that age, the property was to be divided among the testator's surviving relations in the following proportions: Mortimer Hopkins to take a clear half; one quarter to go to Mrs. Shortway, with the remainder to her younger daughters, as before; one eighth to Miss Stringer; and the remaining eighth to be equally divided between Dora Kirby and Juliet Armour.

Then ensued a silence, charged with passion as a thundercloud is charged with electricity. Mr. Rivett took off his spectacles, and, proceeding to refold the will, said, in a subdued but grating tone, "I congratulate you, Mr. Copley."

As though they had waited for these words as for a signal, nearly all present rose to their feet simultaneously, and a noise of angry voices burst forth.

"Do you mean to say that is all, sir?" shouted John Hopkins. "Is there no codicil?" screamed Mrs. Armour. "I never heard of anything so iniquitous!" said Lady Lambton, in a trembling voice.

"Iniquitous, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Armour, snatching at the word. "But those who have plotted and schemed for this end will find themselves mistaken if they imagine that Mr. Dalton's rightful heirs are going to sit down and bear it quietly. I shall dispute the will."

"May I inquire on what grounds, madam?" asked Mr. Plumb, eying her with irritating coolness and gravity.

"On the ground of—of undue influence—collusion—imbecility!" she returned, stamping her foot. "There cannot be a law

court in England that would support such a preposterous document. My uncle must have been mad when he made it. And how that shameless, intriguing fellow can have the impudence to come into our midst, and brave the family—”

But here she was interrupted by a stir and bustle among a knot of persons on the other side of the room. Miss Stringer pulled out her vinaigrette, Mr. Rivett violently rang the bell, Mr. Plumb begged some one to open the door and let in more air; for Mr. Claude Copley was discovered to have fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CLAUDE COPLEY had been more or less ill for a week—ever since the reading of Christopher Dalton’s will. As soon as he had recovered out of his fainting-fit, Mr. Plumb had brought him home in a cab, and had then recounted to his astonished sister all that had passed in the office in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The news was all the more astounding to Barbara, since Claude had kept secret the fact that he had been invited to the reading of the will. “Very considerably intended, no doubt,” said Mr. Plumb. “He did not wish to agitate his family by raising false hopes.”

Barbara made no answer to this speech. Neither did Miss Hughes, who had hastened, trembling, out of the schoolroom on hearing the strange voice in the little passage, and Barbara’s exclamation, “Oh, Claude!” But they both knew very well that Claude had been actuated by no such consideration as Mr. Plumb attributed to him, but had simply chosen to avoid the risk of a painful scene with his Uncle William, whose intense sensitiveness, on the subject of Christopher Dalton, Claude had already pronounced to be absurdly overstrained, and unworthy of a man who knew anything of the world. The young man had pronounced this opinion privately to Aunt Judith, and had persisted in it after she had been driven to tell him all the family story without reserve or mitigation.

The news of his having fainted startled and alarmed the two

women at first, almost to the exclusion of the other tidings brought by Mr. Plumb. But Claude himself made light of it. He attributed it to the close, hot atmosphere of the lawyers' office, and, as soon as Mr. Plumb had gone away, declaring that there had been coke in the beast of a fire, and that he (Claude) never could stand the fumes of coke; but that he should be all right presently. He obstinately, and even angrily, resisted all persuasions and entreaties to go to bed. Why should he go to bed? Did they think he was dying? He didn't want to be coddled. He would just have a snooze by the parlor fire for five minutes. That was all he needed. And so throughout each day during the ensuing week he persisted in leaving his bed after breakfast, and sitting in the parlor, where a makeshift couch had been established for him, made up of chairs and pillows. He had talked of going out; but the weather, which was very cold and wet, furnished him with a sufficient excuse for not making the attempt to do so.

In his uncle's presence, however, he assumed much more the tone of an invalid, feeling instinctively that that character shielded him more effectually than anything else could have done from disagreeable discussions.

Mr. Plumb had been astonished at the absence of all sign of rejoicing in Miss Hughes and Miss Copley when he told them of Claude's splendid inheritance. His astonishment would have increased a hundredfold could he have seen them a little later, tearfully consulting together in their poor home how to break the news to William, as though they had to communicate the tidings of some terrible disaster. Judith dreaded it most, having in her mind the recollection of the letter containing money that had come from France so many, many years ago, and the almost frenzied horror and indignation it had excited in her nephew. But the brave old woman rejected Barbara's offer to take upon herself the task of speaking to Uncle William when he should come home.

"No, Barbara," she said, "William and I have lived through so much together. We will live through this."

Unspeakable would have been Mr. Plumb's bewilderment could he have beheld the three sad faces round the humble breakfast-table next morning, or known that Barbara—whose chamber was

underneath her uncle's—lay awake half the night with an aching heart, and listened to his footfall as he paced up and down, up and down, wrestling with the phantoms of old sorrows, and with the fiery passion that was a constituent part of his nature; turning his thoughts from the bitter past, with a burst of compassion for the helpless ones to whom he was resolved to devote every pulse of his noble heart; sorrowing tenderly over the faults which were most antagonistic to his own character; and murmuring, with exquisite pity:

“Poor dear Olive's boy! Poor darling Olive's orphan boy!”

Such a fashion of receiving the announcement of a large fortune had certainly never come under Mr. Plumb's observation. But, nevertheless, the truth was, that in no member of that poor and struggling household did it excite the least sense of gratification, excepting only in Claude. But Claude's exultation was boundless. He contrived in some degree to suppress it in his uncle's presence; but with Aunt Judith he spoke unrestrainedly.

“I think Uncle William must be going out of his mind!” he said to her one morning, after his uncle had left the house. “He seems to expect me to give up my money! At least, I don't see what other interpretation can be put on something he said just now. Sheer madness!”

Aunt Judith's forehead was wrinkled with new lines of perplexity and anxiety of late; and the wintry roses in her cheeks were fading sadly. She looked up now from her knitting, and said slowly, “Well, child, well, don't speak with disrespect of your uncle. You don't mean it, Claude, I know; but it hurts me to hear such words.”

“Nobody seems to consider that it may hurt *me* to hear such—such confounded nonsense.”

“Tush, child! Don't fret yourself about shadows. It's of no use to talk now of renouncing—the money is not yours yet.”

“Yes, it is!” cried Claude, quickly, with a blaze of temper in his sunken eyes. “It *is* mine virtually. It will be in my own hands almost immediately to do what I please with. My birthday is on the 30th of March. To-day is the 29th of December. The time will fly fast.”

To any one who knew Claude Copley, his ready mention of the date was strangely significant. Formerly he had been always un-

certain as to the day of the month, and often as to the day of the week.

And then he began boastfully laying his plans for the future. He would be magnificent; and Aunt Judith should bask in the rays of his splendor. And Barbara also. And he would build a studio for his uncle—such a studio as would make the first painters in the land envious. And those trader fellows like Hopkins would be on their knees to get Mr. William Hughes's pictures, when he was no longer anxious to sell them. Ha, ha! Claude would enjoy seeing them come palavering, and koo-tooing, and having their entreaties haughtily rejected!

At this point Barbara, unable to command herself any longer, started up, and said in a low, quivering voice, "Claude, Claude, don't you *know* that Uncle William would sooner starve than touch a penny of that man's money? And I will have no share in such riches; never, never!" And then she hastened out of the room, sobbing hysterically.

Claude flew into a violent rage. He inveighed against Barbara's folly and hypocrisy—yes, *hypocrisy!* For if Barbara had been Mr. Dalton's heiress, neither she nor Uncle William would have dreamed of raising such absurd and high-flown objections to accepting his wealth.

In his blind, fierce temper Claude scattered wild accusations broadcast, as a lunatic might scatter burning coals. And finally he threw himself back in his chair, panting and exhausted; and, closing his eyes, soon fell into a heavy sleep. And Aunt Judith drew down the blind, and sat and watched beside him, with her knitting in her hands.

The silence was only broken by the faint click of the knitting-needles, and the occasional dropping of a cinder on the hearth. And as Judith Hughes sat there her thoughts travelled over the incidents of the past week.

Fritz Hofmann had been all that was kind, considerate, and attentive. He had not obtruded his presence on them; but he had been constant in his inquiries for Claude, and had written privately to Miss Hughes, begging to be allowed to offer any assistance in his power. Barbara had seen him once, and had been very grateful for his goodness. "Very grateful," said Aunt Judith to herself, with a brooding face, Miss Stringer had called, too,

more than once; and on one occasion Olga Kettering had come with her, and had sat for some time alone with Barbara, and had shown herself very warm-hearted.

These manifestations of good-will were all the more valued because the Hugheses were aware of the burst of indignation with which Dalton's will had been received by others. Little Mrs. Green, the flower-painter, knew a great deal of what was going on from her nephew Edward. The latter reported that the elder Hopkins was violently angry against Claude, and that he had quarrelled with his friend Coney on the subject of the will. Mrs. Armour, however, had been the most furious of all. She went about inveighing against the Hughes family as though they were detected criminals of the blackest guilt; and she had haunted the office of Messrs. Plumb & Rivett, threatening to dispute the will, and using such intemperate language towards those respectable solicitors personally that they at last refused to hold communication with her, except through her legal adviser.

All this had, of course, become known as such things do become known. How much William Hughes knew Judith could not tell. Since the first day he had not opened his lips on the subject at home, and he had steadfastly declined to enter on it with the lawyers.

Mr. Plumb had called a second time, and had seen Claude alone, and before leaving the house he had begged for an interview with Miss Hughes, and had told her that he considered it highly desirable for Claude to have good medical advice.

"You see your grandnephew daily, madam," said Mr. Plumb; "and for that very reason a stranger's eye is, perhaps, keener. Mr. Copley is evidently unwilling to see a doctor, but I think you must exert your authority—you or his uncle, Mr. Hughes."

And this, too, became known as such things are known, and the suggestion that Claude's life was precarious considerably modified the point of view from which sundry persons regarded him.

"I'm told he has not a twelvemonth to live!" said Lady Lambton to Mr. Hopkins. And Hopkins answered brutally that that was nine months too many. For he, too, calculated dates, and knew Claude's birthday accurately by this time.

But, nevertheless, the thought that Claude was very ill made a considerable impression on him. And when Mortimer somewhat

hesitatingly hinted that he thought of calling to inquire for Copley—"He and me got to be pretty intimate. And I think I ought just to pass the compliment, governor, as one gentleman to another, you know," said Mortimer—his father did not disapprove the idea. The elder Hopkins had taken a legal opinion about the validity of Christopher Dalton's will; and in cool blood he perceived the folly of attempting to dispute it. He was not going, he said to himself, to be such a fool as that Mrs. Armour, who ran about screaming that she was cheated, and condemned to poverty. "There's nothing that does a man more harm than making a poor mouth," said Mr. John Hopkins. He was as angry as ever against the Hughes family, and as full of suspicions. But there could be no harm in keeping an eye on them. In fact, he reflected, if it were true that the young man's health was so delicate, it would be necessary to keep an eye on them. Supposing Claude were to die before he came of age, and supposing his family managed to falsify the date of his death! Even four-and-twenty hours might be of incalculable importance before the 30th of next March.

Moved by these considerations, Mr. Hopkins reinforced his first cool assent to Mortimer's proposal by adding that if he meant calling, he'd better look sharp about it.

Thus unexpectedly encouraged, Mr. Mortimer suddenly resolved to make a clear breast of it; and there and then confessed his passion for Miss Copley—descending, however, to a more prosaic level of language than he had used for that purpose in speaking to his friends Green and Toller.

"Wheugh!" whistled Mr. John Hopkins, raising his eyebrows, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, "That's another pair o' shoes altogether! Gal's a governess, ain't she?"

"So was my mother, governor, when you married her."

"And I was a carver and gilder just settin' up for myself in a poor little bit of a place off Endell Street. I hadn't got a father at my back like you have, I can tell you. Besides, your mother's fam'ly was the height of gentility, Mortimer—father an army officer, grandfather a dean, mother a daughter of Squire Dalton, of Oosewell, Essex. Now this Hughes lot is all writers and artists, and rubbish of that sort. Nothing that can be called fam'ly at all!"

Nor was Mr. Hopkins moved by his son's assurance that the Hugheses traced their descent from the most illustrious Welsh blood. But he seemed to attach somewhat more importance to Mortimer's argument that if Claude Copley got old Dalton's money, the connection would be a wealthy and desirable one; while, supposing Claude should not live to enjoy it, he (Mortimer) would be rich enough to please himself. Nevertheless, he grumbled that in that case Mortimer might look higher. "I ain't—you know I ain't at all sure that she'll—that she'll have me, dad," said the young man, with a sudden rush of nervous despondency which seemed to make his legs quake under him. But this Mr. Hopkins pooh-poohed altogether. Have him? She'd have him fast enough! Why shouldn't she? "I sha'n't—I sha'n't ask her *quite* just yet, you know," said Mortimer. "I don't think it 'ud be exactly *good form*, you know."

"Oh, as to that, you can please yourself. I ain't in any hurry. Only you keep your weather eye open, and see what they're up to. I don't know about the gal, but young Copley's as artful a young devil as ever stepped. And as for Mr. William Hughes, I believe that, for all his simple ways at a bargain, Mr. William Hughes is the downiest of the downy and the deepest of the deep."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MRS. HOFMANN had done an imprudent thing in mentioning Miss Copley's name in connection with her son's to Arthur Madison; and a second imprudent thing in warning Fritz that an alliance with the Hugheses on his part would entail his uncle's lasting displeasure. But when she got her son's letter announcing that the mischief was done, and that he had made an offer of marriage to Miss Copley, she abstained from committing a third imprudence. About this third epistle she held her tongue.

She even delayed answering it—fixing in her own mind a respite of three days before she would write—in the faint hope that the matter might not be irrevocable; and before the three days had expired Fritz wrote again, telling her that, although not rejected,

he had not been finally accepted ; and also, that Miss Copley particularly desired that the affair should for the present remain a secret among themselves.

“I told her I had already written to you, *Mütterchen* ; but that, of course, she cannot object to. I don't agree with her in thinking this period of uncertainty and indecision desirable in any way. But I render full justice—and so, I am sure, will my true-hearted *Mütterchen*—to the delicacy and magnanimity of the feeling which prompts Barbara to insist on it.”

Thus Fritz wrote ; and Mrs. Hofmann congratulated herself that, this time at least, she had been discreet enough to hold her tongue. As to Miss Copley's not finally accepting her Fritz, should Fritz choose to persevere, Mrs. Hofmann had not the faintest belief in *that* ! But it really did seem that the girl perceived the irregularity of the proposed match, and the injury it would cause to Fritz's prospects ; and had sufficient right feeling to hesitate before accepting such a sacrifice. And if she hesitated a little too long—well, every one knew how common were slips between the cup and the lip.

Fritz's mother had an uneasy idea that she herself was in some degree responsible for this obstinate pursuit of Miss Copley. Without going so far as Miss Sally Stringer's theory of the Irishman's pig, Augusta Hofmann admitted to herself that it was a very injudicious way of trying to prevent a young man of her son's character from falling in love with any young lady, to warn him that she was precisely the last young lady he ought to fall in love with.

“And the worst of it is,” said Mrs. Hofmann to herself, rather inconsistently, “that I don't believe Fritz is downright, genuinely, over head and ears in love with her, after all ! He has just persuaded himself into it because he wouldn't truckle to Arthur for the sake of his money, and to prove his own theory about walking into love with his eyes wide open ! Oh dear me, why had I not the wit to advise him by all means to encourage any dawning inclination he might feel for Miss Barbara Copley ?” But she knew in her own heart very well that Fritz had not enough of the quality which Sally Stringer typified by the Irishman's pig to make that at all a safe proceeding.

Ever since the day of the reading of the will, Fritz and Barbara

had seen but little of each other. The Hugheses' one sitting-room was devoted to Claude, who, as has been said, refused to remain in his own chamber, and insisted on coming down-stairs, although he was unable to sit upright in his chair. For a time he really needed all the nursing and attention which his grand-aunt and sister, aided by the devoted Larcher, could spare from their daily work to give him. And Aunt Judith could not but be struck by the perfect reasonableness displayed under these circumstances by Mr. Fritz Hofmann. He invented no *ruse* to accomplish an interview with the object of his love; he never—so far as Judith could discover—hovered about the house in the hope of walking with Barbara when she went to give her lessons; he never importuned her to steal five minutes from her duties in order that he might see her, speak with her, or press her hand. There never was any lover so perfectly reasonable!

Claude was now much better. He had rallied wonderfully, and was in high spirits. A physician had been called in (much against Claude's will), and had laid down several rules—including total abstinence from tobacco—with which Aunt Judith knew it would be impossible to make Claude comply. But with one of the doctor's prescriptions the young man did agree. This was, that he should, if possible, get a little change of air at once. The present was not the season for the country; but even so much of a change as could be got by going to Hampstead, or Highgate, or Norwood, would be beneficial.

Aunt Judith, when she heard this, was greatly troubled in her mind. A change to Hampstead, Highgate, or Norwood? The doctor might as well have advised a change to the planet Jupiter, for all the power she had to effect it! But Claude loftily overrode all difficulties. It would be easy enough for him to get the money necessary for that purpose now, he said. Why, no doubt Messrs. Rivett & Plumb would lend him whatever he wanted!

Miss Hughes knew how averse William would be from asking such a favor of the lawyers; nor, in truth, was the idea much more acceptable to herself. But what could she do? She could not tell Claude that he might not live to claim the fortune he so confidently reckoned on. She did not utter the apprehension even

to her own mind. But it lay deep in her heart, like a dull but ever-present pain.

At length, after much anxious pondering throughout a sleepless night, she resolved, on her own responsibility, to write and lay the case before Fritz Hofmann, and to ask him for a loan, which would enable her to take a modest suburban lodging for Claude for a few weeks. This plan would meet with objections from Barbara. She knew that very well. But she intended to say nothing about it to Barbara beforehand. If she incurred reproaches, she would bear them. What mother would risk her child's life for a scruple? And Judith's affection for Claude was maternal, both in its strength and its weakness.

Fritz's answer, which came as quickly as a special messenger could bring it, was a pæan of gratitude. He could never thank Miss Hughes enough for her confidence in him. He dared now to hope that she really did feel for him some of the frank affection of a friend. He hoped that she would permit him the further pleasure of helping her to find suitable rooms for Claude. He would set about it that very day, and he subscribed himself her attached and grateful Fritz Hofmann. The envelope contained a little packet of bank-notes.

"He's a fine fellow—a dear fellow!" exclaimed Aunt Judith, taking off her glasses to wipe the tears from her eyes. "Ah, what a pity that—" She mournfully shook her head as she folded the letter again, without articulately finishing her sentence.

Fritz not only furnished the money and found the lodgings, but he persuaded Miss Hughes to join him in a little plot. He would offer to lend the rooms to Claude, making it appear that they had been previously hired by him for his own use.

"And, indeed," said Fritz, "it will really be very convenient to me to have *piéd-à-terre* when I want to be quiet and to work at my book. I certainly should have taken lodgings of this sort sooner or later. I am only anticipating the step."

This little fiction offered Aunt Judith a way out of several of her difficulties, and she could not screw her courage up high enough to reject it, and reveal the whole truth to the family at home. For herself she had courage enough—as much courage as ever. She would have dined on dry bread, or laid her old bones on a piece of sacking for a bed, without complaining. But for

Claude! She was not brave enough to see Claude endure any privation that she could spare him; and so the little plot was carried out. Whether William Hughes entirely believed in every detail of it may be doubted; and Barbara did not believe in it at all. But Claude accepted it without difficulty, and was even inclined to take literally Hofmann's assurance that he was doing him (Fritz) a favor in occupying the rooms and keeping the landlady up to the mark.

It was arranged—the Christmas holidays having now commenced and the little day school no longer requiring attendance—that Aunt Judith should accompany Claude to Norwood, where the lodgings were, and remain with him there awhile; and so it happened that Barbara was a great deal alone in those days.

It would have been, perhaps, ungracious in her to say so, but Barbara felt this solitude to be most welcome. She knew that Aunt Judith watched her keenly, and with a new sort of solicitude; and she was conscious that Aunt Judith did not accept the relations between her and Fritz with the same serene, undoubting contentment as did her Uncle William. For her own part, Barbara was entirely satisfied with that perfect reasonableness in her suitor which had struck Aunt Judith—by no means to her satisfaction. The more Fritz's character unfolded itself before her, in the acts of his daily life, the deeper grew Barbara's gratitude to him, the higher her esteem, the warmer her liking. But she never longed for his presence. On the contrary, she felt it a relief to be left alone when her day's work was over.

By her day's work is only meant the routine of her outdoor teaching. The long evenings were, of course, not passed in idleness. But when Barbara was working with her needle, or even when she had the exercise-book of some pupil lying open on the table before her, the employment was mechanical enough to leave a large part of her mind free. And then, before the lamp was lighted, there was that precious half-hour of dusk, when she could sit with folded hands beside the hearth, and her thoughts might wander whither they listed.

Memory flew back, faithfully persistent as the wings of a homing dove, to Thornfield Farm, and the breezy common, and along the course of the brook trickling among its sedges. And Barbara would scent the sweetness of flowers in the pure air, and

hear the shrill sweetness of the lark, and feel, diffused throughout every hour of the summer day, the consciousness of one presence that was sweeter than all the rest.

Sometimes she would start from these reveries, and awake as a sleeper awakes to remembered sorrow out of a happy dream. Not that she admitted her present position to be sorrowful. No; Barbara would have reproached herself for such a thought. It was not a thought, but it was a sensation as intense as that of the awakened dreamer. A moment's reflection sufficed her to recall the various reasons she had to be more than content with the lot which had been offered to her. Only that was not a sensation, but a thought.

Sometimes, again, she would ask herself whether she were not doing wrong to Fritz in letting him devote himself to one who could make him only so poor a return. There was many a girl—far superior to herself in beauty, and charms, and worldly gear—who would, moreover, bring to Fritz the dowry of a warm, loving heart. He was worthy of all love. Had he been her brother, had he been her friend, how she would have rejoiced to be his confidant, and to listen to the story of his wooing, and to take the girl he loved into her heart for his sake! Then she would look again at his letter that lay in her desk, and her eyes would be dimmed with tears because of its manly generosity. And then—then, perhaps, some perception of that perfect reasonableness which fretted Aunt Judith would cross her mind, and she would tell herself that Mr. Hofmann, although the best and most generous of friends, was too much of a philosopher to let Love be lord of all, or to suffer his life to be darkened by a cloud which might overshadow the whole horizon of a less wide-minded mortal.

All these various reflections recurred to Barbara from time to time, as she sat solitary in the little front parlor, and they swayed her purpose now this way, and now that. But one point in the whole matter seemed to her to shine out clear and free from doubt—this was Uncle William's happiness in the prospect of her marrying Fritz. She was convinced that her uncle had been enabled to endure the recent painful trouble about Dalton's will with all the more firmness because of the thought that Barbara, at least, would be removed from the contamination of that man's money. And then, too, in her innermost heart, and half uncon-

sciously, Barbara held Aunt Judith's opinion that a woman who does not answer "No," practically answers "Yes." All then depends on the earnestness and persistency of the wooer.

One evening—the third after the departure of her brother and grand-aunt to Norwood—Barbara sat alone by the hearth, her delicate head bent down, the firelight making deep, strong shadows among the folds of her gown, and tinting with a warm rose-color the fair hands that lay lightly folded in her lap. She closed her eyes, and the winged thoughts flew far away from the dusky little room into the summer sunshine. It was over; it was over. Those days were gone, and the future lay plain before her. But still the winged thoughts flew far away, and hovered over Thornfield.

Presently she heard a ring at the street door and Larcher's step going to open it, and then a muttered parley. Larcher softly opened the door and put her head into the sitting-room.

"There's a gentleman asking for master, Miss Barbara," she said. "Shall I tell him to wait in the schoolroom? Only there's no fire."

"Miss Copley knows me. May I come in, Miss Copley?" said a man's voice.

Barbara stood up from her chair; the last glimmer of light had died out of the room, but the firelight was strong and ruddy.

"You will hardly remember me, I'm afraid," said the newcomer.

"Oh yes, I remember you. I knew your voice," answered Barbara, and the next moment her hand was in Gilbert Hazel's.

For a second or two they stood thus in silence, and then Barbara gently drew away her hand, and sank back into her chair. In the first moment of hearing his voice she had scarcely felt surprise; it seemed as natural that he should have come back to her as that the sun should rise in the morning. But almost immediately there came a reaction. Her limbs trembled under her, her heart began to beat thick and fast, and she leaned her head back against the cushion of Aunt Judith's big arm-chair.

"And you have really, really not forgotten me?" said Hazel, sitting down opposite to her. "It is so long ago—but, of course, it could not seem so long to you, naturally. But I— You did not expect to see me?"

He scarcely knew what he was saying; his lips seemed to be speaking incoherent words without his will. All his soul was filled with the joy of seeing her again. In the fitful, flickering light, he ventured to gaze on her eagerly, as he would not have done had the room been brightly illuminated. The firelight sparkled in her clear hazel eyes, and shone on her glossy hair, and on the contour of her delicate, pale cheek. She was not changed. She was the same sweet, gentle, exquisite being whom he had loved with his heart's best love in those happy weeks at Thornfield, and whom he should love now as long as that heart kept a pulse of life.

"Of course, I remember you," answered Barbara, quietly. Her voice was, perhaps, a little fainter than usual; but, although she felt that she could scarcely have stood firmly upright at that moment, her manner had lost nothing of its accustomed soft composure. "We have not so many friends that we can afford to forget any of them."

"It is very sweet and good of you to say that, Miss Copley. But you must be surprised to see me here. If you thought of me at all, you must have thought of me as being still in India."

"No. We heard—my uncle heard from a lady named Armour, whom he met in Switzerland, that you had left the army and returned to England."

"From Mrs. Armour! But how did she know it? I haven't seen or heard anything of Mrs. Armour for years!"

"You seemed resolved that none of your friends should know much about you, if you could help it!" answered Barbara. Her nerves were steadying themselves now, and a faint tinge of color had come into her cheeks—a tinge scarcely deeper than the reflecting of a rose-leaf held near them.

"I don't reckon Mrs. Armour among my friends," returned Hazel, quickly. "But anyway, I'm sorry that Hughes heard this by chance. He might think, perhaps, that I ought to have written to him about it."

"I think so," said Barbara, after a very brief pause.

Hazel drew his chair nearer, and leaned his hand on the table between them. "Do you," he said, "do you indeed? Then I am deeply grieved that I omitted to do so."

"That is no reason for being grieved, Mr. Hazel. But, since

you have touched on the point yourself, I must say I do think you should have written to my uncle. That is, if you still call yourself his friend."

Hazel was silent, and pushed back the thick, short hair from his forehead with a gesture habitual with him when he was perplexed or thoughtful. Then he said in a low voice, "I am sorry that Hughes should have blamed me—"

Barbara interrupted him. "He? Oh no! He never blamed you. He defended you. But my uncle—you cannot know him as I do. You cannot tell how little all the sorrows of his life—and he has had such a hard life—have taken away from his natural trustfulness. He puts the most generous construction on all that his friends do, and leave undone. But I am grudging *for* him; and exacting, and *proud*. I cannot bear that he should not be fully appreciated. I cannot bear to suspect the shadow of a slight to him. Well, well, perhaps I was wrong. I dare say I have been misjudging you. But now I have spoken out the truth, you will not be angry. You will forgive me, won't you?"

"Forgive you! I have nothing to forgive. But indeed, indeed, you have misjudged me a little."

"Oh, I am so glad!" whispered Barbara, with an exquisite smile.

Before another word could be uttered, Larcher brought in the lamp, saying, "There's master's key in the lock now, Miss Barbara." And in another minute William Hughes was in the room, with outstretched hand, and the welcoming exclamation, "Hazel! Is it really you? My dear fellow, I am so heartily glad to see you!"

There was scarcely any outward likeness between Barbara and her uncle; but when they smiled, the smile had a certain irradiating quality in both faces. This resemblance in expression struck Hazel now, while Barbara was helping to disengage her uncle from his wrap—the well-worn shepherd's plaid, with which we have already become acquainted. And as he looked at his friend he saw that the two years had left some traces on Hughes's face and figure. His head was more bent between the shoulders; there were streaks of silver in his thick raven-black hair; and the lines of suffering round his mouth had deepened. But the bright, genial, selfless spirit of the man shone out clear as ever. There was no change in that.

“Now you must have some tea with us, and tell us all your adventures,” he said, laying his hand affectionately on the other man’s shoulder. “Larcher—this is our dear old friend, Mrs. Larcher, Hazel, who has known me ever since I was a baby—have you any bacon and eggs in the house? Mr. Hazel can eat bacon and eggs; I have seen him do it. I little thought what a pleasant surprise awaited me when I opened the door just now. Not that I was so much astonished as I should have been if I had heard nothing of you all this time. However much the world forgetting, you have by no means been by the world forgot, I assure you!”

Then the tea-board was brought, and William, as he drew his chair to the table, exclaimed joyously, “Why, it’s quite like old times! Do you remember our high tea at Thornfield, Hazel?”

But by and by, when the first flush and excitement of the unexpected meeting had passed away, he began to look more anxiously at Hazel when he thought himself unobserved, and to watch his face as he spoke, or listened to, Barbara. And then William’s pleasant smile took a touch of sadness, and his kind eyes grew soft with pity.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HAZEL’S story was soon told. Almost immediately after his return to India he had applied once more to that kinsman of his mother’s who had formerly offered to give him employment, and had received a civil but cool reply, to the effect that at present there was no opening. And between the lines of the letter he had read pretty plainly the writer’s meaning, to the effect that “If you will not when you may, when you would you shall have nay.”

It would be too much to say that Mr. Wilson (the kinsman in question) had been offended by Gilbert’s refusal to profit by his offer. But it clearly had not pleased him. It pleases no one to have a proffered favor rejected. Nevertheless, there was something in the tone of Gilbert’s letter which he liked; and not the

least praiseworthy point in his eyes was that the handwriting was clear, steady, and unaffected. And then, somewhat over a twelve-month later, Mr. Wilson had written again to say that circumstances had arisen which might enable him to give Mr. Hazel a berth, if Mr. Hazel were still desirous to leave the army and take to business.

The circumstances alluded to proved to be the unexpected departure of a confidential cashier, which caused a general movement in the hierarchy of the counting-house. In giving Hazel a second chance, Mr. Wilson had been careful to point out to him that he guaranteed nothing; it was a mere trial. The business might not suit Mr. Hazel, or he might not suit the business. Therefore, it behooved Mr. Hazel to think well before he decided; and he added that, as things were now, Mr. Hazel would have to begin on a lower rung of the ladder than might have been the case when the first offer was made.

Had he been absolutely penniless, Gilbert would have hesitated before throwing up his commission. But that was not the case. Bread to eat and a coat to his back he had wherewithal to purchase. So he wrote to Wilson, telling him that he thankfully accepted his proposal, and set off on his voyage back to England as quickly as it was possible to get the necessary preliminaries transacted. He had now been in Staffordshire some months, and was hopeful about the future.

All this he narrated to his friends with the frankest and fullest confidence.

"You see, my dear Hughes," he said, "I did not write to you about this until I saw, more or less, how it was likely to turn out. Why thrust my troubles on my friends? But since things promise well—nothing grand, you know, but good hope of a competency—I thought I might venture now to come and report myself. You understand, don't you?"

Hughes understood very well. And his kind face grew still more compassionate. Barbara, who knew every turn of her uncle's countenance, and every tone of her uncle's voice with the knowledge that belongs to sympathy, perceived that he was pre-occupied. But she was far from guessing why. It was natural that her uncle's spirits should be oppressed by the thought of that evil inheritance (to Barbara it seemed as evil as it did to

him) which would divide them from Claude in the future, and which had reopened old wounds, and made old sorrows quiver with a fresh pang.

In all the talk they held that evening not a word was said about Dalton's will. Hazel evidently knew nothing of the matter; and it was not likely that William Hughes should volunteer to speak of it.

They talked first, and chiefly, of Hazel's new prospects, and of Mr. Wilson, whom he liked and praised. He was now in town on some business for his employer, and expected to remain but a few days, although it was possible that his stay might be somewhat prolonged. In explaining how it was that they had heard of Hazel's return to England, William Hughes was led to speak of Mrs. Armour. But Hazel said very little about that lady, and it was easy to see that he had no high opinion of her. And then William gave them some humorous reminiscences of the Pension Monplaisir, with a relish which no troubles had been able wholly to quench, and at which Hazel laughed enjoyingly, although, perhaps, he was not so fully alive to the fun of every point as he would have been had not Barbara been sitting opposite to him and absorbing his attention.

But at length the time arrived when he must go away.

"By the bye, when did you arrive in London?" asked William, when his guest rose from his chair.

Hazel glanced shyly at Barbara, and a flush showed itself under the weather-tan of his face as he answered,

"Oh, at three fifty-five. The quick train."

"What, to-day?"

"Yes; this afternoon. It was too late to do any business in the city, you know. Besides, I have made one or two appointments for to-morrow forenoon."

"Ay, ay; to be sure!" answered William, thinking sadly that the poor fellow had lost not a moment in hastening to find Barbara. "But then," he added, aloud, "where do you mean to put up? Where are your traps?"

"Oh, my one valise is stored safe enough in my quarters. I carried it there from the station. I've got a room at a place recommended to me by one of our clerks—a boarding-house; very cheap, and I hope not too nasty. It's close to Red Lion Square."

“Well, you’ll look us up again to-morrow,” said William, painfully divided between the overflowing hospitality of his heart and the anticipation of his friend’s suffering from the awakening of a hope that must now be crushed. “Look here, Hazel,” he said, after a moment. “Drop in at my studio to-morrow, on your way back from the city. It’s just off Tottenham Court Road. Here’s the address. You will find me there up to half-past five or six. I am making some drawings in black-and-white for book illustrations, and I work at them by lamplight. We’ll have a pipe together, and a—a chat. And then, if you like it, you can walk back with me, and Barbara and Larcher, between them, will give you something to eat.”

“If he liked it!” There was no doubt in Hazel’s mind that he should like it very much; and he said so, eagerly. But William was oppressed by the thought that when Hazel should have heard what he now felt it his duty to tell him, he might shrink from returning to Barbara’s presence.

Then Hazel went out into the squalid, muddy streets, rapt in a golden vision of love and hope. She had been very still and quiet; but she was glad to see him! Her eyes and her smile said so; and they never spoke anything but the truth. And then her reproaches for not having written! Why should she have reproached him if she had cared nothing for him? He understood her feeling for her uncle. But would she have desired him to win her uncle’s good opinion if she had been wholly indifferent to him herself? And, in the course of their conversation that evening, he had noticed that her remembrance of the days at Thornfield Farm was as keen and minute as his own. And, as he pondered all these things, recalling every inflection of her voice, every varying expression of her sweet, guileless face, he almost resolved to put his fate to the proof, and to tell her on the morrow how dearly he loved her.

It was still early when he reached the boarding-house; but he proposed going straight to his room. Wishing, however, to ask the mistress of the house to let him have his breakfast early the next morning, and being told by the servant that she was in the drawing-room, he repaired thither to seek her.

As he opened the door, he heard a loud voice saying emphatically, “I will not avouch that Mr. Claude Copley’s manners are

altogether engaging; nor even commonly civil. But his uncle, Mr. Hughes, is quite the gentleman, and plays on the guitar *most* beautifully."

Hazel looked with some curiosity at the speaker, in whom the reader will have recognized Miss Jenks. Then he said the necessary words to his landlady, and was about to leave the room, when Miss Jenks's eloquence again arrested his attention.

She was talking now about Claude's legacy. The story of Claude Copley's legacy, and of Mr. Dalton's strange will, and singular character, and vast wealth, was by this time in the mouths of a great many persons who had never beheld, and were never likely to behold, any of the parties concerned. It may be imagined, therefore, with what an eager relish every scrap of gossip on the subject was devoured in that genteel boarding-house which two of the most prominent personages in the "Dalton will case" had actually distinguished by their bodily presence!

Mr. Copley, as the person who had got all the money, was naturally the chief object of interest. But Mrs. Armour, as the person who ought to have got it, occupied a scarcely less prominent position. No one seemed to be able to say why she ought to have had the bulk of Mr. Dalton's money; but the impression had gone forth that she was specially aggrieved and ill-treated. If her case did not attract much sympathy, it aroused, at all events, a great deal of inquisitive interest. Mrs. Armour was not popular in the London boarding-house, any more than she had been at Monplaisir. But everybody enjoyed talking about her just at present. She herself had not reappeared in the neighborhood of Red Lion Square since the reading of the will, so that conversation flowed on delightfully untrammelled.

Miss Jenks, by reason of her personal acquaintance both with the fortunate heir and the disinherited niece, was the object of peculiar attention, and for a long time had the field to herself. There was, to be sure, one drawback to the pleasure of listening to Miss Jenks—she was not imaginative. Or, at all events, her fictions, when she uttered any, were of a strongly utilitarian cast, designed rather for her own individual advantage than for the entertainment of her fellow-creatures, and were thus apt to be a little monotonous and dry. Still, there was at this time such a charm in the mere mention of the names of Copley and Armour that

Miss Jenks was surrounded by a circle of listeners in the drawing-room every evening.

After her admiring mention of Mr. William Hughes, an eager boarder inquired,

“Does *he* come in for anything?”

“I am not at liberty to say,” replied Miss Jenks, majestically.

“Oh! You don’t know!” snapped out the eager boarder.

“Well, whether he comes in for anything or not,” answered Miss Jenks, quite undisturbed by the insinuation, “Mr. William Hughes can do without it very well, I assure you; for he is a most *celebrated* painter, and last season one of his pictures was bought by the Grand Duke of Cashmere.”

“Grand Duke of *what?*” cried the eager boarder, with a malicious gleam in her eye.

But Miss Jenks, being very uncertain as to the proper style and title of the illustrious purchaser, and feeling that this was dangerous ground, feigned to be unconscious of the question, and promptly removed the conversation to a safer point—namely, the great disappointment of Mrs. Armour, and the probability that she would “bring an action.” Miss Jenks had no distinct idea against whom the action would be brought, nor in what it would consist. But that did not detract from the zest she had in mentioning the probability.

Hazel listened with increasing astonishment. He had seated himself at a distant table, and taken up a magazine lying there as an excuse to linger. But after a few minutes he drew near to the group around Miss Jenks, and addressed that lady without ceremony.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but will you allow me to ask a question or two about this will case? My apology for venturing to do so is that I am a friend of some of the persons who have just been spoken of.”

There was a sudden silence, and people looked uneasily at one another. But almost immediately up and spoke Miss Jenks, with her accustomed dauntless firmness, and boldly asked the very question which the others were casting about in their minds how to get answered:

“Are you a friend of Mrs. Armour?” inquired Miss Jenks, solemnly.

“The friends I was alluding to are Mr. William Hughes, the painter, and his family. I have been absent many years from England, and have not happened to hear anything of this Dalton will case—I think that is what you called it?”

At these words every tongue was loosened. But in a very short time—partly, no doubt, owing to her superior weight of metal, if the phrase may pass, and partly, also, because the rest of the company really did believe her to know more of the matter than they did—Miss Jenks was left sole spokeswoman. Her narrative was neither clear nor accurate; but it served to give Hazel the main outline of what he wanted to know; and it was elucidated by a good deal of comment and contradiction on the part of the audience. The eager boarder in particular, though far from wishing to cast any aspersion on respectable persons now living, felt herself compelled to remark that there could be no doubt of Mr. Dalton’s having been mixed up with a very ugly story connected with some member or members of the Hughes family many years ago. Oh yes; she didn’t dispute that Mr. Hughes was quite the gentleman—although his nephew did not appear to be what *she* considered well-bred!—nor yet that he played in a superior manner on the guitar. It might be so. But what she would and must say was, that riches didn’t give you peace of mind unless your conscience was at rest. Otherwise, why should Dalton go and hide away from his family all those years? And if once they threw the case into Chancery, she (the eager boarder) could assure them that there would be very little left for *anybody*! The suggestion of which contingency was received with strong tokens of public approval.

In the solitude of his own room, Hazel thought long and anxiously of what he had heard. The existence of some painful story, connecting the Hughes family with Dalton in the past, would account for what otherwise seemed so inexplicable—the silence of William and Barbara about this important event of Claude’s legacy. “Well,” said Hazel to himself, “I thank Heaven that, be this money what it may, and let it come from whence it may, it has been left to the brother, and none of it to Barbara. They all agreed about that. How could I come back and woo a rich heiress, when I held my peace to that penniless young girl whom I knew at Thornfield Farm?”

The story, and the way in which he had heard it told, had annoyed him. But nevertheless the remembrance of Barbara's sweet face, and Barbara's sweet low voice, made a serene gladness in his heart beyond the reach of such vexations. If she loved him—if that one supreme happiness could be his, what else could be wrong for him in the world? If that were not to be—God bless her, and make her happy; and for him let the end of it all come, the sooner the better!

The first of his appointments next morning was for half-past ten o'clock; and Hazel would keep the hour with military punctuality. But there was time between his early breakfast and the hour when he should be due in the city to rush off to the Harrow Road, and to the shabby little house in the shabby little street hard by where she lived, and to pace up and down there for ten minutes on the chance of seeing her—at any rate, to look up at her window, and to see the outside of the casket that held his matchless pearl of women. It would doubtless have seemed a very unwise proceeding to most spectators. The morning was dark, the pavement dirty, the air damp and raw. But the preciousness of pearls varies, as we know, with the nature of the creature that finds them.

Fortune favored Gilbert Hazel; for he had not been five minutes in the street before the door of the Hugheses' house was opened, and forth stepped Barbara, in her old cloak and black hat, carrying a parcel of books in a strap. Hazel was some little way up the street on the opposite side of it, and she did not see him. Her face looked sadder and paler than it had looked last night. And—was it his fancy, or were there traces of tears about her eyelids?

He stood for a moment irresolute; longing to hear the sound of her voice—to take her hand. But then he determined to refrain from doing so. She was going to her daily task, poor child! He would not risk startling her from her composure, just for the brief word of greeting which was all that time allowed them just then. He had seen her. That was worth the pilgrimage he had made, a hundred times over! Yes; there *was* a shade of trouble in that sweet face. Could it be connected with the story of the will that those people had been chattering about last night? Oh, if he might but shield her, and guard her on her way through

this rough world, and carry her over the miry places in his loving arms, so that her dainty little feet should be safe from smirch or chill! Sweet, patient, gentle, darling Barbara!

Then he went off on the top of an omnibus towards Fleet Street, and acquitted himself with good discretion of Mr. Wilson's business.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON the day following that on which Gilbert Hazel so unexpectedly reappeared to Barbara Copley, Fritz and his cousin Olga paid a visit to Miss Hughes at Norwood. And we must go back a little in the course of our story, in order to explain how that came to pass.

It may be remembered that Olga Kettering had been to see Barbara, and to inquire for Claude, after the reading of the will. Neither her father nor her mother had made any objection to her accompanying Sally Stringer to the Hugheses' house.

It would not be fair to say that the revulsion of opinion in favor of the Hughes family, which was very generally observable about this time, was wholly due to the fact (established now beyond doubt or quibble) that Claude Copley was the acknowledged heir to the bulk of Dalton's wealth. But it might not be very far from the truth to say that many persons were now disposed to examine the evidence who had previously assumed the Hugheses to have been guilty of secret and underhand manœuvres in order to get the money.

And this evidence, when inquired into, was all in their favor. Messrs. Rivett & Plumb testified that Dalton had gained all the information he had about Claude Copley solely through their means. It was years since he had written from America, bidding them make private inquiries as to the surviving descendants of the late David Hughes of Marypool. During these visits to England, the revelation of which had so startled Juliet Armour, Mr. Dalton had particularly desired to keep his presence secret from the Hughes family; and had never—the lawyers declared them—

selves convinced—seen, or been seen by, any member of it. All this was brought to Mr. Kettering's knowledge through Sally Stringer. And Mr. Kettering had latterly spoken very handsomely of the Hugheses, acquitting them of any ill-behavior in the matter of the will, and even declaring that, after all, the old rascal (meaning Christopher Dalton) might have done worse with his money.

Mrs. Armour, to be sure, had been hardly used. He was really sorry for Mrs. Armour's disappointment. Eh? The sister? Oh yes! of course Miss Kirby's case was equally hard. No doubt it was. But it appeared that Mrs. Armour had been a little rash, and had set up exaggerated expectations. It now came out that none of the Kirbys had even taken the trouble to discover whether Dalton were alive or dead for nearly twenty years past. So that he could scarcely be expected, when once his sister was dead, to interest himself particularly in the second generation. Moreover, Mr. Kettering was afraid that Mrs. Armour had been intemperate and undignified under her disappointment. He was very sorry for Mrs. Armour, but he did fear that she had sinned a little against good taste. There was Lady Lambton now; how different had been her behavior!

It was quite true that after the first shock Amy had borne her disappointment at the terms of the will in such a manner as to win a great deal of praise. The fact was (although the statement would have been rejected as incredible by every one of the other disappointed candidates) that the chief bitterness she felt had arisen from wounded vanity. The wound had been given by a side-stroke in the wording of the bequest to Sally Stringer. Miss Stringer was lauded and rewarded for not having made any professions of regard to the rich man. The mortification of this was at first very sharp to Amy Lambton, remembering her own admirable letters to Dalton. But it did not take her very long to persuade herself that, although she personally had not benefited by Dalton's money, yet the bequest to her mother and sisters was doubtless due to the charm of her eloquent epistles. The house and land in Essex were of no great value—would not probably produce a bare six thousand pounds to be invested for Mrs. Shortway. But the possession of six thousand pounds would make an enormous difference to the Shortway family. It meant ease of

mind and comfort of body secured to Amy's parents for the rest of their days.

And let it not be supposed that Amy was indifferent to this consideration, nor that, after the first burst of disappointment, she begrudged her sisters their little dowry. If only Dalton had had the grace to put it on record by whose influence the bequest had been obtained for them! But, as she told them in Gower Street, she was thankful that her letters to Mr. Dalton had secured so good a provision for her mother and sisters—very thankful.

On the whole, Mr. Kettering considered Lady Lambton to have behaved very well.

Mrs. Kettering was not quite so cordial in her approval of Lady Lambton. Lady Lambton might have behaved well enough about the will, but why did she flirt with Rhodonides? There was Fritz. Why didn't she stick to Fritz?

"But, my dear Gertrude," said Mr. Kettering, "allow me to point out to you that Fritz shows no inclination to 'stick to' Lady Lambton, as you not very elegantly express it. And it really does seem as though he had found metal more attractive."

"Do you mean Miss Copley, Philip? I don't believe Fritz will be so silly as to marry Miss Copley."

"H'm! The silliness—which, I presume, only applies to Miss Copley's worldly circumstances. You have no personal objection to her, my dear?"

"Oh, I like Miss Copley very much, Philip; but I think it would be very silly of Fritz to marry her."

"Well, but you see the silliness of marrying a poor young lady is to a great extent removed now. Miss Copley's only brother is, or will be in a month or two, very rich. Really—very—rich," repeated Mr. Kettering, slowly and emphatically, as who should say, "You observe that *I* call him rich, and my standard of riches is a high one." "I understand that the young man is in very delicate health. His natural heirs would be—but, in any case, it cannot be supposed that he should not make some suitable provision for his sister. The connection would now be a—a—a very different one, indeed."

"Well, I don't believe Fritz will be so silly as to marry Miss Copley," returned Mrs. Kettering, in precisely the same placid tone as before.

Of course, not all the particulars of these and other similar conversations between her father and mother were known to Olga; but equally, of course, their influence was felt in the altered tone assumed by Mr. Kettering about Miss Copley; and when Fritz informed the Ketterings that Miss Hughes and her grandnephew were lodging near the Crystal Palace in order to give young Copley change of air, and suggested that Miss Stringer and Olga should run down there with him and pay Miss Hughes a visit, Mr. Kettering graciously observed that he thought it would be a very becoming thing to do, and would, no doubt, be gratefully appreciated.

So the little excursion was arranged, but at the last moment Sally cried off. She had something else to do; she was tired; she didn't want to go. No, she had not promised; she had only not said "No." In a word, there was no moving her, and at length Fritz exclaimed, impatiently,

"Well then, Olga, we must go by ourselves!"

Olga hesitated. "Do you think we can, Sally?" she asked, wistfully; for neither her father nor mother was at home.

"I should suppose so! Is there any greater difficulty in going to Norwood than to Kensington Gardens, or to Highgate, where you walked the other day?"

"Difficulty? No; only—"

But Fritz cut the discussion short by peremptorily bidding Olga get her hat on, or they should miss the train; and he wished to arrive in good time so as to show Olga a certain view from a certain point on the hill, before they made their call. And Fritz got his own way.

It was a fine winter's day. The air, even at that short distance from the centre of London smoke, was already far purer than the atmosphere they had left behind; and the distant landscape, tinted with soft, unreal-looking lilacs, and pearl-grays, and opaline haze, was enchanting. Olga, at least, thought so as she walked beside her cousin with her hand on his arm.

Now Fritz had reserved to himself a certain discretion in the matter of keeping secret his position with respect to Barbara. He would not reveal it to any one "for the present," he had told her. But that "present" was now some weeks old. And finding, as he had done of late, so very much happiness in confiding

to Olga his thoughts, aims, views, and wishes on a great variety of subjects, it was only natural that he should feel impelled to make the further confidence of his suit to Miss Copley. The impulse came upon him strongly as they walked that day, and he yielded to it.

Olga received the news very quietly. Indeed, at first she only said, "Yes, Fritz; I was sure of it." But presently she added, "I wish you joy, and I think she is very good and charming. She must—she must be very fond of you, Fritz."

"My dear child, that is exactly what she is not."

"Oh, Fritz, it's impossible!"

"Too good of you to say so!" answered he, smiling, and raising his eyebrows.

A bright, quick flash dyed her face. She removed her hand from his arm to the interior of her muff, and drew her straight young figure a trifle more upright, as she said, "Of course, if you—since you have told her you love her, I mean."

Fritz shook his head. "I assure you even that did not call forth an expression of tenderness. No doubt she ought to adore me—only she doesn't."

There was a silence which lasted so long that Fritz asked his cousin if she felt tired.

"Oh no."

"Won't you take my arm again? I think we keep step better so."

"No, thanks; my hand is warmer in my muff."

Another silence.

"Well?" said Fritz. "Have you no word of wisdom for me, *Cousinchen*?"

"I never have words of wisdom."

"Well—words of sympathy, then?"

"I—look here, Fritz—I don't understand you. You seem not to be in earnest!"

"Not in earnest? I beg your pardon! I am very much in earnest."

"But then—how is it? Miss Copley hasn't refused you, Fritz?"

"No; but she hasn't accepted me."

"I don't understand," repeated Olga, shaking her head, and pressing her lips together.

Then Fritz proceeded to explain the position as well as he could; and in the course of his explanation he was led on by one or two brief questions from Olga (who, however, said very little) to set forth his theory of falling in love, as regarded himself personally. "You see," he said, "I can talk to you, Olga, as I could talk to scarcely any one else. I never met any one more clear-headed, or possessed of a quicker insight into certain psychological phenomena, than you are, when you give your mind fair play."

But on this occasion Olga did not show her usual docility and intelligence.

"The upshot of it all is, so far as I can see," said she, obstinately, "that Miss Copley doesn't love you a bit; and you don't love her a bit."

"Olga, how can you talk in that childish way? I tell you I do love Miss Copley. But my affection is based on reason. I could have checked it at first. I examined my own mind step by step. I perceived that, as a companion for life, Miss Copley was all I could wish for: cultivated, intelligent, very amiable, a lady to the finger-tips. I believe that an immense amount of mischief is done in the world by that foolish assumption that it is in some way fine and praiseworthy to give one's self up blindly to the passion of love, while yet we admit that other passions should be fought and conquered."

"Well, perhaps one may reason one's self *out* of love; but one can't reason one's self *into* it; and that's what you're trying to do," answered Olga, with, possibly, rather more "psychological insight" than Fritz was quite prepared to expect. "But," she added, quickly, "as far as reason goes, I think you have made a very good choice. Don't imagine I mean otherwise! and everybody seems to think so too—now."

Being required to explain this utterance, Olga confessed how her parents had at first strongly set themselves against the idea of Fritz's attachment to Miss Copley (Fritz at once surmised that the first hint of such a possibility must have come from his mother, but said nothing); and how their opinion, latterly, had changed; and how highly her father in particular had spoken of Miss Copley.

"Oh, indeed!" said Fritz, rather coldly. "Well, I am glad

Uncle Philip approves; although, of course, that could make no real difference as to my conduct in this case."

"I think it ought to make a difference in your satisfaction, at any rate—on reasonable grounds, you know."

"You don't see this matter with your usual perspicacity, Olga. Reason concerns itself in such a case as this—with what the two parties chiefly interested think of each other: not with what any third person may think of either."

"Oh! Reason doesn't care for anybody's opinion? Then I don't see how it is so very much wiser than love!"

"*Um Gotteswillen, Olga!*" cried Fritz, impatiently. "Don't you see—can't you understand? Look here! Put the case to yourself in this way: Suppose, just for the sake of argument, that Uncle Philip and Aunt Gertrude wanted you to marry somebody; say, just for the sake of argument, Rhodonides, for instance. Well, from their point of view, the idea might be more or less reasonable. But, from yours, it would, of course, be absurd, and—"

"I don't know that."

"What! You don't know that?" echoed Fritz, stopping short, and looking round at her.

"No; I don't know that at all."

"Olga, he's an ass!"

"I'm not sure that he is. He may not be a philosopher; but—"

"Philosopher! How can you talk such nonsense? You could never care for such a fellow as Rhodonides—you know you couldn't."

"*How* do I know? If papa and mamma thought I ought to care for him, and there was nothing against his character, or his temper, or his manners—and there is nothing so far as I know—why shouldn't I reason myself into caring for him if he cared for me?"

Fritz's blue eyes flashed, and his eyebrows were knitted angrily. "Oh, of course, if you choose to talk merely for the sake of being provoking, there is no more to be said," he muttered.

And then they marched on side by side up a steep slope at a tearing pace and in total silence.

All at once Fritz stopped abruptly. They were both flushed and panting.

"Olga," said Fritz, speaking in a soft voice, and trying, not very successfully, to see her face under the brim of her hat, "I'm afraid I came up the hill too fast for you."

"Not at all."

"I beg your pardon if I did."

"Not at all."

"Olga—Olga, do you know I believe we very nearly had a quarrel! We never quarrelled before, did we? If I spoke roughly, I am very sorry. Please forgive me."

"I think," said Olga, in a constrained little voice, "that if an apology is due to any one, it is due to Mr. Perikles Rhodonides. We have been making all kinds of ridiculous suppositions about him, and he has never said a word to warrant them."

"Hasn't he? But, of course, he hasn't! You wouldn't have let him! Say you wouldn't, Olga!"

"I can't say anything about it."

"But you *can*! That's a mere subterfuge— There, there; don't let us begin again. Take my arm."

"No; never mind that now, thanks. Are we far from Miss Hughes's lodgings, Fritz?"

"Eh? Far from— Upon my word, I am not quite sure *where* we are! I missed the way somehow while we were talking. Oh, it is of no consequence—the affair of ten minutes more or less. I think that will be our turning yonder. Do take my arm. Non-sense! Give me your hand, or I shall think you haven't forgiven me. There, that's much better. What a brute I was to rush you up here at such a pace! But you ought to have checked me. We'll go down more gently. I say, Olga, you were not serious, were you? You wouldn't have Rhodonides supposing, just for argument's sake, that he were to ask you?"

"What would it matter to you if I did?"

"What would it matter! What would it matter if you—ah! what do you deserve for making such a speech, you wicked gypsy?" For there was a little spark of laughter—or was it a tear? That hat-brim was plaguily in the way!—in Olga's eye, and a little quivering smile at the corner of her mouth. "You know very well, Olga, that there isn't a creature in the world whom I'm fonder of than you!"

“Except Miss Copley.”

“Oh!—yes.”

Then they went down the hill, and made their way to Miss Hughes's lodgings. And they were again silent. But this silence was not like the former one. Each was absorbed in his or her own thoughts; but they were, at least, not angry thoughts. And Fritz pressed the little neatly gloved hand on his arm gently to his side now and then, as though to assure himself it had not sullenly withdrawn again to the shelter of the muff.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONCE more Gilbert Hazel was pacing up and down that shabby little street hard by the Harrow Road. It was dark now; and a dim light came through the yellow blind of the little front parlor. Barbara was there! He could picture her sitting opposite to her uncle in the big arm-chair. Perhaps she had some needlework in her hand; perhaps a book. He knew how she looked, with her head bent down, and the lamplight showing the gloss of her soft brown hair!

It was not much past seven o'clock; but the wintry sky was black as it would be at midnight. To Hazel it seemed like a funeral pall spread above him.

Too late—too late! Why had he been doomed to come too late?

With what boyish eagerness he had hurried to William Hughes's studio that afternoon! How he had rejoiced in the despatch he had used in his business, thinking that so an hour was gained of Barbara's company—or, at the very least, an hour in which he might speak of her, and hear her praises (for one who knew her, to speak of her was to praise her!), and get, perhaps, a cheerful encouraging word, bidding him godspeed in his suit! And he had but hastened the hearing of his own sentence. He had darkened the last rosy moments of the sunset; he had shaken the last sands from the glass with his own hand!

Barbara was lost to him!

That, at first, was all he knew—all that Hughes's words conveyed to him. What could he care for details—the how, the where? Pain such as he felt is absorbing. He had no faculty to spare for anything but the effort to bear this blow as a man should bear it; and to bear it so he must be alone. He could not remain in the presence even of William Hughes. Sympathy, friendship—these might come later. Now there was just the pain, and the pride of his manhood striving to bear it.

He had gone out into the streets, and walked about like a man in a dream. The beings around him flitted by like so many ghosts. Everything seemed unreal. Everything—but the pain and the struggle to endure it, and be master of himself.

He found himself in that poor little street he had trodden so hopefully only a few hours ago. And then by degrees he awoke to the understanding of much that Hughes had said, and that had lain dormant in his consciousness.

How had it been, then? Yes; this man, who was rich and cultured, and who could give her so much that poor Gilbert Hazel could not give—he loved her. That was of course! He must love her, since his good Fate had given him the opportunity of being near her—of frequenting her home as a familiar guest; of watching the beauty of her mind and soul in the broad daylight of daily life. And Hughes had called this man generous and honorable; and had praised him for his delicacy and sincerity, and a hundred good qualities.

Yes; they all came back to him now, the words he had heard, not comprehending or not heeding; for what did it matter to him, with that great pain at his heart, and the knowledge that he must never hope to have Barbara for his wife?

But it did matter.

He told himself now, as he walked up and down the muddy pavement outside her window, that it mattered vitally. For if he must live thenceforward the sadder for her sake, yet she might be happy. That was much. That was everything. It should be everything—only there was the pain at his heart. But he knew the first keen sharpness of it would pass. He was a man, and he had the courage of a man.

Let him try to recall all that Hughes had said! He remembered crying out passionately, "Does she love him? Tell me,

does she love him? Tell me, does she love him!" And Hughes had answered vaguely—seeming, indeed, almost to shrink from speaking of Barbara's feelings, as something too sacred to be touched. He went back, by a strong effort of memory, over every detail of that interview.

As he did so, still pacing up and down, a hansom cab dashed up to the door of Hughes's house, and a young man alighted from it. He was in evening dress; Hazel could see the white cravat as his overcoat fell back a little, and he carried a bouquet of flowers in his hand. A tall, upright, well-built fellow, Hazel measured him with a soldier's eye. He was so near that he heard the stranger ask Larcher, who opened the door, how Miss Copley was; and bid the old servant say that he had been that day at Norwood, and had seen Miss Hughes, who was very well, and sent her love; and Mr. Claude was much better. He had ventured to bring a few flowers for Miss Copley. He was engaged that evening. But Larcher was to tell Mr. Hughes that he hoped to come and beg for some tea to-morrow afternoon, and give them all the news of Norwood. Then he got into the cab again, and, mentioning the name of a theatre, bade the driver pelt along as hard as he could, for he was late.

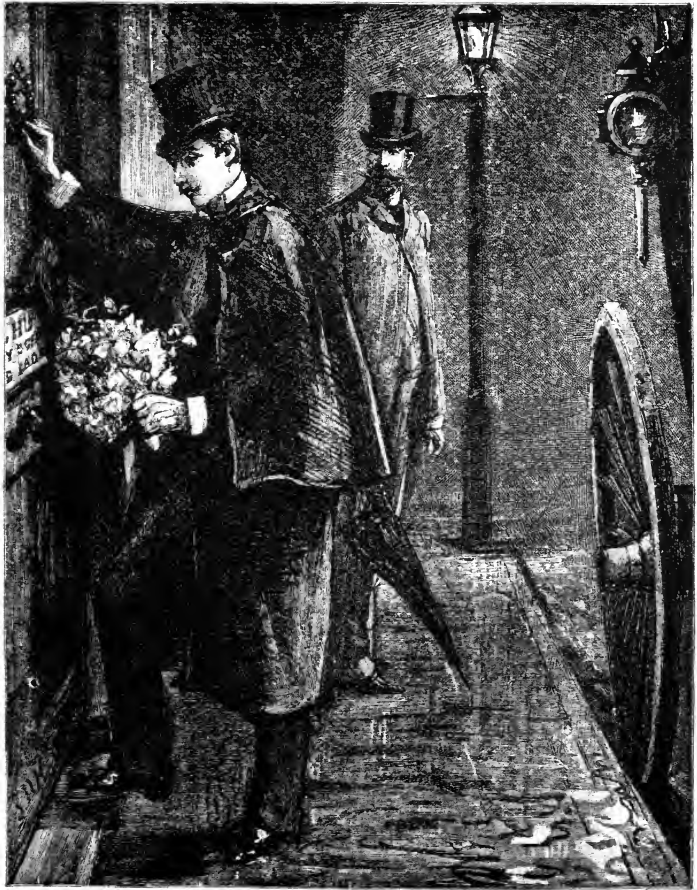
Hazel heard it all—even to the slight foreign accent, and the little guttural sound of certain letters.

So that was the man! And he might go in there, into that room, and sit near her, and speak to her, and hear her thank him for his flowers in that voice that was sweeter than sweet music, and see that smile that was like a ray shining straight out of heaven—he had the privilege of doing this, and he drove away and left it behind him!

And then Hazel lifted his head and looked at the dim light behind the yellow blind; and, with a new strength of purpose in his face, he said to himself,

"Yes; if she is to be happy, I will fold my arms and go down, and the waters shall close over my head. But I will be sure first that it *is* for her happiness. If there's a doubt, by the help of God, I'll swim for it!"

Perhaps no explanation that could have been given of Mr. Hofmann's behavior on this occasion would have satisfied Bar-



"A hansom cab dashed up to the door, and a young man alighted from it."

bara's less fortunate lover; but then the latter was, as Mrs. Armour had disparagingly remarked of him, high-flown and romantic.

The true explanation, however, was this :

Fritz, when he brought Olga home from Norwood, was met by Mrs. Kettering, with the request that he would escort his cousins to the play that evening. She and Mr. Kettering were engaged out to dinner; Sally Stringer had returned to her own house, and there was no one with whom to send the girls. Ida had leave from Dr. Slocombe to go. Would not Fritz take them?

Fritz demurred. He purposed spending his evening otherwise. Then his Aunt Gertrude had spoken more confidentially. The fact was, the ticket for a private box had been brought to the house that afternoon by Perikles Rhodonides. It was his mother's box, and had been placed at his disposition. He had heard the young ladies say they wished to see this particular piece, and he knew there were no places to be had for weeks to come, and so he had ventured to offer Mrs. Kettering the box.

"I refused at first, because Uncle Philip and I are engaged, you know. But then I thought of you, Fritz. I was so sure you wouldn't mind. And Rhodonides looked so disappointed when I told him I feared we could not accept!"

"Upon my word, Aunt Gertrude, I do not care one straw whether he is disappointed or not."

"Oh, *Fritzchen*, that is very disagreeable of you! But the girls would be disappointed, too."

At this point Ida burst into the room, and preferred her own petition without the least reticence or dignity. What! Did Fritz refuse to take them to the play? Oh, she couldn't believe he would be so nasty and horrid! The first chance she had had, too, of going out for ages and ages! And she and Olga had been longing to see this particular play, more than any other play that had ever been played. Why, Fritz might think himself lucky to get the chance. Of course he would enjoy it: only he chose to be so grand and give himself airs, and pretend he liked reading metaphysics better than going to the play, which was absurd on the face of it to any sane mind! Oh, but *would* he? Would he really? Then he was a dear, and a duck, and a *Gold-Fritzchen*, hurrah!

And away ran Ida to tell her sister the news, and pin Fritz to his consent beyond the possibility of retractation.

"I dare say Rhodonides will look in on you in the course of the evening," said Mrs. Kettering, complacently, when the matter was settled.

"Oh, of course!" grumbled Fritz. "That's *le mot de l'énigme*. That's what the whole business is got up for."

"Fritz!"

"Oh, understand me, Aunt Gertrude. Pray don't imagine me guilty of the impertinence of applying that phrase to you! But it's plain enough to be seen what Rhodonides is after."

"It wasn't at all plain to you until I told you," rejoined Mrs. Kettering, with her quiet, matter-of-fact bluntness, which sometimes had the force of a sarcasm. "But I think you are right now; and why should he not have his chance? When you fall in love yourself, Fritz, you will have a fellow-feeling for such little *ruses de guerre*."

Fritz was silent for a minute. Then he said, with his own good-humored smile, "Well, it's a comfort to know that one of the party will enjoy his coming, anyway. How delightful to be sixteen, and to venture to say out what you mean, what you like, and what you dislike, without fear or favor!"

"If you are alluding to me," exclaimed Ida, who returned just in time to hear this speech, "I beg to say that I am seventeen and a quarter; and I scarcely ever dare say what I mean, because what I mean generally turns out to be impolite to somebody! But I do mean that you are a darling for taking us to the play to-night—and Olga says the same."

"Did Olga say I was a darling?"

"Oh, well, not exactly those words, you know. But when I told her you would go, she turned quite red with joy."

Then Fritz took his leave. He would not return to dine at the Ketterings' house. He had one or two little matters to attend to. But he would be in waiting at the door of the theatre to hand his consins out of their carriage at a quarter before eight punctually.

The event fully justified Fritz's declaration that at least one member of the party would enjoy the evening. Ida came home radiant; and after Olga, pleading fatigue, had gone to bed, Ida sat by the fire in her mother's dressing-room, chatting in the highest spirits.

The play had been lovely; and their box had been the very

best in the house for seeing and hearing; and Mr. Rhodonides, who had a stall just beneath them, came up after the first act, and stayed in their box all the rest of the time. And he had made himself so agreeable! He knew the names of so many persons in the house, and he knew some of them personally, and he told Ida who they were, and all sorts of interesting things about them.

"But, Ida, I hope you didn't bore him?" said her mother. "You know you sometimes ask too many questions."

"No, mamma, I didn't bore him the least bit! He's just like me; he thinks it very tiresome to be always talking up in the clouds about what Fritz calls abstract questions. He says he likes people who are not ashamed to take an interest in the real things around them. Stay! I believe it was I who said that. But he quite agreed with me, and he hates theories. I think theories only muddle people. And Mr. Rhodonides thinks so too."

"And was Fritz civil to him?" asked Mrs. Kettering, after a little pause.

"Civil to him? Oh yes. I don't think they talked to each other much. But they shook hands and all that, when we came out."

"And—Olga?"

"Olga didn't talk much either. But, mamma, I never saw Olga look so pretty as she looked to-night. Her eyes shone so, and she had such a color! That new frock shows off her white throat and arms so well. I wish my arms were plump and pretty like Olga's. Everybody was admiring her. I saw lots of people looking at her through their opera-glasses. But I don't think she noticed them; and I didn't say anything."

"And she looked pleased—happy?" inquired the mother.

"As pleased as Punch! And now I suppose I must go to bed. And mind you tell Dr. Slocombe how much good going to the theatre has done me."

Fritz had laughingly told Ida, in reply to her eager questions as they were driving home, that he had been a victim and a martyr; and that she never could be grateful enough for the sacrifice he had made in giving up his serious evening for her frivolous amusement. But he admitted to himself that the hours so spent had been pleasant to him. And then he resolved

to carry out forthwith an intention which had been for some time in his mind.

This intention was to offer Hughes the commission to paint a picture for him. It could be done, he thought, without incurring the suspicion of desiring rather to serve the artist than to please himself; for he had noticed on the wall of Miss Hughes's little sitting-room a spirited sketch of the port of Marypool from the heights above the town; and he knew that he could make no more acceptable present to his mother than a finished painting from that sketch, if Hughes would undertake it. So in the afternoon of the day following the visit to the theatre Fritz repaired to the painter's studio; whence he purposed, after the business should be arranged, walking home with Hughes to have tea, as he had announced to Larcher yesterday.

But Fritz had another purpose in his mind, also.

His talk with Olga at Norwood, and the incidents of last evening, had brought vividly before him the fact that his position with respect to Miss Copley was a false one, and that it behooved him to make it true and clear without delay. If there now appeared to be some vague danger that certain philosophical theories he had held about himself might not eventually stand the test of practice as satisfactorily as he had conceived beforehand, Fritz knew himself to be a man of honor. Here, at least, was firm ground. Let his position towards Miss Copley be distinctly and publicly acknowledged, and no doubt a variety of strange, uneasy, conflicting—what should he call them?—fancies, would disappear like mists in the sunshine. He would speak with Barbara that very day.

At the studio, to which he mounted with his usual vigorous, swinging step, he did not observe, until he had rung a hasty peal at the bell, a piece of paper fastened to the door, on which was written "W. Hughes out. Return at five." It was now but a minute or so past four. What should he do meanwhile?

As Fritz stood there irresolute, a door on the same landing was opened, and Mrs. Green, appearing at it, inquired civilly if she could take any note or message for Mr. Hughes.

"You are very good," said Fritz, with a bow. "But—no, I think not. I must speak with Mr. Hughes myself. I suppose I had better go away, and come back again. Perhaps—if it is not trespassing on your kindness—you would not object to say that

Frederick Hofmann has been here, and will return? In case, I mean, that Mr. Hughes should come back first."

Mrs. Green knew his name very well; and knew his relationship to Hopkins's rich customer, Mrs. Kettering. He might be a possible purchaser of pictures himself! With the desire to do her neighbor a good turn, she invited Mr. Hofmann to walk in, and wait in her studio. "It isn't a pleasant day for strolling about," she said. "And you won't inconvenience me in the least, I assure you. I am an old neighbor—and I hope I may say an old friend—of Mr. Hughes. If you will come in, you are heartily welcome."

It was said with so much cordiality that Fritz accepted her offer. All the more readily because he had heard Miss Hughes and Barbara speak in high terms of the friendliness of the little flower-painter. And in a few minutes they were chatting together like old acquaintances.

Presently Mrs. Green insisted on Mr. Hofmann's sharing her afternoon tea; and over those cheerful cups she became more communicative than ever.

"People do say, Mr. Hofmann, that young Copley won't live to come into the money. But who can tell? And if he only lives a day after his twenty-first birthday, he has the power to will away the property just as he likes. And you'd hardly believe what shoals of—well, I call 'em sharks—will swim after such a chance as that!"

It was quite a new view to Fritz to consider any member of the Hughes family as the object of greedy pursuit; and he said so.

"Oh dear, yes," said Mrs. Green, nodding her head shrewdly; "I happen to be in the way of hearing a good deal about them, one way and another. Among other things"—and here Mrs. Green chuckled a little to herself—"I am honored, and bothered, with the confidences of an adorer of Miss Copley's. Oh, you needn't think I am a traitor. The young man makes no secret of it. Indeed, I believe he likes nothing better than to talk about it to anybody who will listen."

Fritz looked gravely attentive. The recollection of Barbara's face when he saw her for the first time after his proposal came vividly into his mind. Might he, possibly, be coming on a clue as to what had perplexed him then and many times since?

"And has this candid gentleman taken Miss Copley into his con-

fidence as well as the rest of the world?" he said, quietly sipping his tea.

"I can't say positively, but I don't believe he has spoken to her; and if he takes my advice, he won't."

"Really!"

"No. Oh, bless you, Mr. Hofmann, the thing's ridiculous! As I spoke just now about sharks, it's only fair to say that the young man is not a shark—anyway, not as far as Miss Copley is concerned. I believe he is disinterested enough there. But, dear me, she is miles above him."

"Perhaps that might be said of most men," observed Fritz, thoughtfully stroking his moustache.

"Well, so it might—in a way! You are quite right, Mr. Hofmann; and it really is delightful to find how well you appreciate Miss Copley. I'm an immense admirer of hers, I assure you. But in this case— Oh, well, if you saw the party for two seconds, you would understand that he hasn't the ghost of a chance. Not the ghost! The fact is—he's too vulgar."

Fritz had been dimly conscious of some magnanimous impulses. What if there should be a secret story of true love crossed by duty and hard circumstances? And what if it should be in his, Fritz Hofmann's, power to make its course run smooth by the sacrifice of his own feelings and projects?

But Mrs. Green's last words brought him up short. "Vulgar!" No, if Mrs. Green were right there, the young man, whoever he was, certainly had not the ghost of a chance.

Then Mrs. Collins, the charwoman, announced that Mr. Hughes had come back, and Fritz, with many thanks for the flower-painter's hospitality, went away to his friend's studio.

CHAPTER XL

THERE was some one in the studio with Mr. Hughes when Fritz entered it—a lady, who must have arrived at the same time with the former—a lady of a tall figure, who towered above the painter by nearly a head, not to mention the crown of a high hat—a lady

who was in the act of shaking hands with Mr. Hughes, and saying, in a loud, almost threatening voice, "How do you *do*? You never came to see me; so I have come to see you. But my belief is that your nephew never gave you a word of my message, for I will not credit a fickleness of disposition, much less a want of politeness, in one whose manners were the theme of universal comment. I *beg* your pardon!"

This last ejaculation was addressed to Fritz Hofmann, who had been standing close behind her, unable to pass, and unable, also, to make her aware of his presence. She had become aware of it now by backing against him with some force in the emphasis of her speech.

"Oh, Hofmann, is it you?" said Mr. Hughes, looking up at him with his eyebrows in a perplexed knot, and the humorous smile faintly discernible at the corners of his mouth. There was, too, an indefinable, but quite unmistakable, expression in his face of feeling Hofmann's presence to be a protection to him, and at the same time a consciousness of the absurdity of any such feeling—all subtly mingled together, and changing and melting into one another as he stretched out his arm beyond Miss Jenks, who still blocked the gangway, and shook hands with the young man.

"I *beg* your pardon!" said Miss Jenks again, facing round, as if at some military word of command, to look at Fritz. "I was *not* aware of any one so close behind me, and almost staggered."

Fritz had quite staggered. But he was stalwart enough to resist the shock; and he received Miss Jenks's gracious apology with a low bow, and begged her not to mention it.

And then Hughes ushered them both into the room. To Miss Jenks was assigned the seat of honor—an old wooden arm-chair, with a cushion covered with faded red chintz—while William perched himself on a board supported on two trestles, and Fritz remained standing, with his elbow on the mantelshelf.

"And so this," said Miss Jenks, looking round her with a solemn stare, "is an artist's stewdyo? I never was in one before, except when I went to be photographed—a most elegant place, with a red velvet sofa, like the outside of the hotel omnibus at Vevey. I remember my woollen gown stuck to it."

"Ah!" said Hughes, shaking his head, "we can't rival the photographers."

"Oh, but you don't take sitters, you see! That makes a difference."

"Well—perhaps it does."

"To be sure it does," said Miss Jenks, encouragingly. "And, indeed, I *must* say, that what with the heat and the glare, and the chemical smell, I felt quite—" Miss Jenks paused here, as though fastidiously selecting her epithet, and then said, very loudly and emphatically, "Sick!"

"Well—well," said Hughes, gravely, after a moment's silence, "I hope that in some respects we may have the pull of the photographers, after all!"

Fritz's blue eyes were fixed on Miss Jenks with such undisguised curiosity that he started and colored a little when she unexpectedly turned her head and caught him. But she merely said, affably, "I hope I didn't hurt you, although *not* having the pleasure of your name."

William Hughes presented him. "Mr. Frederick Hofmann, Miss Jenks."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Jenks. "I have heard of you from a mutual friend."

Fritz bowed.

"And, *what's* more, I had the pleasure of knowing your cousin, Miss Ida Kettering, on the Continent."

Fritz, recalling Sallie Stringer's description of the party at Monplaisir, looked anywhere rather than at William Hughes.

"And *being* from the Continent yourself," pursued Miss Jenks, "I must tell you that I was very much pleased with it—very much indeed."

Fritz politely expressed his gratification on behalf of Europe generally, and then—by way of a hint to her that the painter's time was of value—expressed a hope that he was not interrupting her business with Mr. Hughes.

"I did not come on business," returned Miss Jenks.

"Oh!"

"No; although any business calculated to assist Mr. Hughes in his profession must ever be an unfeigned object with *me*, my present visit was dictated by far different sentiments."

"Oh!"

"Some unpleasant remarks were made in the boarding-house

where I at present reside—by a person who I will not derogate by describing beyond the simple mention that her name is Towzer—about my visiting a gentleman's stewdyo. But the unpleasantry at once fell flat when I stated that the gentleman was strictly landscape."

Fritz, looking very like his cousin Ida, gazed at Miss Jenks in frank bewilderment; and even William's quickness was at fault.

"Strictly landscape," repeated Miss Jenks, with a virtuous air. "I *should* object to bring myself in contact with anything anatomical; nor are those who know me best likely to suppose otherwise."

There was a pause, during which Miss Jenks manifested the solid self-satisfaction arising from a conscience at ease; and William Hughes's countenance was a perfect study of conflicting expressions, among which intense enjoyment of Miss Jenks's conversation, and an uneasy desire to get rid of her, predominated.

"Do you know that I have been under this roof more than three quarters of an hour?" said Fritz, breaking the silence. Then he narrated Mrs. Green's hospitable behavior, and Hughes declared heartily that Mrs. Green was one of the best souls he knew.

"And she insisted on giving me some tea," added Fritz.

"Just like her! I'm glad you accepted. It would delight her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Jenks, suddenly straightening herself rigidly in her chair, and assuming her inexorable drill-sergeant manner, "*Do* you think Mrs. Green would give me some tea?"

The two men looked at each other, and neither spoke.

"Because," continued Miss Jenks, vigorously, "I feel rather faint at this hour, *being* accustomed to it; and I am acquainted with a friend of Mrs. Green's by the name of Mr. Nathaniel Coney, besides being a friend of Mr. Hughes's, and I shouldn't in the *least* mind asking her."

"I've no doubt she would," said Fritz, all at once. "I'll go and speak to her."

He darted out of the studio so briskly that Hughes had some difficulty in catching him on the landing, where—having carefully closed his own door behind him, he made some whispered remonstrances in Fritz's ear.

"No, no; not at all," answered Fritz, obstinately. "Not a

shame at all. If I don't mistake, Mrs. Green is perfectly well able to take care of herself; and I'm quite sure she would be glad to release you from that vampire of a woman, who must be got rid of somehow! Mrs. Green is so sharp and shrewd that she'll manage it right."

And thereupon Fritz rang loudly at Mrs. Green's bell, while Hughes returned to his own studio.

"I must now mention," said Miss Jenks, abruptly, as soon as he reappeared alone, "that I wish to know the address of your aunt, Miss Hughes, and of Miss Copley, your niece, as I intend to leave a card on *each* of them."

William drew back, and looked at her with a new expression. It would not do at all to give Miss Jenks the power of bestowing her society on Aunt Judith and Barbara just now, when there was so much anxiety and care on their shoulders about Claude. Indeed, William doubted whether Aunt Judith would have appreciated Miss Jenks under any circumstances. And it was as characteristic of him to be stanch in defending the dear women at home as it was to be soft in defending himself. He therefore answered coldly that Miss Jenks was very obliging, but that his aunt, Miss Hughes, was away from home, and that, moreover, she did not desire to receive any visits at present.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that Miss Jenks would have accepted this reply as final. And, indeed, she had opened her mouth to say so, when Fritz came back, took Miss Jenks on his arm, conducted her at a very quick march across the landing, and in at Mrs. Green's door, which, after a rapid word of introduction between the two ladies, he shut again smartly, leaving Miss Jenks inside it.

"There!" said he, passing his hand triumphantly through his hair. "Von Moltke couldn't have managed it better!"

"It is rather a case of Napoleon's big battalions," said Hughes. "If you had been an inch shorter, or a stone lighter, I don't believe you could have done it!"

Fritz laughed. "She is certainly a tremendous female," he said. But, having got rid of her, Fritz insisted that his friend should come away without taking any further leave of Miss Jenks, who was quite safe in Mrs. Green's hands for the next ten minutes at least. Hughes would not have consented to this measure but for

the thought of Aunt Judith and Barbara. They must be protected at all costs.

"But *isn't* she wonderful? *Isn't* she an exquisite creature?" said Hughes to Fritz, with extraordinary earnestness, as they walked away together.

If Miss Jenks could but have heard him!

Meanwhile, that practical-minded woman was improving the occasion—firstly, by drinking Mrs. Green's tea, and eating Mrs. Green's toast; and, secondly, by getting all the information out of her that she could.

Miss Jenks, as we know, had her own motives for visiting Mr. Hughes. But she had also come as, in some sort, the agent of Mrs. Armour. Juliet had, with indescribable bitterness of spirit, been unable finally to resist the conclusion that Dalton's will was unassailable. But then a sinister and lurid kind of hope had begun to illumine the darkness of that prospect. Claude was very ill. Claude might die before he came into his inheritance. In that case Juliet and her sister were to divide the eighth of the whole.

There was great confusion and uncertainty as to what the total amount of the property might be. It consisted almost entirely of shares in many various investments, and it was not possible to estimate their value accurately, pending the arrival of further details from Mr. Reuben Wilford, Dalton's agent in New York. But the lowest calculation Juliet had heard (it was Coney's, and Coney had some knowledge on the subject) put the amount of Dalton's fortune at a quarter of a million sterling.

Now Juliet Armour would, six months ago, have looked upon even the sixteenth part of that sum as riches. But her view had changed. Others would take more than her share four or five times told. There was the sting! And, besides, Claude might be weakly and delicate, but he would in all probability survive his next birthday: the time was very short now. And if he did so, he would be absolute master of that wealth, to do what he would with.

And after much meditation—which, however, it did not take very long to accomplish, thought being almost as independent of time as of space—Mrs. Armour decided in her own mind that she had committed an error in quarrelling with Claude, and that she must now do her best to retrieve it. It might not be easy, and

would certainly be disagreeable; but she would try it. She would fight for her rights. She had been treated with infamous injustice, and need not show any consideration to her enemies. As to Claude, she could easily regain her influence over him, if once she had access to him again. The foolish boy had worshipped the very ground she walked on! Mrs. Armour remembered with a malicious smile certain complaints and certain impatiently disparaging words that she had led Claude on to utter against his uncle; and she told herself that she knew whose influence would triumph if it ever came to a struggle between herself and Mr. Hughes.

But the first point was how to approach Claude. She wished to do so warily, and as if by accident. She had heard—for Dalton's heir was watched now by suspicious eyes—that young Copley had gone from home for a change of air, and was lodging close to London. Hopkins could probably have told her his address; or Lady Lambton. But she would rather not question them on the subject. Then, when she discovered that Miss Jenks entertained the design of calling to see Mr. Hughes on her own account, Mrs. Armour charged her to find out all she could about his nephew; and especially his present whereabouts.

"You must not mention my name," she said. "And it would be no passport to Mr. Hughes's good graces. But if you can get me young Copley's address, without any fuss, I'll give you my green bonnet."

Miss Jenks no sooner found herself alone with Mrs. Green than it occurred to her that this chatty little woman—who was evidently proud of her intimacy with the Hughes family—might furnish her with the information she wanted. And Mrs. Green—who did happen to know Claude's address, from having posted a letter from William Hughes to his Aunt Judith—wrote it down on a card without any hesitation.

Mr. Hofmann had not had time to say many words to Mrs. Green; but he had briefly conveyed to her that the lady in her neighbor's studio was a bore, that it would be a service to Mr. Hughes to relieve him of her presence, and that he (Fritz Hofmann), feeling assured, even after his brief acquaintance with her, of Mrs. Green's good sense and kind heart, had taken the liberty of appealing to her for help.

The flower-painter was, therefore, unprepared for Miss Jenks's peculiarities, and observed her curiously as a new specimen. But on two points Mrs. Green soon made up her mind—namely, that Miss Jenks would sponge on her if she could, and that she would resolutely decline to be sponged on. Consequently, when Miss Jenks, on rising to go away, said, in her most impressive manner, "Mr. Hofmann assured me that, as a friend of dear Mr. Hughes, and mutually acquainted with other parties, you would be most *happy* to welcome me, which I have found to be the case," Mrs. Green replied with great distinctness that it was quite a chance her having been at home at that hour, and was most unlikely ever to occur again.

But Mrs. Green was as yet unacquainted with the dauntless and persistent character of her visitor.

"I shall now," said Miss Jenks, majestically, "return to Mr. Hughes's stewdyo, thanking you for the refreshment, which was most exceptable."

"Don't mention it. But I think Mr. Hughes is gone," rejoined Mrs. Green, with cheerfulness.

"Gone!"

"I fancy so. It's about the hour when he usually does go. He has a great many engagements, you know, and his time is of value. And I am going out myself directly, so I must wish you good afternoon."

Notwithstanding Mrs. Green's opinion on the subject, Miss Jenks marched across the landing and tugged at Mr. Hughes's bell. But a second and a third peal eliciting no reply, she at length reluctantly came to the conclusion that he was really gone. And, reviewing the circumstances with slow and dogged attention, the idea dawned on her that Mr. Hofmann, in hustling her away as he had done, had been actuated less by attention to her comfort than by the desire to get rid of her.

"Well, never mind," said Miss Jenks to herself. "I was very glad of the tea—being an extra, and not included in the board at Mrs. Pringle's—and I can come back some day when he is by himself. And, at any rate, I shall have that green bonnet."

CHAPTER XLI.

It is very easy to talk with glibness of the straightforward path of duty; and the clear light of duty; and the plain dictates of duty; and so forth. But, apart from the difficulty of doing one's duty—which is a different matter—it is by no means always easy to discern what it is. Life is very complex; and the relations of one human soul to its fellow-souls are very complex; and there come crises in which the path of duty is not straightforward, nor its light unclouded, nor its precepts plain.

Such a crisis had come to Barbara.

When Hazel went away on that evening of his first visit, she soon withdrew to her own room, for she desired to be alone with her thoughts. Moreover, her uncle did not seem much disposed to talk. He said a few cordial words about Hazel. But there was a tinge of melancholy in them.

"I suppose Mr. Hazel is to be congratulated now, uncle," said Barbara in a low voice. "His prospects seem to be so good. And he looks much better and stronger than he did at Thornfield."

"Yes, my dear. No doubt. At least I hope so. He has certainly recovered his health. He is a capital fellow. I—I hope all will be for the best."

Barbara raised her eyes and looked at her uncle. "And yet you seem to be—"

"To be what, my dear?"

"To be sorry for him, in some way."

William turned his head aside to light Barbara's candle for her, as he answered, "We all have our troubles, my pet. You know I told you that Hazel has had many troubles. And—and he is a man of deep and strong feelings. Good-night, my dear child. God bless you."

Yes; Hazel had had many troubles. How often had she thought of his sorrowful story, and of him so far away and so

lonely! Perhaps he was still grieving for that false love who had deserted him so coldly and so cruelly. Perhaps he had confided this to her uncle.

She wrapped herself in a shawl, and sat down on the side of her bed in the fireless room, to think.

The question on which she strove to concentrate her mind was, "What is my duty?" And the answer was neither plain nor prompt.

But as she thought, earnestly trying to see the truth, her way seemed to grow gradually clearer. That maiden dream which she had spoken of to herself as the belief of a child in a fairy tale was her own secret. No one suspected it. No one should ever know it. No one could be injured by it. Fritz Hofmann neither demanded nor expected romantic love from her. He had told her that if she would marry him, she would secure his happiness. She knew that the thought of that marriage was the one bright point to which her uncle looked in the future. She felt for Fritz the sincerest esteem, the most faithful friendship, the warmest gratitude.

There might be natures to whom these would not suffice; who, loving ardently, could accept nothing less than love in exchange. Gilbert Hazel's perhaps was such a nature. If he were trying to win a girl to be his wife—

But Barbara checked her wandering thoughts abruptly. What she had deeply and seriously to consider was Fritz Hofmann's character; not another's. And she thought she might believe him when he said he could content himself with such regard as she was able to bestow. Hazel had spoken of those days at Thornfield as though he remembered every minute of them. But, of course, he did not think of them so tenderly as she did. They were different, and had so many objects of interest and excitement in their lives. And if he thought—

But whither were those errant fancies straying again? Had she no sense—no conscience—no pride?

She started up with a deep blush burning on her face, and then she felt that all her limbs were numbed and stiff with cold. As she stood for a moment leaning against the bed, she heard her uncle's footsteps—very slow and labored—go up-stairs and into the room above hers.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, “what a poor selfish creature I am to be dreaming here over my own fancies and regrets—I, who have grown up with that example before me all my life! He sacrificed everything—youth, health, love, ambition, to take up the burden of two helpless lives and carry them on his shoulders. Out of pure gratitude and affection and compassion he renounced, in the very springtide of his days, the aims and hopes of other men; and I can sit here, under his roof, and think it hard to part with the shadow of a dream! If Gilbert Hazel knew it, he would despise me. But, please Heaven, I shall not be so miserably weak and selfish to-morrow. I should not like him to despise me,” murmured Barbara, lying down to rest, with the salt tears trembling on her eyelashes.

The next afternoon Hazel was to come back with her uncle; and she courageously prepared herself to meet him. She would be not only calm, but cheerful. Had she not good reason to be thankful? She would not incur her own scorn by contemptible repinings.

But Hazel did not come. William Hughes appeared without him, and said something—not in his usual clear and coherent manner—of Hazel’s being so much occupied in Mr. Wilson’s business, and of not being even sure that they should see him again before he returned to Staffordshire.

“There is nothing the matter? He—he is not ill?” stammered Barbara.

“Oh no, my dear. He is very well, only very busy,” answered her uncle, in the same absent, confused way. Barbara had turned very white, and was trembling. But he was troubled himself, and anxious to hide his trouble from her, and he did not look at her face.

And presently Larcher came in bearing Fritz’s flowers in her hand, and bringing Fritz’s message. (They little guessed who had watched the delivery of them!) And Barbara saw how her uncle’s face grew brighter as he listened.

“What a good fellow he is!” exclaimed William, heartily. “Fancy his going down to Norwood to bring us this report! It cannot have been very amusing for a young gentleman who has so many agreeable ways at his command of killing time.”

Some persons—Mr. Perikles Rhodonides, for instance—might have thought a *tête-à-tête* stroll with Olga Kettering a sufficiently

agreeable way of killing time. But then William Hughes knew nothing about that.

Then he admired the flowers, which were, as usual, all white. "I have not observed any specially artistic qualities in Hofmann, speaking generally," he said. "But here, I must say, he shows a poetic touch. He always sends you flowers that look like you, Barbara."

"I never heard so grand a compliment in my life!" said Barbara, arranging her flowers in water, and bending her head down over them to hide her face. For she was struggling to keep back tears—of gratitude she told herself. And then she made a brave effort to smile at her uncle. But when she looked up in his face the tears suddenly blinded her, and she threw her arms round his neck, and leaned her head against his breast.

"Barbara, my pet! What is it?"

"Because you are so good and dear," she sobbed. "And because you have had such a hard, hard life!"

"No, no; don't cry, my dear, don't cry. I have been very happy."

The words were said with the utmost sincerity and simplicity, and contained the brief and eloquent epitome of his rare nature.

On the following evening Fritz duly appeared at tea-time in company with William, whom he had rescued, as we know, from the powerful fascinations of Miss Jenks, and they made their little jokes over the tea-table about the eccentricities of that remarkable woman.

"I should very much like to see her," exclaimed Barbara.

"I am sorry, then, that I have deprived you of a pleasure," replied her uncle. "She wanted to call on you, but I—I stopped her."

There was something almost like compunction in his face as he said it, for he could not bear to hurt even a hurtful creature.

But Fritz was less tender-hearted. "Of course, you stopped her!" he said. "It would never do to have her intruding herself on Aunt Judith and Barbara. We cannot allow that."

And Barbara noticed two things in this speech which were new to her—first, a tone of authority, as though what concerned her were now his business; and, second, that he called her by her

Christian name. He had often addressed Miss Hughes, half playfully, as Aunt Judith; but he had never yet spoken to, or of, herself in her presence except as Miss Copley.

By and by Fritz declared that Barbara was looking very wan and tired, and proposed to carry her and her uncle down to Norwood as his guests the next day, which was Saturday, and that they should remain there over the Sunday. There was accommodation for them both in the house where Miss Hughes and Claude were lodging; and, in fact, it was all settled. Barbara need not attempt to make any objection.

"I do not purpose making any," she answered, gently. "It is a delightful scheme, and I think Uncle William will accept it as readily as I do."

And again she noticed the new air in Fritz of taking possession of her.

Then they spoke of his visit to Norwood yesterday, and he told them that Claude seemed to be much better; the change had certainly done him good.

William's eyes glistened.

"We have to thank you for that, Hofmann," he said.

"For that, and for how much else!" added Barbara, in a low voice; and then she timidly put out her hand to him. He took it in his own, bowed over it, and kissed it lightly with a grave kind of homage, as if she had been a queen.

Barbara thought he behaved perfectly, as did her uncle. But had Aunt Judith been there, it may be doubted whether she would have been quite content.

All the arrangements for the little expedition were made before Fritz went away. It was to be a surprise for Aunt Judith. She was not nervous, and rather enjoyed such little excitements.

Fritz had declared that everything was arranged. But this was not strictly accurate. To say the truth, the scheme had only occurred to him since entering the Hugheses' house. He had gone there with the intention of praying Barbara to let him announce openly to his family that he was her accepted suitor. He had prepared in his own mind several cogent arguments to induce her to put an end to the present state of indecision and concealment. But when he was there he found it difficult to get an opportunity of uttering them. Then he was struck by Barbara's looks.

She was not well, or was working too hard. And then the idea of getting her down to Norwood flashed upon him.

Yes, that was a famous plan. And once there, he would speak the irrevocable words that were to fix his fate.

Irrevocable! Why, was not every word he had ever said to Barbara as irrevocable as the faith and honor of a gentleman could make it? Certainly, his proposal was irrevocable—unless by Barbara's own wish. And then he fell to wondering who the young man could be whom Mrs. Green considered to have not the ghost of a chance.

Fritz had to precede his guests to Norwood early the next morning, in order to make these arrangements for them which they supposed to be already made. But he was on the platform of the station when they arrived, and had a carriage in readiness to convey them to the lodgings. He left them at the door of the house, to announce themselves, saying that if they would excuse him, he would see that his dressing-bag had been duly carried to the neighboring hotel, where he had taken a bed for himself, and would join them again presently.

Aunt Judith was duly surprised and delighted when Barbara and her uncle walked into the sitting-room together. Although it may be suspected that the landlady had not entirely refrained from giving a hint as to the expected visitors. "But where is Claude?" asked Barbara and her uncle, almost simultaneously.

Claude, it appeared, had gone out to the Crystal Palace, but would soon return.

Then when Barbara had gone away to her room to take off her hat, Aunt Judith drew nearer to her nephew, and said, with a little hesitation, "There is some one with Claude, who has promised not to let him stay out too long in the evening air. Some one whom you know—Mrs. Armour."

William uttered an exclamation of astonishment; and it was clearly astonishment of a by no means pleasant nature.

Then Aunt Judith explained that Mrs. Armour had called that forenoon; and had asked to see Miss Hughes; and had said that, being in that neighborhood, she had ventured to come and inquire for Mr. Copley.

William listened with a cloudy face.

"I don't like the woman," he said; "and it is not possible that she should like our family very much."

This allusion—distant though it were—to Claude's inheritance, emboldened Aunt Judith to speak further. Mrs. Armour, it appeared, had confessed to feeling angry and disappointed at first; but she saw now that, whoever had been to blame, no blame could properly belong to Claude, and she wished to show that she bore no malice.

"You're not angry with me for telling you, my dear?" said the old woman, timidly laying her hand on William's.

"Angry with you, my dear old aunty! I shouldn't know how to set about being angry with you if I wished it!"

But although he took her hand and held it fondly between his own, his brows were still knitted, and he looked thoughtful and ill at ease.

"Claude seemed so pleased to see her! It quite brightened him up, and he had been moping a little before. The doctor thinks it very important that he should be kept cheerful."

"Could we devise no way of keeping him cheerful except the society of that flirting, foolish woman?"

"Well, my dear, she really spoke very sensibly—to me, when we were by ourselves, you know—saying that she knew he had had a boyish kind of romantic adoration for her."

"I wonder whether I have a romantic adoration for her without knowing it, like the rest of my sex," muttered William, remembering the fair Juliet's references to Hazel.

"She said that with a woman of her age all that was, of course, mere nonsense; but that it would do him no harm, and might help her to have a good influence over him, and that she had had a great interest in him, and liking for him, ever since the days of the Pension at Vevey, where, for a long time, he had been her only friend."

All this was thoroughly distasteful to William from beginning to end. He could not, as he had said, be angry with Aunt Judith—poor, dear, good soul!—but he wondered in his heart how she, with her old-fashioned, dainty notions on many points, and with the native integrity of her character, could tolerate such a woman as Juliet Armour.

He did not guess that Judith yearned over her boy as a mother

yearns over a dying child. What wish of his can the mother refuse—to him who is so soon to leave the light of the sun, and for whom the summer will shine and the flowers blossom nevermore?

Judith did not say this to herself. She did not confess her fears, but they haunted her; and she had not the heart to deny Claude any fancy that she could gratify.

Then Fritz returned, and Barbara re-entered the room, and they had both to be prepared for the presence of Mrs. Armour.

Fritz frankly made a discontented grimace.

“The fact is,” he said, half laughingly, “I am not very fond of Mrs. Armour—”

“Ah,” interrupted Hughes, shaking his head with a grave smile, “you’re not aware of it!”

“Aware of what?”

“That you cherish a romantic adoration for Mrs. Armour.”

“Well, no. I certainly am not aware of that.”

“Few of us are aware of it, but we do—every mother’s son of us! I have never heard her mention an exception.”

Fritz looked a little puzzled, but he was not sufficiently interested in Mrs. Armour to pursue the subject.

And when Aunt Judith saw him bend down and speak softly to Barbara, and saw Barbara look up at him with her gentle smile, a flush of pleasure came into the wrinkled, careworn face; and, turning to her nephew, she began to chat cheerfully, with the discreet intention of leaving the young people to themselves.

But there was nothing very lover-like or tender being said. Fritz asked Barbara, in a quiet tone, if she would object to walk out with him for half an hour in the forenoon to-morrow, supposing the weather should be fair; and Barbara answered, in the same quiet tone, that she would do so very willingly; and they were both rather grave and preoccupied after that, for both felt that an important decision was at hand.

And in a few minutes, with a sound of rustling skirts, and affectedly vivacious talk and laughter, Mrs. Armour, followed by Claude, came up the stairs and into the room.

CHAPTER XLII.

At the first sight of her brother, Barbara thought him looking surprisingly better and stronger than when he had left London. But, after a few minutes, that impression wore away, and she was assailed by fears and doubts on his behalf.

Claude's spirits were certainly high; almost too high—for there was something feverish in his excitement. He greeted his sister in his usual careless, half-patronizing way, and shook hands with his uncle and with Hofmann.

And then Barbara had to be presented to Mrs. Armour. That lady looked at her with hard, glittering eyes, that seemed to radiate cold, as though they had been bits of blue ice. But she smiled a great deal, and was very gracious.

"Mr. Hofmann I have seen this morning already," she said. "We came down in the same train from Victoria."

"I had not the pleasure of recognizing you," said Fritz, handing a chair for her.

"Oh no; you did not see me. I perceived that. Your mind was, doubtless, full of much more interesting subjects."

"That, of course, is impossible," answered Fritz, with an exaggeration of manner which Barbara felt to be almost impertinent. But Barbara had no experience of women of Mrs. Armour's type. Mrs. Armour accepted the words; not, of course, literally, but as conveying an agreeable kind of homage that was her due. And she laughed affectedly. But as she turned away her head, in doing so, she caught sight of Claude's lowering face; and said, rather quickly, "And how is the pretty cousin, Mr. Hofmann?"

Fritz was not what is generally understood by the word "thick-skinned;" but he, nevertheless, had a certain stoutness of integument that was proof against any sudden dart Mrs. Armour had it in her power to throw; and he answered, with perfect coolness, "You must not lay on me the responsibility of deciding which of

my cousins you mean by that kind description, Mrs. Armour. I think them both pretty. But then I may be partial."

"I mean the young lady with whom I have always seen you talking whenever I have been at your uncle's house—Miss Kettering."

"My cousin Olga is Miss Kettering. Thank you; I believe Olga is very well. She appeared to be so on Thursday; didn't she, Miss Hughes?"

"Very well indeed," replied Aunt Judith.

"I believe I did not mention to you last evening that my cousin Olga accompanied me to Norwood the other day," said Fritz, addressing Barbara. "She came as representing the ladies of the family. Miss Stringer was to have come too; but at the last moment she was prevented. I explained it all to Miss Hughes."

All this surprised Juliet Armour a good deal, and secretly angered her. The ladies of the Kettering family had limited their attentions to *her* to the formal leaving of cards. And then young Hofmann appeared to be on quite a familiar footing among these Hugheses. But presently Juliet thought she understood the position very well. It would have been long before such attentions were showered on the family of the little governess had not the brother of the little governess inherited vast wealth. Juliet's lip curled with contempt. Her own case was very different. She had been robbed—infamously deprived of her rights; and it behooved her to fight for them, if not by fair means, then with any weapon at her command. But for these Ketterings—rich themselves, and yet fawning on money—her scorn was boundless.

Mrs. Armour was to return to London at six o'clock. But it still wanted more than an hour of that time, and the hour threatened to hang very heavily. Her presence was a bar to much of the familiar conversation they might otherwise have indulged in among themselves; and Claude showed an ill-bred tendency to talk with her apart, ignoring the others. She was too cunning to let him do this at present. But when she answered his half-whispered sentences aloud, he resented it, and grew sullen. Moreover, he had never cordially liked Hofmann, and accepted his benefits with a grudging protest and the promise to himself that he would repay them twice over and be quit of him—some

day. Then William Hughes was uneasy, Barbara silent and pre-occupied, and Fritz chafing under the intrusion of this stranger, his opinion of whom was, no doubt, derived chiefly from his cousin Olga and Sally Stringer. Altogether, that hour which had to be got through loomed very lead-colored.

But when Aunt Judith ordered some tea to be brought in, to refresh Mrs. Armour before her journey, it was felt to be a welcome diversion, and then all became a little more cheerful as they sat with their teacups in their hands.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Armour, somewhat recovering her vivacity, "that I have seen a friend of yours? When was it? Oh, yesterday."

"Of mine?" said Hughes, to whom she had particularly addressed herself.

"Yes. Don't you remember our talking of him at Vevey, and my telling you he had left the army? Gilbert Hazel."

Aunt Judith turned round quickly. "Mr. Hazel! Is he in England again?" she said.

"He is in England, and he is in London, and, moreover, he is in the very same house where I—where I have a little *pied-à-terre* that I use when I want to be near my lawyer or to do any business. My sister lives at the end of the world."

"Yes, Aunt Judith. Hazel came to see us the other evening. I was going to tell you all about his visit. You have seen him, then, Mrs. Armour? How was he?" said William, earnestly.

Barbara listened with wide, plaintive eyes and parted lips for the answer. Her face showed as little consciousness of the observation of others as a child's. She was absorbed in awaiting the answer to that question. But Aunt Judith furtively watched Barbara.

"Oh, I think he is well enough," answered Mrs. Armour. "Why shouldn't he be? Was he not well when he called to see you?"

"Yes—oh yes; he was not ill. But he appeared to be—worried—about business."

William was vexed with himself for having shown so much solicitude about Hazel before that woman.

"Really! Well, I should say that it is his employer who is most likely to be worried."

"Why?" demanded Fritz Hofmann, abruptly.

"Oh—well, because he is a kind of grown-up *enfant terrible*. If Mr. Wilson—that is the name, I believe—sells cloth, Gilbert Hazel will tell the customers how much shoddy is put into it. And if he sells iron, Gilbert Hazel will warn them of every bar that has a flaw."

"I think I should like to buy my cloth and iron of him," said Fritz.

"Oh, well—of course, in that sense—! But I was merely giving an illustration of his character. He is quixotic: I think that expresses him best."

"He is a very noble-hearted fellow!" burst out Hughes, looking at Mrs. Armour, with a fire in his dark eyes that she had never seen there. Then he turned to Fritz, and told him something of Hazel's story—not all of it; there were points as to which he did not feel himself at liberty to speak. But he told how manfully Hazel had endured the ruin brought on him by his father's rashness; and how no hint of complaint against that father ever passed his lips. "And then the simplicity with which he bears his poverty—neither bragging of it, nor hiding it, but accepting it quietly like the thorough-bred gentleman that he is! There's no man alive whom I honor more than Hazel!" said Hughes, with generous warmth.

Fritz listened attentively. "Why did he leave the army, after all?" he asked, when the painter had ceased speaking.

William paused a moment, and a look of pain crossed his face before answering. "He had the opportunity of entering a house of business belonging to a member of his mother's family. And India never agreed with his health."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Hughes," cried Mrs. Armour, who quite understood that she had been snubbed and reproved, and resented it with a great deal of pent-up wrath, "you must not believe all you hear about the much-abused climate of India. If a man is sick of the service, or not calculated to shine in it, or to get on in it, the climate is a convenient excuse for leaving it. Major Armour used to say he had seen so much of that sort of thing. Now I must be going, as I mean to walk to the station."

Odious as he felt the woman to be, she was there in some sort as his Aunt Judith's guest; and William, in his chivalry, could

not allow her to leave the house alone. He was preparing to accompany her; but Fritz sprang up, and declared that that care must be his. He would have the honor of escorting Mrs. Armour to the station, if she would allow him to do so.

Mrs. Armour was very willing to allow it, greatly preferring his company—although he had never paid her all the attention that was her due—to that of Mr. Hughes. And before she went away she contrived to whisper a word or two to Claude almost in his ear. “I may come and see you again, may I not?” she said aloud, holding Aunt Judith’s hand in hers. Then, with a rustling of silk, and a waft of cheap perfumery, and a general sense of fuss, she took her departure; and presently her high-pitched tones were heard outside, as she and Fritz passed out of the little front garden and walked down the road.

Once alone with Hofmann, Juliet Armour “let her tongue rage like a fire.”

Mr. Hofmann had been surprised, no doubt, to find her there? But she had resolved not to make any feud about the wretched will. Mr. Kettering—whose opinion she valued more than she could say—quite agreed with her that it was due to her own dignity to show no animosity towards the inheritor of her uncle’s money. Indeed, towards the poor young fellow himself she felt none. He looked wretchedly ill; did not Mr. Hofmann think so? The sister was rather pretty, but inanimate; and perhaps a little—just a little—affected. And the old aunt, how comically quaint! Her dignity was very amusing. But really, when one remembered the circumstances under which her Uncle Dalton had come to have any connection with that family, there was something extraordinarily—she would not say brazen, but insensible, amazingly insensible, in the old lady’s self-sufficient manner. Mr. Hofmann was, of course, aware that Miss Hughes kept a little dame-school near the Harrow Road? It would, indeed, be a marvellous change for them all (for, of course, the whole family would benefit by it) if the young man lived to come into all that wealth. She had heard of the disinterested kindness shown to the Hugheses by Miss Stringer and Miss Kettering. So very sweet of them! Mr. Hughes was quite an original. Oh yes; very clever as a painter, no doubt. At least, so she had been told. But, probably, a little idle and careless—the sort of person

who lived from hand to mouth; and he had a decided tendency to—well, to romance in his talk. Perhaps as an artist he thought himself above the humdrum rules of the work-a-day world. But now, really, in confidence, all his rodomontade about Gilbert Hazel was sheer nonsense. *She* knew a great deal more about Gilbert Hazel than Mr. Hughes could possibly know; and the fact was that the whole story of his father's speculations had been thoroughly discreditable; and the young man himself had never done very well in the army. Yes; she had a second-class return ticket. She was not ashamed of being poor. Indeed, it was, perhaps, a mark of respectability, seeing the channels by which money was acquired in some cases! So many thanks. She would be charmed to see Mr. Hofmann if he ever found himself near her little *pied-à-terre*. She could scarcely ask him to call at her sister's, who lived at the end of the world. Good-night.

Fritz felt that it was like opening a window, and letting the fresh air into a close room, to get back to Barbara after this dose of Mrs. Armour's conversation. Claude declared himself tired after Mrs. Armour's departure, and went to his own room, where he dined alone, and afterwards sat in an easy-chair by a blazing fire, reading one of M. Zola's novels and smoking cigarettes in the teeth of the doctor's prohibition.

The others, thus left to themselves, dined together, and then chatted over their coffee by the soft light of a shaded lamp in the neat little drawing-room. It seemed to Fritz as though life in general were shining through a shaded lamp. There was certainly no discord among the little party—nothing that jarred. But there was the suggestion of a plaintive minor—of a sadness somewhere that would not be suppressed and could not be defined.

"You do not forget your promise to walk with me to-morrow?" said Fritz to Barbara as he took his leave. And she answered gravely that she had not forgotten it.

He resolved the next morning to have a good tramp by himself before the hour of his engagement to walk with Miss Copley. He wanted to think over the arguments he meant to put before her—not, of course, to strengthen his own resolution—that was taken; but to silence some mysterious spirit of contradiction—a kind of devil's advocate within himself, that kept making its voice heard with intolerable importunity. So he sallied forth be-

times, and, the weather being dry, although not very bright, he walked hard for two hours.

At the end of that time, having made a long circuit and returned to Norwood, he found himself on the slope of the hill he had rushed up so fast with Olga, and with his mind full of all that Olga had said, and done, and looked. She had been very naughty and perverse. But what a dear, delightful face it was when she looked up with that mutinous sparkle in her eye, and a smile curving her fresh red mouth! She could not possibly be in earnest as to what she had said about Rhodonides. He was such an ass! And yet, girls were persuaded every day into making such marriages. Almost every one whom Olga knew—beginning with her own father and mother—would consider Olga to have achieved high good-fortune in marrying Rhodonides. The conventionality and worldliness of it all was really hideous! Fritz, as he thought of it, gnawed his fair moustache and clenched his fists.

Then he went down the hill again, and, in a few more minutes, he was walking along the road in front of Miss Hughes's lodgings, with Barbara by his side.

At first they went on almost in silence, broken only by Fritz's remark as to the fineness of the weather for the time of year; and Barbara's assurances that the lodgings were very comfortable, and that Aunt Judith was more than content with them. Then, all at once, Fritz said, turning his head so as to look full at his companion, "Barbara, I suppose you know what it is I want to say to you?"

She met his eyes for a moment, and answered, with modest firmness, "I think it is for you to say it, whatever it may be."

"Of course it is for me to say it; and for you—if you will—to listen. I think I have done wrong, and put you in a false position. When you told me you would leave me free, I ought to have said, 'Give me my answer, Barbara, and let us stand clear towards each other and towards every one else.' Free! A man who has said what I said to you can't be free, and ought not to be free—unless he is definitively rejected; and you did not definitively reject me, did you, Barbara?"

She looked at him with a changing color, and her lips began to quiver.

"Forgive me if I acted mistakenly," she said. "I knew the generosity of your offer, and I wished—I thought—"

"I am not blaming you, dear! Good heavens! you cannot suppose I meant to blame you? No; it was all my fault."

"But I want you to understand—"

"I think I do understand. I understand your delicacy of feeling—your magnanimity. To speak plainly, you knew that you had no money, and that I had some."

"Money, and—and other things."

"I have no other thing that even the Empress of the Philistines, Madam Grundy herself, could pretend to put in the balance. My father was a trader; so was my grandfather. There can be no remote fiction of family dignity set up for me. No; the whole matter is this: that you have no money, and that I have some."

"No; that is not the whole matter—at least, not to me."

"You, perhaps, remember something of that letter I wrote to you?"

"I remember it all—every word."

"Well, I don't know that I could plead for myself any better than I pleaded in my letter. If you can make up your mind to accept me as your husband, I will do my best to make you happy. I will devote my life to you."

"I know it. I am sure of it."

"Then, Barbara, will you be my wife?" He stopped as he said it.

She raised her face, and looked at him with a faint little smile; and there was a wonderful radiance in her eyes as, putting out her two little hands to take both of his, she answered, "No."

"Barbara!" He dropped her hands and stepped back a pace, looking at her.

"No," she repeated. "I will confess to you that when I consented to come down here, I thought it possible that I might—might give you a different answer."

"You may return to that good thought," he said, quickly.

"Never! And it was not a good thought. It was a selfish thought."

"I don't believe that, Barbara," he said, looking down on her protectingly. (They were now walking on again, side by side.)

She shook her head. "I knew that if I married you, it would be in my power to brighten their lives at home. And I thought—I am not *all* selfish—that perhaps I might be able to brighten yours."

"So you could! So you can!" he exclaimed.

Again she shook her head. "As I lay awake last night, it all grew so clear to me that I wondered I could have hesitated. I saw that all the arguments I had been using to myself were false. I saw that in this case my first—my sole—duty was to you. No, please, let me speak! I have said that my uncle is strongly attached to you. He esteems you very highly. Suppose I had gone to him and said, 'Uncle William, I know that Mr. Hofmann is worthy of the best and warmest and truest love a woman's heart can give. Nevertheless I, who cannot give him such a love, will marry him because he is kind and generous, and it will make your old age easier to know that I am so well provided for:' how do you think he would have received that? I believe it would almost have broken his heart."

"But you don't think that you may be breaking my heart, Barbara?"

She wiped away the tears that had gathered in her eyes, and smiled on him—this time so brightly that he gazed, entranced with her beauty.

"No, dear friend—dearest and best of friends—it will not break your heart."

An hour ago Fritz would have admitted that it certainly would not break his heart to be refused by Barbara. But at this moment the devil's advocate within him, suddenly veering round, whispered that it was cruelly hard on a man to be asked to resign so perfectly charming a creature, whom he had been allowed for weeks to look on as his future wife.

"That is more than you can say," he answered, rather gloomily.

"I hope not. I trust not. If I have mistakenly done you any wrong, I ask your pardon, heartily and humbly. It would be a very keen grief to me to think that you and I should not be friends; that I had incurred your anger."

"Anger! Oh, of course this is no question of anger."

"Then won't you forgive me and shake hands?" she said, stretching out her own.



"She raised her face, and looked at him with a faint little smile."

He took it, and stood for a moment looking at her. Then he glanced round. The suburban road was very quiet and solitary.

"Barbara," said he, "may I give you a kiss?"

The color came into her face, but she put up her fair rose-tinted cheek without hesitation. He took off his hat, and, bending down, kissed her tenderly.

"God bless you, dear!" he said. "You may be right about that breaking of hearts; but one thing I know—you will always be to me the ideal of a sweet, pure woman. There will be a halo shining about you in my mind as long as I have any memory left. Do you know that I first saw you in a halo?"

"In a halo?"

"Yes; the halo round a butcher's shop in the Harrow Road. Shall we walk back?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MAN cannot take the rejection of his offer of marriage as though it were a matter of no consequence, and beg the lady not to mention it. He cannot do so in justice to the lady; and he will scarcely be inclined to do so in consideration to himself.

Fritz told Barbara, when they were returning to the house where Miss Hughes dwelt, that he would go back to the hotel for the present, and would probably return to London that evening.

"But you will come and see us soon?" she said.

"As soon as I can. You have hit me harder than you seem to think, Barbara."

By this time Barbara had come to a very decided opinion on that point. She did not follow out her own reasonings very closely. In fact, she was scarcely conscious of reasoning on the subject at all. But there was an instinct in her heart which taught her that Fritz, even if he were hit, was not touched in a vital part.

"I would give a great deal to have spared you any uneasiness," she said.

"Uneasiness! As one might speak of a garment that did not

fit. It is wonderful how cruel a woman can be—even so gentle and sweet-natured a woman as you are.”

Fritz was not a hypocrite. He did feel a longing for this fair and lovable creature which he certainly had not felt when he believed that the fair and lovable creature might be his whenever he should stretch out his hand. To Fritz, as to other sons of Adam in the like case, from the moment when Barbara became unattainable she became also more desirable.

“It is nothing to you what a fellow may suffer. You don’t care a straw for me, Barbara!” he said, detaining her hand for a moment as they reached the garden gate.

“You know I care for you a great deal,” she answered, looking up fearlessly into his face.

“Oh yes, as my old nurse did, who knew what was good for me, and never would let me have anything I liked!”

Barbara broke into a spontaneous, silvery little laugh; and Fritz, after trying for an instant to frown, could not refrain from laughing too.

“Ah, Barbara, Barbara,” he said, opening the gate for her to pass in, “there may be no breaking of hearts, and yet—you don’t quite understand it all, dear.”

Barbara did not, perhaps, quite understand it all; nevertheless, she felt that her instinct was right, and that there had been no vital wound.

She went up to her own room, and was meditating how to tell her news to her aunt and uncle, when there came a tap at the door, and Aunt Judith peeped in.

“Oh, you are there, Barbara. I was not sure whether you had come back,” she said. Then she looked at the girl’s face, and there was no need for Barbara to speak.

“Is it all over?” said Aunt Judith.

“Sit down here for a moment, dear aunty. I want to talk to you.”

There was a bright fire in the room—by Mr. Hofmann’s express orders, as the landlady had informed them—and Miss Hughes sat down beside it, while Barbara placed herself on a low stool at her knees.

“Oh, I am so sorry, Barbara,” said the old lady, smoothing the girl’s soft hair with a trembling hand.

That motherly touch reassured Barbara in a moment. She caught the trembling hand, and kissed it, and held it to her breast. "I knew you would be sorry, dear Aunt Judith. And I am so grieved to make you sorry. But you are not angry?"

A gentle caress of the soft brown hair from the other hand was the only answer.

"Indeed, indeed, I could do no otherwise, Aunt Judith. I tried to persuade myself; but all at once it came upon me as clear as sunlight that it would be doing him a wrong. There are some things one feels, although one cannot argue about them."

"No, child," assented Aunt Judith, mournfully, "it is of no use to argue."

"I did try to argue at first. And that did all the mischief."

"Where is he?"

"He has gone back to the hotel. I don't think he will come again this evening."

"Is he—is he very unhappy?"

Barbara turned round, leaning her arm on her grand-aunt's knee, and looking up at her earnestly. "Aunt Judith," she said, "if I thought he was going to be seriously unhappy, I don't know what I should do. I love him dearly. There is no one in the world more frank and generous and kind-hearted. But he is not going to be unhappy. I am sure of it. I believe he is not very unhappy even now."

She had half expected that Aunt Judith would protest against this assumption. But no protest came.

"What I am most afraid of," said Barbara, after a while, "is that Uncle William will be so grieved and disappointed."

"He will be grieved and disappointed, of course."

"I dare say he will blame me; and I dare say I deserve it. But I hope he will not blame—Fritz."

"Why should he blame him?"

"No; I don't mean that he will precisely blame him. I mean—I scarcely know how to say it. At first he will be so grieved for his friend. But then when I tell him that Fritz is not broken-hearted, and that he will get over this trouble, and be quite his own cheerful self again very soon, I am afraid—I am afraid that my uncle may think less well of him than he did. And that would be terrible to me. Fritz Hofmann deserves nothing

but respect and gratitude, and affection from us all—nothing else.”

Barbara, with sympathetic insight into her uncle’s character, recognized that passionate single-heartedness which could scarcely be made to understand that a man should receive such a blow as Fritz had received, and not be lamed for life.

Aunt Judith, although keen-sighted as to many points of this love-story, did not share Barbara’s penetrating vision here. It lay a little beyond the sphere of her imagination.

“Let me speak to your uncle,” she said, rising up from her chair. “I think it is my place to tell him. It ought not to fall on you.”

“How good you are to me, Aunt Judith!”

“My dear child! My poor, dear, motherless girl!” cried Judith, folding her in her arms. And then, bidding Barbara remain there quietly and rest, she left the room.

The old lady’s interview with her nephew was a long one. William was utterly astonished by what she told him—astonished, and deeply disappointed.

“I cannot understand it,” he said, looking at Judith with grave, wondering eyes, and his forehead wrinkled with lines of perplexity. “That Barbara should be fickle, that Barbara should have viewed the position lightly, is incredible. That, at least, it is impossible for me to believe.”

“She is not fickle. And she never views the rights and feelings of others lightly.”

“I am convinced of it. Who should be convinced of it, if not you and I? But then, dear aunty, how is it? What is the explanation of her letting Hofmann—my heart aches for him!—go on all these weeks confirming himself in hope, if she is now to reject him?”

“She was trying to persuade herself that such a marriage would be good and happy.”

“Persuade herself! But, good Heaven, why should she try to persuade herself? If persuasion were needed, that should have sufficed to show her that it could not be good and happy.”

“She has learned that at last.”

“How has she learned it?”

To this question Aunt Judith made no reply. But, presently,

laying her hand on her nephew's arm, she said, "William, it is Barbara's nature to sacrifice her personal inclinations to her affections. She has sacrificed them to me many a time, when I have been a cross, petulant old woman, seeming to put others before her; although in my heart I always knew her worth. She would have sacrificed her wishes to you if she had ever had a wish contrary to yours, and if it was possible for any human being to live with you and make sacrifices instead of receiving them. No, no, my dear; I know very well what I am saying. Well, then there came this offer of marriage. The man was a dear, good fellow; a gentleman, highly educated, of a bright, sweet temper—and he was rich."

William turned round and flashed a quick look at her.

"He was rich," repeated Aunt Judith. "And we were poor. Barbara knew that she was the apple of your eye. She knew that if you could once see her safe from the rough usage of the world, half the troubles of your life would be at an end. And she said to herself—not just in those words, but that is what it came to—'I will marry this man for my uncle's sake.'"

William started up with a sudden ejaculation. And then began to pace up and down the room ruffling his hair with his hands.

"And there is another thing to be said," pursued Aunt Judith, after a brief silence. "If Mr. Hofmann had been passionately in love with Barbara, I think—I think he might, perhaps, have won her."

"Do you mean to tell me now that he doesn't love her?" cried William, facing round almost angrily.

"No; I don't mean to tell you that. But I do mean to say that his is not the kind of love to take a girl's heart by storm, and make her forget—everything. Men are not all alike. Every sane man will get over an unfortunate attachment in time, I suppose. But with a few the scar remains to their dying day. Fritz Hofmann is the dearest fellow in the world. And if he had married Barbara, she would have had the kindest of husbands. But there will be no scar—not a trace of it! And if you will only believe that, it will comfort you very much."

For a few minutes William continued to march up and down the room. Then he sat down, and, folding his arms, remained in

deep meditation with a tenderly thoughtful face. At length he walked up to his aunt's chair, and kissed her forehead. "As I live," he said, "what astonishes me as much as any part of it is the wonderful way in which you have been able to understand it all. While I have been blinder than a bat. Are you a witch, Aunt Judith?"

"No witch, William," she answered, with a slow smile and a shake of the head. "But, you see, I happen to be a woman; and although I am an old woman now, I was once a young one—I was once a young one, my dear."

Meanwhile, Fritz Hofmann returned to London in a decidedly low-spirited state. He occupied some time on the day after he had parted from Barbara in writing a long letter to his mother. "I wonder," he said to himself, as he closed it, "whether Mr. Arthur Maddison will consider the offence of even having proposed to Miss Copley sufficiently heinous to make him cut me out of his will! *Mütterchen* will never tell him; but I shall take good care that he knows it."

Then he shut himself up for some days with his books; but it must be owned that the great work on comparative sociology made but little progress. And then, when he finally resolved to go and call at his Uncle Kettering's, it almost appeared as though the whole family were in a conspiracy to annoy him!

Fritz felt it to be peculiarly irritating that Mr. Kettering, who (as he had learned from Olga) had expressed himself very strongly against the idea of an alliance with Miss Copley all the time that Fritz thought himself sure of her, should now take every opportunity of praising her, and even of hinting what a charming wife she would make! That Mr. Kettering knew nothing of the real state of the case did not at all soothe Fritz's vexation. Then Sally Stringer, who had made great friends with him after her fashion, suddenly turned cold in her manner, and seemed to eye him with suspicion. Aunt Gertrude persistently advised him to "make it up" with Lady Lambton; and—worst of all!—Perikles Rhodonides began to haunt the house—morning, noon, and night.

Mrs. Kettering privately remonstrated with her husband for encouraging Fritz to make up to Miss Copley. "Not that I think he will be so silly as to do it," she parenthetically added.

"We discussed all that, Gertrude. The circumstances are al-

tered. I merely chose to make your nephew understand that, so far as we are concerned, there would be no objection to welcoming the young lady into the family. But it is idle to talk of my 'encouraging' Fritz in his pursuit of her. He would not be likely to pay much heed to that if I did 'encourage' him, as you call it. Nor does he stand in any need of it, I assure you! He is constantly with Miss Copley's family, and displays, rather ostentatiously, the familiar and intimate footing he is on with them."

"Who told you so, Philip?"

"I—a—I heard it casually; but on what I believe to be very good authority."

Mr. Kettering did not think it necessary to tell his wife that Mrs. Armour had paid him a secret and confidential visit at his counting-house in the city, to implore his advice about the investment of her "poor, wretched little five hundred pounds," and had then favored him with an account of her having seen Mr. Hofmann at Norwood. Gertrude was prejudiced against Mrs. Armour, and it might possibly increase her prejudice to mention this circumstance, in which view Mr. Kettering was, no doubt, correct.

"Do you know what Sally says?" said Mrs. Kettering, placidly, after some quiet reflection. "She says that Mr. Hughes will never touch a penny of Dalton's money, because of that dreadful family story, you know."

"Tut, tut, my dear. That, I take leave to say, is all moonshine. The money has not been bequeathed to Mr. Hughes. Time enough for him to repudiate it when he is asked to accept it."

"But Sally says she hears he won't let his niece touch a penny of it either. And he tried to persuade the young man to refuse the legacy."

"Refuse the legacy! Good heavens; Gertrude, that would be stark madness! I don't believe a word of it."

"The young man *hasn't* refused it, you know."

"No, I should imagine not! Upon my honor, there is no limit to the absurd things people will say and believe."

There was something in this suggestion of giving up a large fortune that jarred inexpressibly on Mr. Kettering's sense of the fitness of things.

And on this point Mr. Kettering held opinions almost identical

with those of Mr. John Hopkins, only, of course, very differently expressed.

Hopkins flew into a violent passion when the rumor first reached him, and begged to know whether he—John Hopkins—were generally taken to be an out-and-out idiot, that he should be expected to believe such things. But after a while he took higher ground, and pronounced that, bad as the whole business had been, he regarded this statement as by far the worst feature in it. Could he be sure that Mr. William Hughes had tried on any gammon of that sort, he should have a lower opinion of him than he now held.

“But,” said Mortimer, answering him pretty much as Mrs. Kettering had answered her husband, “you won’t catch Copley doing anything of the sort—not if he’s aware of it!”

“You needn’t tell me that, Mortimer. Your father wasn’t born yesterday, thank you! But it’s the principle of the thing I’m looking at. There’s a—an abject meanness about it. Why, a man that would pretend he wanted to refuse three hundred thousand pounds would—dashed if I can think of anything he *wouldn’t* do that’s sneaking and underhanded!”

“They’re not quite—not just exactly like the common run of people, you know,” said Mortimer, deprecatingly.

“Who ain’t?”

“Mr. Hughes and Miss Copley. There’s a something—what you might call poetical about ’em, you know.”

“Mortimer,” said his father, with severe moral indignation, “drop that! I say nothing against the gal.”

“You’d better not, before me, governor,” interposed Mortimer, chivalrously.

“I’d better say what I mean, sir, before you and everybody else. And I intend to. But as I don’t mean anything against the gal, I sha’n’t say anything against the gal. But when you come to talk of poetry in connection with better than a quarter of a million of money, I simply tell you to drop that. For I’m d—d if I stand it, and now you know!”

Mortimer was conscious of a great deal of burning eloquence within him; but he was also conscious that it would be entirely wasted on his father, and therefore kept it pent up in his soul for the present, intending to pour it forth to more appreciative ears by and by.

Presently Hopkins inquired of his son whether he had "been and offered to the gal" yet.

"No; I haven't exactly offered yet. I did call twice, but she wasn't at home. I can't persecute her, you know. There is a certain delicacy—"

"A certain fiddlestick! You're chicken-hearted, I suppose, that's about the long and the short of it. Look here, Mortimer, it's no good fooling about like this. You'd better give it up, and devote your mind to business for the present. There's plenty of time before you need think of marrying."

"I shall never give it up—unless she bids me," said Mortimer.

"I think you'd a deal better. There's heaps of girls as good as her. She's nothing so very wonderful, after all."

"Others hold a different opinion. Others admire and adore her—not as I do, though. And, besides, I began first. I hear that young Hofmann is after her."

"Who?"

"Hofmann; that German chap; nephew to Philip Kettering, Esquire; 'ighly connected; and got a pot of money of his own; quite independent," said Mortimer, heaping up these testimonies to Miss Copley's merits and attractions with considerable pride, albeit with a gloomy brow.

Mr. Hopkins whistled. "What, that young swell? I remember him."

"I learn," pursued Mortimer, folding his arms, and rather enjoying himself, "that Hofmann lays his offerings at her shrine. I've *seen* him spend fifteen bob for flowers in Covent Garden when he little guessed who dogged his footsteps. I learn, too, from another source, that he goes in and out at Hughes's studio like a tame cat. And I learn from yet another source that he went down to Norwood, where Copley is, and stayed with the family; and one of the Miss Ketterings went there too and called on the old lady."

"No! You don't mean that? Then I tell you what it is, Mortimer: they've got scent, somehow, that the gal's going to have a big slice of that money! Why, if the young chap only lives long enough over the 30th of next March to sign a will—You'd better look sharp about making your offer, if you mean to make it. And, later on, I think I could square it with Baikie

& Wiggetts to give you a little 'oliday; and we'll run down to Norwood and keep a watch on 'em, turn and turn about, as the time draws nigh."

CHAPTER XLIV.

SINCE the evening when he had stood and watched Fritz Hofmann deliver his pony and his message to Larcher, Hazel had debated with himself day by day whether it would be well to leave London without seeing Hughes again, or whether he should summon courage to visit once more the shabby little house where he had had that brief, bright glimpse of happiness in Barbara's dear presence.

He had declared to himself that night that he would make a struggle to win her yet, if Hofmann were not worthy of her. But in the cold light of the next day all that seemed very hopeless and impracticable. What chance had he of knowing more of Hofmann? What likelihood of influencing Barbara's feelings and opinions about him? What part had he in her life? He was a stranger who had chanced to fall in her way for a few weeks, with whom she had been sweet and gracious so long as their paths lay together, and from whom she had parted with a calm farewell.

And yet—and yet she had been glad to see him. Those eyes and that smile were true, or there was nothing true in God's world; and in their innocent candor they had said more than words. He forced himself to attend diligently to the business intrusted to him. Duty must be done, and done with thoroughness, but the thought of Barbara ran through every hour of his waking day.

He avoided the society of the people at the boarding-house, and when his day's work was done he would go out and walk aimlessly about the streets, until he thought he was tired enough to sleep. Once he accepted an invitation from a correspondent of his employers, Mr. Wilson having recommended him not to repulse any civilities of that sort. But for the most part he wandered about alone in the evenings.

If she were to be happy—if she were to be happy, he could bear it. So he told himself. But the thought of her happiness as the wife of another man failed to administer as much consolation to him as, perhaps, it ought to have done. And as he tramped through the busy streets with his hat low on his brows, he felt very desolate, and his heart was very sore.

The solitude, however, was of his own seeking. Mrs. Armour had encountered him in the boarding-house, as we know; and had greeted him with flattering warmth. For, although Mrs. Armour had spoken somewhat disdainfully of him at Norwood, she showed no disdain in her manner to him. On the contrary, she was eager in her manifestations of pleasure at seeing him again, and made many sentimental references “to the dear old days at Budjapore.”

From various intimations, Mrs. Armour had gleaned the impression that Gilbert Hazel's present prospects and position were far more prosperous than when she first knew him in India. And she began to consider within herself whether it might not be well to set about fascinating him seriously. Some degree of fascination Juliet Armour thought it desirable to exercise over every man who might by any possibility be useful to her—over Mr. Kettering, for instance. But with Hazel it might be worth while to be in earnest.

She presented in the attitude of her mind on this point a curious contrast to Lady Lambton. Lady Lambton also practised fascination; but in a very different spirit. It was impossible for Lady Lambton to hold a very low opinion of any man who admired her—so long as the admiration lasted. She accepted his compliments uncritically, as a child eats sweetmeats. They delighted her. And although she wished and intended to marry again when an eligible suitor should present himself, yet her mind was not constantly bent on that object. The pleasure she took in her flirtations might be described as *l'art pour l'art*. An appreciative crossing-sweeper who should have the wit to manifest his appreciation of her beauty would be sure of a smile from Lady Lambton.

Juliet Armour was made of sterner stuff. Originally of a hard nature, which blind indulgence in childhood had made selfish and exacting, she considered her life to have been a series of unmer-

ited disappointments. Her father had lived extravagantly, and, at his death, left very little behind him, and of that little the greater part went to her sister Dora. Her husband, Major Armour, whom she had married chiefly on the strength of his good family connections, never obtained any patronage that availed to advance him in his profession, and died without having obtained a colonelcy. In a few years during her Indian life, and while youth lasted, she was courted and flattered. But there came widowhood, restricted means, and the inexorable march of the years; and, finally, the glittering hopes of her uncle's inheritance had been dangled for a moment before her eyes and then snatched away forever.

There was an almost tragic intensity in the bitterness that filled her heart. She flirted and cajoled and fascinated as she best knew how, but with none of Amy Lambton's credulous enjoyment. Mrs. Armour was quite capable of despising, even of hating, the men who showed themselves amenable to her attractions. She had pride of a certain kind, and she revenged herself for the humiliations she incurred in her own esteem by wrathful contempt towards those for whom she incurred them.

But for Gilbert Hazel she did not feel any wrathful contempt. She had ridiculed what she called his quixotism; but it had a charm for her. She liked the very reserve of his manner, which was always respectful. Mr. Hazel, at least, did not instantly jump to the conclusion that his oglings and his speeches and his flatteries must necessarily delight her, as so many self-conceited idiots did! Nevertheless, she went on bidding for the good graces of the self-conceited idiots.

She encountered Hazel some days after her visit to Norwood, and began to speak of the Hughes family. She felt her way rather carefully; wishing to disparage them, and yet not wishing to sink in his opinion by a display of rancor. She was aware from Miss Jenks's report that he had been told the story of Dalton's will. And she intimated, as she had done to Fritz, that she had magnanimously made advances to the Hugheses in order to show the world that *she*—who was the person chiefly injured by Dalton's will—was not among those who accused them of dishonorable practices.

"Do you not think I was right?" she said.

"I think you were quite right to clear yourself of complicity in calumny," answered Hazel.

"Oh—calumny? Well, at all events the assertion is not warranted by anything that can be proved. Not that my friendship is of so much consequence to them now as it was some months ago," pursued Mrs. Armour. "They will not lack partisans. A young gentleman of my acquaintance is already paying very particular attention to Miss Copley, who would scarcely have done so—I don't say that he is *solely* attracted by *les beaux yeux de sa cassette*; but of course the charms of a well-dressed young lady are placed in a peculiarly favorable light."

"You are severe on your friend."

"Miss Copley is scarcely a friend of mine. I saw her for the first time a few days ago."

"I mean the man."

"Oh! Poor Mr. Hofmann! But, my dear Mr. Hazel, where shall we find a paladin *sans peur et sans reproche*? I declare if I were asked to point out a disinterested man, I think I should name you! And very possibly I might be mistaken," she added, with a smile and a coquettish glance.

Hazel turned away with a strong feeling of disgust. "The woman is a humbug ingrain," he said to himself.

And yet, in this instance, she had been sincere.

"Are you going?" said Mrs. Armour. "You must come and see me at my sister's house. Dora will be so pleased to make your acquaintance. She has heard of you. She knows all the details of my Indian life."

Hazel had his doubts as to that. But he merely bowed, and muttered something about his stay in town being very brief.

"Oh, but your business will bring you to town again! We must not quite lose sight of each other after meeting again by this unexpected chance. I consider that we are old comrades, you know. Ah, those were happy days at dear old Budjapore!"

Then Hazel got himself away from her presence, and went out into the streets. He must make up his mind on that question of trying to see Barbara again. At one moment he almost desired that a telegram might arrive from Staffordshire cutting short his further stay in town; at another it seemed to him that to leave

the place where Barbara dwelt would be like losing hold of the last spar and plunging down into despair.

He had wandered into Hyde Park—not of set purpose, but instinctively attracted by the space and air. Returning along Piccadilly, an elderly gentleman met him, stared hard, passed him, turned back, and said, hesitatingly, “Isn’t your name Hazel?”

And Hazel, roused from his reverie, looked up, and, holding out his hand, exclaimed, “Colonel Mullett!”

“My dear boy, I’m uncommon glad to see you! Bless my soul, it must be eight or nine years since we met! But I thought I knew the face. Where have you dropped from? Are you home on leave?”

“On a very long leave, colonel. I have left the army. But I beg pardon—I ought to say general, oughtn’t I?”

“Yes; when they put me on the shelf they labelled me general. I’ll turn and walk back with you. I should be going back about this hour, at any rate. Bless my soul! Little Bertie Hazel! I never thought you’d have left the service. It seemed a regular vocation, you know. You used to play with my sword before you were breeched; and you stuck to it through thick and thin. I suppose if you had gone into the church you’d have dropped into the family living when your poor father—ah, dear me, that was very sad! A man in the prime of life. He was at Winchester with me. And what are you doing? On my soul, I’m uncommon glad to see you!”

Then, as they walked along, Hazel narrated briefly the circumstances that had led to his accepting his present position. General Mullett listened with great interest; and, before they parted at the corner of St. James’s Street, had made Hazel promise that he would dine with him that evening. “In my quarters, you know, quietly; so that we can have a good long talk. There’s heaps of things I want to know. You won’t get so good a feed as you would at my club; but my old housekeeper will manage a chop and an omelet, I dare say. Good-by. Don’t lose the card with my address; and don’t forget eight sharp!”

Hazel was punctual to the appointed hour, and found his old friend in a very luxurious little home; and was set down to a handsome and well-appointed dinner.

"You mustn't be critical, Bertie," said the general. "It's an impromptu affair, you know."

"My dear general, I have fared sumptuously."

"No—no; that's nonsense! But I *can* give you a decent glass of claret. No more? Well, then, shall we have a cigar and a cup of coffee in my den? I always smoke in my den, because there's a couple of good easy-chairs there; and I lose the soothing effect of my 'baccy if I'm sitting at a wrong angle. And now, Bertie," said the host, when they were installed in the den, "tell me all about everything."

"Well—you know that my poor dad lost all he had in the world in—"

"I know that. Poor dear Hazel! We were in Commoners together. Ah dear! *fugaces labuntur anni!*"

"And you know that Carry Foster married Dumbleton?"

"I know that, too!" and the general muttered something about Carry Foster which, perhaps, it was as well that the cigar between his lips rendered unintelligible. Then he said, more distinctly, "And I understood you to say this afternoon that this Mr. Wilson had come forward soon after your father's death, and offered to give you a berth."

"Yes; but I refused. I was as poor as a rat; but I knew I could live on my pay with what I had, and I didn't much care what became of me."

There was a short pause, and then General Mullet, waving aside a cloud of fragrant tobacco with his hand, so as to get a good look at Hazel, said,

"And after a time something happened that made you begin to care what became of you—eh?"

Hazel was silent.

"Well, my dear boy," said the elder man, after a moment or two, "I don't want to be intrusive. Pass me the cognac. Don't you take a *chasse*."

Then all at once Hazel opened his heart, and told the story of his love and the bitter disappointment that had awaited him in England—told it all, simply and fully, down to his life in the boarding-house near Red Lion Square; only reserving all mention of Barbara's name.

"I *knew* there was a woman in the case!" exclaimed the general when he had finished.

"Did you? How?" asked Hazel, looking at him earnestly.

Mullett waived that question, and inquired whether the lady were aware of Hazel's attachment.

"I can't tell. I have never spoken. I suppose not."

"H'm! I'd lay odds she knew it. They always do."

"You cannot judge of her by that sort of generalizing worldly wisdom."

"Ahem! Ah, exactly! I mean, if she were another young lady, she probably would know it. She has no money?"

"So far as I know, not a halfpenny."

"I see. You don't think, under the circumstances, on the whole, you know, that you had better give it up?"

"Much better. Only it won't give me up."

"Then," said the general, after a short pause, during which he had puffed at his cigar with unusual energy, "there's nothing for it but to make a dash for the enemy's guns and carry her off from under the nose of the other fellow. There's no middle course that I see."

"Unfortunately there's precisely that middle course which seems to be the lot of most mortals. 'Not to desire and admire, if a man could learn it, were more'—than all sorts of fine things. But a man can't leave off desiring and admiring simply because he sees it would be the most comfortable line to take."

"Well, look here, Bertie, you must let me see as much of you as possible while you're in town."

And then General Mullett proposed that if Bertie would dine with him again the next night, they should go afterwards to the house of some friends and neighbors of his whom Bertie would find agreeable acquaintances. But Hazel defended himself strenuously against this proposal. He had no spirits for society. He might be called away at a moment's notice, and so forth. The general, however, still persisted.

"You must pull yourself together, you know. Why, even for the sake of carrying on the campaign, it will never do to mope about like an owl! By George, you know, the idea of your feeding at that hideous boarding-house, and then wandering about the streets by yourself, is altogether too ghastly. 'Pon my soul it is! Besides, these people may be useful acquaintances in the way of business. Philip Kettering is a man of mark in the city. His

wife is a German—one of the Hofmanns of Hamburg, also mercantile swells, and—”

“Hofmann?”

“Yes; and, by the way, her nephew is an uncommon nice fellow. You and he ought to be pals.”

“General, if I may choose my mind, and if it can be done without giving you any trouble, I think I will go to your friend’s, if you will present me.”

“Bravo! That’s right! You really must pull yourself together, you know.

“Why so pale and wan, fond lover?

Prithee, why so pale?

Will, if looking well can’t move her,

Looking ill prevail?”

“Good-night, general. It’s awfully good of you to let me bore you with my troubles.”

The elder man took Hazel’s hand, and gripped it silently.

“It has been a real comfort to speak to an old friend. I was so desperately lonely!”

CHAPTER XLV.

“THERE’S no party, you understand,” said the general, when he and Hazel were putting on their overcoats the next evening after dinner. “Mrs. Kettering is generally at home on Friday to one or two intimate friends, that’s all. There’s no affectation about any of ’em; and just a little touch of foreign manners that makes things easy and agreeable. I find it an uncommon pleasant house to go to. Phil Kettering and I are very good friends; all the women of the family are nice to look at; and”—with a little grave, emphatic lowering of the voice—“I have not had one bad glass of wine there in ten years.”

Then, as they drove along, he told Hazel that he had called that morning to ask Mrs. Kettering’s leave to present his friend, and that the proposal had been received with the greatest cordiality.

“I just said a word, you know, about your father’s people in Buckinghamshire, just to let ’em know who you are.”

“I suppose all that they care to know is that I come under your wing, general; and that you answer for my not stealing the spoons, or putting my boots on the chimney-piece.”

“No; that’s not quite all. Kettering professes very democratic opinions. But I don’t think he likes to have them taken too much for granted, you know—see what I mean? Well, here we are.”

General Mullett felt something almost like paternal pride in his companion as they mounted the stairs to Mrs. Kettering’s drawing-room side by side. “Bertie not only looks every inch a gentleman, but he’s an uncommon handsome fellow into the bargain!” thought he to himself with much complacency.

In the drawing-room a small company was assembled. There was Lady Lambton, accompanied by her sister Blanche, whom she had recently introduced to the Ketterings, and who, made very happy by the enlarged possibilities of new frocks conferred by Dalton’s legacy, had greatly disgusted Eleanor’s severe taste by appearing in a toilet of the latest fashion; whereas we all know that costumes, like port-wine, require the warranty of time before a connoisseur who respects himself will confess to liking them.

There was Perikles Rhodonides paying great court to the mistress of the house, on the back of whose chair Ida was leaning with both arms, and occasionally joining in the conversation. There was Miss Stringer, looking very alert and vivacious, and chatting with Blanche Shortway and a very young but very solemn gentleman who had lately published, at his own expense, a long poem in blank verse, founded on some Norse legends; for Mr. Kettering cultivated literary society within moderate limits, and thought it incumbent on commerce to patronize the Muses.

And there, also, seated near his cousin Olga, with whom he was discussing some point that required frequent reference to the notes in a small pocket-book, was Fritz Hofmann. Hazel recognized him instantly, and involuntarily fixed his eyes with a scrutinizing glance on the other man’s face.

The entrance of General Mullett and his friend was greeted with polite warmth of manner by the host and hostess; but in the

breast of at least one person present it excited a gleam of genuine delight. Lady Lambton had found herself in the unusual position of being neglected. There were present two men whom she reckoned among her adorers—Hofmann and Rhodonides—and yet she was left with no other attention than Mr. Kettering's, and no other incense than that of his urbane compliments. These, to be sure, were better than nothing. But they were far from being all she had a right to expect. Her heart leaped up, as did the poet's when he beheld a rainbow in the sky, on the entrance of the two last comers. One of them, she had reason to think, she had already charmed, and the other appeared to be well worth charming.

"I think it is extremely kind of you, Mr. Hazel, to come to us in this unceremonious way," said Mrs. Kettering, in her placid voice, and with her pretty placid smile. "Of course I understand that we owe that favor to the good offices of our friend General Mullett; and we are greatly obliged to him."

Hazel made a suitable reply, and sat down near his hostess in a chair which she indicated to him. Then he was presented to Ida, and Mrs. Kettering said a word of introduction between him and Rhodonides. Meanwhile General Mullett made his way across the room to Lady Lambton, who received him with her most sparkling smiles, whereby the general, all unconscious that much of their brightness was intended to glance off himself in the direction of his friend, was greatly flattered.

Hazel, while he said the little commonplaces of the moment to Ida and Mrs. Kettering, could not keep his glances from wandering in the direction of Fritz Hofmann, whom he contemplated with mingled bitterness and perplexity. The man sat there, bending down to talk to that flaxen-haired girl beside him as though he had no greater interest in the world than listening to her replies; cheerful, smiling, evidently wholly at his ease, while all the time it depended only on his own will to leave that luxurious room—that big, splendid, empty casket—and be admitted to the dim little shrine where Barbara was shining! It was incomprehensible—almost incredible, although he saw it before his eyes.

Mrs. Kettering at length noticed the persistence with which her guest kept regarding Fritz and Olga; and, being more than willing to break up that *tête-à-tête*, she called Olga to her by a little

gesture of the hand. "I must make you known to my elder daughter, Mr. Hazel," said she.

Hazel, of course, rose from his chair as the young girl approached him, and bowed to her when her mother mentioned his name. The next moment, as he stood erect again, he found himself face to face with Fritz Hofmann, who was looking at him with a frank, pleasant smile, and holding out his hand.

"Mr. Hazel," said Fritz, "my name is Hofmann. I know you are a friend of a very dear friend of mine—William Hughes, the painter. I am very glad to meet you."

"My nephew," said Mrs. Kettering. And then Hazel gave the other man his hand. They were about the same height, and they looked for a moment straight into each other's eyes.

Fritz, who had been attracted by the stranger's face, and moved by a friendly impulse the moment he heard his name, was suddenly conscious of a little chill. Something stern and cold seemed to come into the dark eyes that had been bent on Olga the moment before with such winning gentleness.

"Very odd!" thought Fritz. "One would almost say the man disliked me—only that's scarcely possible, seeing that he never beheld me before!" He was not, however, specially sensitive to such impressions. So he shook off the little unpleasant chilly sensation as best he could, and began to talk. But he found it uphill work. And what struck him again as singular was that Hazel, on his part, appeared to be struggling against some sense of repulsion and difficulty; and yet to wish, nevertheless, to carry on the conversation.

"*Sind wir etwa bezaubert?*—Are we both bewitched?" muttered Fritz to himself. But he stuck to his task and talked on.

Mrs. Kettering was well content to see him thus occupied, and signed to Olga to remain near her. "You see," she said, turning towards Rhodonides, "Fritz never had a sister of his own. But my girls have been exactly like sisters to him all their lives. Exactly the same."

"I think Fritz is ever so much nicer to us than a brother," said Ida. "Brothers are horrid, sometimes. The Laurie girls give the most awful account of *their* brothers! But Fritz always does everything we ask him—everything that Olga asks him, at any rate."

"Ida! Be so good as not to interrupt me when I am speaking."

"I thought you had finished, mamma."

"My nephew," continued Mrs. Kettering, still addressing Rhodonides, "is writing a book in his own language; and as Olga is quite as conversant with German as with English, he occasionally gets her to read portions of it; and that has—has thrown them a great deal together lately."

"I'm sure Miss Kettering is very clever," said Rhodonides.

"Of course she is!" exclaimed Ida, stoutly. "Fritz says she has great—what was it? Oh, I know!—psychological insight."

"Never mind what Fritz says, Ida. Mr. Rhodonides will be sick of the subject."

"Oh no, indeed!" protested that amiable young man. "I'm quite sure Miss Kettering knows a great deal about psychology. I think it's very nice indeed."

"Oh, Olga has no pretensions to be a *bas bleu*!" said Olga's mother. "She has many delightful qualities—at least, we think so."

"Oh, I'm sure she has," muttered Rhodonides.

"But she does not set up to be a woman of intellect, like Lady Lambton, for instance."

"Oh yes! Lady Lambton is very intellectual, isn't she?"

"Very."

"Ah, but you don't like people to be too clever—I mean always up in the clouds—do you?" burst in Ida. "You said so that night at the theatre. No more do I."

This time Mrs. Kettering did not chide. She contented herself with smiling, shaking her head, and saying, "Ida, Ida, you are a sadly spoiled child!"

"Oh, not at all!" put in Rhodonides. "I'm sure Miss Ida is not in the least spoiled. But I don't quite remember objecting to cleverness, you know."

"No; but you agreed with me that you didn't like theories. Don't you remember when Fritz and Olga were mooning on about—about affinities? You must remember that! I said I thought theories only muddled people's brains; and you said yes, you thought they did."

"Well, I—I'm not quite sure, you know."

"Oh, you did say so! You know you did!" exclaimed Ida, with indignant earnestness.

"Ida!" interrupted her mother, severely.

"Oh, indeed, Mrs. Kettering, I have no doubt Miss Ida is quite right—quite right in the main, you know. I remember now perfectly well. She was most amiable and—and amusing. I never enjoyed an evening more—really, I never did."

Mrs. Kettering now proposed that Ida should show Miss Shortway the sketches she had made in Vevey—for Miss Shortway was sitting, somewhat forlorn, between Sally Stringer and the poet of the Northern Sagas, whom Sally was apparently reducing to a condition of great prostration and confusion of mind by her bold and heterodox opinions.

When Ida tripped away to get her portfolio, Mrs. Kettering took the opportunity of vacating her own seat, and leaving Rhodonides near Olga. As she walked in her leisurely fashion towards Miss Stringer, she heard the latter say, with her tightest and most distinct articulation,

"Fiddlesticks about 'realism!' A dunghill is real, and a rose is real; but does any one doubt which to sniff at?"

Upon which the solemn young gentleman gasped, and looked about him helplessly.

Mrs. Kettering, watching them quietly, saw Rhodonides at once begin to talk with Olga, and saw also that he had evidently hit upon some topic which interested her. Olga smiled, and grew quite animated, and presently they both rose and joined Ida and Blanche, who were turning over the sketches at a side-table, and the four young people were soon chatting away with great vivacity.

The complacency with which Mrs. Kettering observed all this was not shared by her nephew. Hazel became aware that Fritz's attention was wandering as they stood still, conversing together, near the fireplace; and at length Fritz suggested that they should go and look at the sketches.

"My little Cousin Ida really draws very well," he said. "And, by the way, Hughes gave her some lessons last autumn."

And he thereupon led the way to the table where the contents of the portfolio were spread out, and insinuated himself into a place between Olga and Rhodonides, to his Aunt Gertrude's great chagrin.

"Fritz is too bad! One would say he did it on purpose!" she whispered to Sally; and Sally, after one sharp look at her, replied emphatically,

"Yes; that is *exactly* what one would say."

Owing to his unusually long absence from the Ketterings' house, Fritz had not seen Olga and Rhodonides together for some time; and he was struck this evening by the warmth and friendliness of his cousin's manner to the young man. Rhodonides had dined there, as had Fritz; and had seemed to Fritz to make himself almost one of the family. Still, after dinner, the cousins had a confidential chat together about the *magnum opus*, as Fritz jestingly called the book he was writing. Fritz had, in fact, engrossed Olga up to the time of General Mullett's arrival; and had made up his mind to tell her at the first opportunity how things stood between him and Miss Copley. But that must be done when they were secure from interruptions. On the whole, Fritz was tolerably comfortable about Olga. It was impossible that she should give herself to that ass, though he really was an amiable kind of ass. How bright she was! And how pretty! And how she interested herself in all his plans and theories! Fritz had not, perhaps, more than a wholesome amount of vanity. But certainly the innocent way in which Olga, while she scolded and laughed at and contradicted him, conveyed implicit faith in his superior talents was exquisitely agreeable. Barbara had never scolded or laughed at him. But neither had she displayed any absorbing interest in the *magnum opus*.

Then, as they all stood looking at Ida's sketches, Fritz contrived to place himself, as Mrs. Kettering had observed, between Olga and Rhodonides.

When Hazel said a few words of praise to Ida about her drawings, she answered, with her usual straightforward candor, that the merit of them was chiefly due to her teacher. "He never touched them, you know, but he made me see things. I believe I have some eye for color; but you have no idea what botches I made before Mr. Hughes taught me."

"Oh, I'm sure you didn't, Miss Ida! I can't believe that," said Rhodonides.

"Why can't you?" inquired Ida, looking full at him with her blue eyes very wide open. "I did make dreadful botches. Mr.

Hughes is quite a real artist, you know ; not a mere drawing-master," she continued, addressing Hazel. "And he is so clever; and so patient, and not a bit conceited or stuck-up, and so kind—I adore Mr. Hughes."

"I know Mr. Hughes very well, and I quite agree with you," said Hazel, looking down at the girl with a smile.

"Do you? Oh, I'm very glad you are a friend of his!"

"Oh, but, although I dare say Mr. Hughes is as nice as you say, at home we're all in love with another member of the family," exclaimed Blanche Shortway, impulsively. And then she stopped short, blushing to find the general attention fixed upon her.

"Oh, come, I say! Another? These Hugheses have an unconscionable share of good luck; haven't they?" said Perikles Rhodonides.

"Oh, but the one I mean is a lady," said Blanche, with great simplicity. "It is Mr. Hughes's niece, Miss Copley."

"Miss Copley!" echoed Ida. "Oh! Yes; Miss Copley is very nice."

"My mother raves about her."

"She is very nice," said Ida, decisively, after a moment's deliberation. "And I think there's something noble about her: she's always so true. But she isn't—is she very handsome, do you think?" addressing this question to Blanche Shortway as an artistic authority.

"Not in a showy style. But she has wonderful purity of coloring. And if you were to take a crayon and try to trace her profile, you would see how fine and delicate the lines are."

"Yes; I can understand that," said Ida, nodding thoughtfully. Then, suddenly turning towards Hazel, she asked, "And do you know Miss Copley as well as her uncle?"

"Yes; I know her."

Fritz looked across the table at Hazel as the latter said those four commonplace words; and all at once there came upon him such an illumination as made the blood rush into his face.

From time to time during the rest of the evening he kept calling up recollections of looks and tones—fleeting and intangible things, which yet, taken together, held a strong significance. Of course, Barbara had been with her uncle at the farm-house where they had first met Hazel! He remembered hearing Hughes

speaking of that holiday; and, of course, Hazel had fallen in love with her there! As to that, Fritz had no doubt whatever. But beyond feeling morally sure of that fact, he did not see his way very far. He could not help wondering whether Barbara's eyes would light up, and the soft color come into her cheek, for this confoundedly good-looking fellow, as they certainly never had done for him. And he could not help a slight passing sensation of envy at the thought of those beams and blushes. A woman may not only resign her lover, but may, under some circumstances, take pleasure in witnessing his happiness, and petting his wife and his sweetheart. But to a man—although he, too, can resign—there is never anything agreeable in the contemplation of another man's love-making. Fritz had thoroughly given up all thought of winning Barbara; and he had been, on the whole, pleased with the way his philosophy had stood the strain on it. He was master of himself, as he had assured his mother he should be. But he did not, in these first moments, feel any cordial satisfaction in the idea that Barbara might possibly love Mr. Gilbert Hazel.

As they all stood round the table, still looking at Ida's landscapes, Lady Lambton came up on General Mullett's arm, and demanded to know what they were so interested in. Her ladyship had become extremely tired of sitting among the elders—Mr. and Mrs. Kettering, Miss Stringer, and General Mullett—even although the general's attentions had been more devoted than usual.

"Oh, drawings!" she exclaimed. "You know that Art is, to me, the very breath of life! Music, Poetry, and Painting—what would the world be without them?"

No one being prepared with an answer to this inquiry, there was a silence until Blanche Shortway said, holding out one of the sketches, "Does not Miss Ida Kettering draw well, Amy?"

"Are these yours, Ida? How charming! You naughty child, you never told me!"

Then Amy whispered a word to General Mullett, who said, laying his hand on Hazel's sleeve, "Bertie, let me present you to Lady Lambton. Mr. Gilbert Hazel."

It must be recorded that Lady Lambton unhesitatingly sacrificed her delight in Art to the claims of good-breeding; and that

she took not the least notice of Ida's drawings from the moment the stranger was introduced to her. The interview, however, was not wholly satisfactory to her. Mr. Hazel was a gentleman, was thoroughly at his ease, and his manner had a tone of courteous deference. Moreover, he was handsome, and looked—so Amy thought—romantic, although nothing could be simpler and less affected than his words and ways. But somehow he was not quite satisfactory. And at length Lady Lambton made up her mind that he was shy—which accounted for the suppression within his own bosom of all the flattering speeches he was doubtless dying to utter.

Meanwhile that illumination which had come to Fritz had helped him to find some explanation of Hazel's puzzling air of repulsion towards himself. He remembered that Mrs. Armour was an inmate of the same boarding-house with Hazel, and he thought it more than probable that she had been spitting her venom on his (Fritz's) connection with the Hugheses in her own genial and charitable spirit. No doubt she had been spitting her venom, he said to himself. But he would take means to administer an antidote. He had, indeed, resolved to invite Hazel to accompany him to his own rooms that night on leaving the Ketterings, when something occurred which changed the current of his thoughts, and drove conviviality and hospitality out of his head.

It was understood that on these informal Friday evenings the party should break up early. It was not yet eleven o'clock when Lady Lambton's carriage was announced, and General Mullett, who knew the ways of the house, at once took his leave. Hazel received a very cordial invitation from the host and hostess to come to them whenever he should be in town. And Fritz went down-stairs at the same time, intending to give his invitation while the men were putting on their coats in the hall. The ladies' wraps had been left in a little room on the ground floor, and thither Olga and Ida accompanied Lady Lambton and her sister to see that the maid was in attendance, and to say some last words to Blanche Shortway, with whom Ida had struck up a friendship.

Now Fritz, standing in the hall and waiting an opportunity to speak to Hazel, to whom Mrs. Kettering was making polite

speeches—Fritz beheld Rhodonides walk in at the open door of the little room among the cloaks and shawls, and go up to Olga, and heard him say, in a low, confidential tone, "Mr. Kettering has promised to see me to-morrow." Whereupon Olga had nodded silently, and given him her hand.

Fritz stood for a moment with the sensation of being stunned, as though he had received a violent blow. That Rhodonides, who saw Mr. Kettering frequently, should make a special appointment with him, and should confidentially communicate that appointment to Olga, admitted of but one interpretation. A sudden tumult of feeling surged up in Fritz's heart, and he was torn by a dozen conflicting impulses that attacked him from all sides at once like a pack of wolves. He felt a wild desire to seize Rhodonides by the scruff of the neck and pitch him out of the house; to rush away himself and be seen no more; to confront Olga with vehement reproaches—he scarcely knew for what. But he simply stood there motionless among the little knot of people in the hall; and then, in the general movement, amid the general "good-nights," he found himself outside the door, and walking along the pavement by himself.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FRITZ HOFMANN was a man by no means prone to rage, but who, nevertheless, had been in rages; when the fierce gleam of his blue eyes, and the expression about his mouth, were not pleasant to behold. It would never have occurred to him to use a dagger, or even a pistol. But there awoke within him a certain animal combativeness; a sense of thews and muscles which it would be delightful to employ in pounding and pummelling the object of his wrath. And there had been one or two occasions in his boyhood and early youth when he had indulged himself in that delight, with its concomitant drawback of being pounded and pummelled himself; as to which, however, he cared very little.

Some such Berserk fury had come upon him now. And yet all the while, in the very tempest and whirlwind of his passion,

he was, in some latent way, conscious of being very much surprised at the violence of his own emotions.

When he reached his lodgings, he paced up and down the sitting-room, speaking disjointed sentences out loud. It was monstrous, horrible, a vile sacrifice to Mammon, the world, and the devil! It is to be feared that Fritz heaped many vituperative epithets on his Uncle Philip and Aunt Gertude; and that he even flung a great many harsh and rough ones at Olga herself. False! She had been false and treacherous! What though she had never expressly disclaimed all intention of accepting this rich young fool? Had she not shown in a hundred ways, as intelligible as words, that she shared her cousin's opinion of him? And now—! It was well, perhaps, that Perikies Rhodonides was not at that moment within reach of those powerful hands—clenching themselves as Fritz strode up and down the room.

But the fit could not last very long at that point of ebullition. He flung himself into an arm-chair beside his writing-table, and began by degrees to get his thoughts somewhat under control.

As to the significance of Rhodonides' words to Olga he had no manner of doubt. What was he to do? What could he do? And the inquiry might naturally have presented itself, why was he called upon to do anything? What was it to him, as Olga had asked at Norwood, that his cousin should marry Rhodonides? But he knew now, with startling certainty, what it was to him. He was furiously, passionately jealous. It was not merely that he held Rhodonides to be immeasurably inferior to Olga, but that the thought of her marrying any man was intolerable to him. He wanted Olga to be his own. That was the truth, and he had recognized it too late.

Too late! Was it too late? No, it should not be too late! She was not yet married to that idiotic waxwork image of a man, and so long as she was unmarried there was hope. There must be hope. Fritz would have liked to have rushed back to his uncle's house, and lay claim to Olga without more delay. For an instant he seriously contemplated returning to insist on speaking with Mrs. Kettering; but it was now the dead of night, and even in the torrent of his impatience it did occur to Fritz that to knock the family up for this purpose, after having just spent a long

evening among them without dropping a hint of the matter, might subject him to a justifiable suspicion of lunacy.

Then, as he sat over his breakfast the next morning, he began to feel some visitings of fear. Fritz was not much subject to anxious doubts, but he had never in his life longed for anything as he now longed to obtain Olga for his wife. He longed intensely, and, therefore, he also feared. With what assurance could he approach Mrs. Kettering now, at the eleventh hour? What words should he find to convince Olga herself, that, while he had been confiding to her the progress of his suit to another woman, it was really she whom he loved beyond all the daughters of Eve—she alone whom he coveted for his wife? And then a little half-inarticulate question flitted through his mind: would he, in truth, have discovered, even now, how precious she was to him had he not beheld his jewel almost within the grasp of another?

But Fritz by no means proposed to follow out the workings of his soul with that philosophic introspection which he had employed on a former occasion. He wanted to marry Olga—he loved her—he would make her happy, and no other man should take her from him without a struggle. Such was the elementary condition of Fritz Hofmann's highly cultured mind when he set forth to go to the Ketterings' house.

It was but little after ten o'clock when he reached it. Rhodonides would surely not have his promised interview with Mr. Kettering until the afternoon; for, ass though he were, he was assiduous at his business, and was to be found in his father's counting-house in the city with punctual regularity. And there, too, Fritz would catch his uncle before he left home. Fritz would have arrived with the early milkman had he thought that likely to conduce to the success of his purpose. But he reflected that Uncle Philip would object to being disturbed in the midst of his morning ablutions; and that, moreover, he would be more amenable to reason after the comforts of his breakfast than before.

With a beating heart, but with unflinching courage, Fritz knocked at his uncle's door. The servant who opened it believed Miss Kettering was in the drawing-room. Mrs. Kettering had not finished breakfast, and Miss Stringer and Miss Ida were in the morning-room. Should he announce Mr. Hofmann?

"No; I will just run up to the drawing-room. I have a word to say to Miss Kettering." Then, as his foot was on the stairs, he turned and said, "My uncle has not gone out yet, James?"

"No, sir." The man seemed about to add something more; but Fritz did not wait to hear it. He dashed up the stairs, paused one instant at the closed door of the drawing-room, and then, softly turning the handle, walked in.

Olga was sitting there alone in a low lounging-chair with her back to the light. Her hands were folded in her lap, and held neither book nor work. At another time Fritz would have thought this odd. But he did not notice it now. She saw his face more distinctly than he saw hers; and exclaimed, in a startled tone, "Fritz! At this hour! Is anything the matter?"

"No. Uncle Philip will not slip out of the house while I am here, will he?"

"Slip out—! No. Fritz, you frighten me. I am sure there is something the matter!" cried the girl, rising from her chair.

Fritz certainly did not look agreeable. His fair eyebrows were drawn together in a frown; and he stared upon her with a stern intentness of which he was himself quite unconscious.

"There is nothing the matter—in the way you mean. Only I want to speak to Uncle Philip before he goes away to the city."

Olga sat down again. But she still looked at him uneasily. "Papa is sure to come in here before he goes away. I am waiting for him."

"Here? Why are you waiting here, instead of down-stairs?"

"Because papa is engaged. There is some one with him!"

"Some one with him!" cried Fritz, striding close up to her. "Who is it? Not that accursed ass Rhodonides?"

"Fritz!—what has come to you? I beg you will not speak to me in that way!"

"Do you mean to say that Rhodonides is with my uncle now?" he asked, between his set teeth.

"Yes, I do; and what possesses you to make this display of violence I cannot conceive."

He dropped her wrist, which he had seized hold of in his eagerness, and, stepping back a pace, folded his arms and glared at her ferociously. "You will not pretend," he said, still grinding out

the words between his teeth, "that you are unaware of the object of his visit?"

"I shall not pretend anything. Why should I?"

"Why should you pretend anything?" repeated Fritz, in a bitterly ironical tone. Then, suddenly, he burst out, "*Gott in Himmel!* Olga, you are not going to do this shameful thing! You *shall* not. I'll kill him first!"

"Fritz!—are you out of your mind?" She was trembling now, and her color was changing quickly.

"No; I am in my mind now, whatever I may have been before; and I tell you that you *shall not* marry this doll-faced idiot—unless, indeed, you will swear to me that you love him with all your heart and mind and soul! If you can bring yourself to say *that*—"

"For mercy's sake, be quiet!" she whispered; and the next moment the door opened and Mr. Kettering appeared, followed by Perikles Rhodonides.

"Is that you, Fritz?" said his uncle. "What were you holding forth about?" Then, turning to Rhodonides, he said, with even more than his accustomed suavity, "You won't mind Fritz? He is one of us—a son of the house. I am happy to inform you, Olga, that our interview has been quite satisfactory. Of course, I tell him that I answer only for myself and mamma. For the rest—he must plead his own cause. Perikles says you have been so kind, and given him so much encouragement, that he wished you to know at once that he has my approbation. We are now going to ask mamma to receive us," and Mr. Kettering withdrew his beaming face from the doorway.

"Dear Olga, I shall never forget your goodness," began Rhodonides, advancing towards her with outstretched hand; when Olga, with a sudden movement, threw herself between him and her cousin, and almost hustled the astonished young man towards the door. "Yes—yes; go! I am so glad! I hope it will be all right. Do go and speak to mamma! and I will explain to Fritz. He—he doesn't understand."

Then, suddenly shutting the door upon Rhodonides, she turned and stood with her back to it, confronting her cousin. "Fritz!—stay here!" she panted.

"Olga, leave that door. Child, what are you afraid of? Do

you seriously think I mean to murder anybody? And do you suppose you can stop me from going out?"

"I—I think I can—if you—if you will only listen. I can hardly get my breath. You frightened me so with your wicked, scowling looks! I don't think I shall ever—ever forgive you. And as to Perikles—thank Heaven, his mind was too full of something else to look at you!"

"He shall look at me before I have done, and listen to me too!"

"Oh, Fritz, how can you—be such a goose?"

Olga had sunk down by this time on an ottoman near the door, half laughing, half crying.

"I am in no mood for trifling," answered her cousin, angrily. "I swear to you, as I am a living man, that unless you can look me in the face, and say that that man who has just left the room is dear to you beyond any other being on earth—"

"But I can't."

"No. I know that you cannot."

"And, good gracious, why should I?"

"Why should you? You can ask that question of *me*?"

"Of any one who is not a lunatic! Good heavens, must one love one's brother-in-law above all earthly beings?"

"One's—*what*?" shouted Fritz, seizing her by both hands. "Say it again!"

"Well, if he marries Ida, and I think she will have him, he will be—"

But Olga got no further in her sentence, for Fritz lifted her up in his arms as if she had been a feather, and kissed her wildly.

The next moment she had extricated herself from his embrace, and was looking at him flushed and indignant, with quivering lips and flashing eyes. "Fritz," she said, in a choking voice, "recollect yourself! I will not be insulted."

"Insulted! Olga, is true love an insult? The best—the truest—the whole love of my heart!"

"The whole love of your heart! When you're engaged to marry Barbara Copley!"

"But I'm *not* engaged! She won't have me! I won't have her! We don't care a straw for one another, only I'm very fond of her, and so is she of me. And she's a dear, sweet, noble creat-

ure. Oh, Olga—see, I'll go down on my knees to you! My darling, I want you to be my wife. I always loved you—yes, yes; I dare say you can't quite understand it at this minute, but I can explain it all. I can indeed, dear, if you will only believe me! Olga—do say a word! Don't cry! Oh, what a wild beast I have been! But it was all because I loved you so. *Herzliebchen*, will you forgive me? Can you ever—ever love me, Olga?"

He was kneeling now beside the ottoman, where she sat with her face hidden among the cushions. Presently she lifted her head, and looked up for a moment, with her pretty eyes full of tears, but with a gleam in them that was neither of sorrow nor anger.

"Fritz," she whispered, "I think—"

"Yes, darling?"

"I think I may be able some day to—"

"May be able to—"

"To love you—next to my brother-in-law!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

It would be doing William Hughes great injustice to suppose that he had not often thought of Hazel since that day at Norwood when Barbara had given Fritz his dismissal. He had told Hazel that Barbara was—as he then fully believed—practically bound to marry Hofmann. And now, was it not his duty to explain that such was no longer the case? He thought it was his duty. But he did not find it easy to decide in what way that duty should be performed.

He had thought of writing to Hazel. But in what words should he put on paper the statement that, although his niece had indeed appeared for some weeks willing to marry Mr. Frederick Hofmann, she had now changed her mind? He did not, even now, fully comprehend all the course of Barbara's feeling in this case. And if he did not, how could he be sure that his written words would not expose her to misapprehension? His affection for his niece was tenderly, even shyly, sensitive.

Besides, it almost seemed to him that the writing of such a letter would imply an encouragement to Hazel which he had no right to offer. Barbara never volunteered the mention of his name. When her uncle spoke of him, she would say some gentle, friendly word, hoping he would be content with his present occupation, expressing her certainty that he would do his duty in it loyally and zealously, as he had done his duty as a soldier, and so on. But she never asked why he did not come to see them.

"Poor Hazel!" thought William, in his simplicity. "I'm afraid Barbara is less interested in him than she was."

However, when a few days had elapsed after their return from Norwood, and still Hazel made no sign, William Hughes resolved to go to the boarding-house near Red Lion Square, and speak with his friend face to face; and he left his studio rather late one evening for that purpose. But at the boarding-house he was met by the announcement that Mr. Hazel was out; that he seldom came in before bedtime; and that Mrs. Pringle, the mistress of the house, could not at all say when he was likely to be found there.

William could only beg this lady to tell him that Mr. Hughes had called, and would be glad to see him. This the landlady—a haggard, careworn woman, who looked as though the struggle to make both ends meet had been with her a physical tugging and straining, which had toughened her sinews and denuded her of superfluous flesh—promised to do; and he left the house. He left it only just in time to escape a fervent greeting from Miss Jenks, who, hearing Mrs. Pringle talking with a stranger in the passage, came out to see who it was. Miss Jenks was astonished, and somewhat indignant, to find that Mr. William Hughes had been there—actually standing under that roof—and had made no inquiry for her. On this point Mrs. Pringle's evidence was perfectly clear, and unshakable by the severest cross-examination. And at length Miss Jenks, looking round at the assembled boarders in the drawing-room (for she had not conducted her conversation with the slightest secrecy), said, solemnly, "Then I'll tell you what: he has forgotten my address, and thinks I live somewhere else!" The result of this utterance in arousing the baleful sarcasm of Miss Towzer, the eager boarder, need not be here set down. But the reader is entreated to believe that Miss Jenks

got the best of the encounter. In a war of wits, as in a game of chess, superior sharpness is only available so long as your adversary observes the rules of the game. But Miss Jenks, when in danger of checkmate, simply kicked over the board.

It was a raw, foggy night, and in spite of his old and well-tryed friend, the shepherd's plaid, William Hughes suffered from the cold and damp. The next day, and for many successive days, he was confined to the house with a severe attack of asthma, during which Larcher was almost triumphant in having him all to herself. Miss Hughes was away, Miss Barbara was obliged to go out to her daily teaching, and there was no one to check Larcher in her lavish self-devotion. The old woman greatly enjoyed waiting hand and foot on "Master William," and making a score of unnecessary journeys from her subterranean kitchen every day to see that he lacked nothing.

Although Miss Copley had dismissed one lover, and another kept aloof, there was one manly bosom palpitating with the resolve to have done with doubts and delay, and to make her an offer of marriage on a certain fixed day.

Mortimer Hopkins's hopes, which had been burning very low, suddenly flickered up at the unexpected rumor, communicated to him by his friends Green and Toller, that Mr. Frederick Hofmann was to marry a daughter of Kettering, of Lombard Street. At first Mortimer refused to believe the report, but Messieurs Green and Toller assured him that the marriage was "as good as settled;" adding that "their eldest son" was to have the other sister, and that everybody at "their shop"—meaning, of course, the house of the Greek merchants, carried on under the style and title of Rhodonides, Trikos, and Co.—knew all about it.

The belief that Hofmann was no longer his rival was certainly cheering to Mortimer Hopkins. His ignorance and his vanity were great, but they were not great enough to disguise from him the fact that Mr. Hofmann's social position was superior to his own. There was, however, no reason why it should always be so. Hofmann's family were merchants, and Mortimer was engaged in a merchant's office, and might rise to be a leading partner in an equally important firm. The difference between himself and Hofmann on that score presented itself to his mind as merely the difference between subaltern and commanding officer, and not as the

difference between private and subaltern. But where he felt Hofmann had had an immeasurable advantage over him was in the opportunities enjoyed by the former of appearing in a favorable light in Miss Copley's eyes.

Mortimer reflected that Miss Copley had hitherto had no chance of discovering that he had a soul above the ordinary and commonplace—a soul capable of appreciating Poetry and Art! Of course this superior soul was not used in the work of his every-day business. Something spiritually second - best scored for that purpose. No man having a Damascus scimitar, inlaid with fine gold by some cunning artificer, would employ it to chop wood or carve mutton. No man—so Mortimer Hopkins believed—could thrive at Baikie & Wiggetts's who should attempt to conduct his business by the lofty moral standard, or strain after the high ideals, held up in the "Idylls of the King." Poetry, to Mortimer's thinking, was valuable, not as the sunlight is valuable, but as the gaslights in a theatre are valuable, for glorifying tinsel that would make but a sorry show by day.

Now Fritz Hofmann, enjoying abundant leisure, had been able to exhibit himself under the most becoming illumination, and to flourish his Damascus scimitar, while other men were toiling with homely tools. But if Fritz Hofmann were really withdrawn from the competition—well, that was undoubtedly encouraging.

It has been said that Mortimer had fixed on a certain day for making Miss Copley an offer of his hand and heart. He had fixed on a certain Saturday afternoon for that purpose; having learned from Mrs. Green enough of the present state of the Hugheses' household to anticipate that he would then find the young lady alone. Mr. Hughes was confined to his own chamber by asthma, and Miss Hughes with Claude was still absent from home. Barbara returned from her teaching between four and five o'clock. At five, then, he would present himself before her, and set his fate upon the hazard of the die.

If the hairdresser to whom was intrusted the curling of Mortimer's locks on this occasion did not guess the errand he was bound on, that skilful practitioner must have found it unusually difficult to preserve the amiable alacrity by which his craft is generally distinguished. Nor scarcely anything but the anxiety of a lover would have excused the young man's fidgety demeanor under

the combs and tongs. But the hairdresser, who was an old acquaintance of Mortimer's, probably had his suspicions as to the state of the case; and he endeavored to soothe his customer's nerves by a copious flow of flattery and pomatum. The latter passed unnoticed in the agitation of the moment; but the former was not without effect.

"I'm looking a little pale, ain't I, Gubbins?" said Mortimer, regarding himself in the glass.

"Not partic'lar, sir. I don't know that I ever succeeded better with your 'air, sir. It's truly classical. But, dear me, with such a profile as yours, what can the 'air be but classical? A work'us' crop, sir, couldn't destroy the outlines. But, of course, the Ambrosian curls, as the poet says, do give a finish. Let me send you 'ome one pot, sir; it's a very elegant preparation. Thank you. Gently with the curls on the forehead! Don't jam your 'at too 'ard down on your 'ead!"

Mortimer had taken great pains with his attire. He wore the same glossy suit of mourning which had been bought for the reading of Chris Dalton's will; but its sombreness was relieved by the substitution of a lilac tie for a black one, and by pale lavender gloves. A white camellia adorned his button-hole, and the big imitation-pearl pin was conspicuous on his cravat.

He did not intend to walk to his destination; but he went on foot to a certain confectioner's shop in Oxford Street, not far from the hairdresser's, and there drank a small bottle of some effervescent beverage which was labelled, and paid for, as champagne. And then, jumping into a cab, he felt like one who has pushed off from land and embarked upon the perilous deep.

Never, as it seemed to him, had mortal cab-horse devoured the space between the middle of Oxford Street and the Edgeware Road as did the animal behind which he was now seated. They were absolutely in the Harrow Road, and within a few yards of the street he was bound for, before he had time to collect his thoughts.

He hurriedly tried to recollect all the advantages he had to offer, and to fortify himself by the reflection that a young lady's "No" was not necessarily final, and that she could hardly be expected to yield at the first summons. But perhaps the thought that chiefly supported him, as he paid the cabman with a trem-

bling hand, was that he had told no one of his intention for that special afternoon, and might, therefore, postpone his proposal altogether, without incurring the contempt of his friends.

A bell tinkled somewhere; so he must have pulled it. An old woman in a stiff cap, and with manners to match, opened the street door, and afterwards admitted him to the little front sitting-room, so he must have asked for Miss Copley. But he was not distinctly conscious of what he was doing and saying; and to find the parlor empty was like a reprieve from imminent execution.

This relief, however, did not last long. He had barely had time to catch a glimpse of himself in the old-fashioned convex mirror above the mantelpiece, when Barbara came into the room.

"Did you wish to speak with me?" she asked, after bowing in acknowledgment of his salutation. And there was a chill surprise in her tone that seemed to freeze him.

"How do you do, Miss Copley? I'm extremely glad—I mean very sorry—very sorry to hear that Mr. Hughes is unfortunately *non compos*—no; that's not it; I *can't* think of the word—on the sick list, you know. So I thought I would just—just step round and inquire."

"Thank you. My uncle is much better."

She remained standing; and of course Mortimer had no choice but to stand also.

"I thought I would inquire at the same time for Copley—Mr. Copley. Your brother and me were on terms of intimacy, you know; so I—I hope you don't consider it an intrusion."

"My brother has benefited by the change of air. I will tell him that you were good enough to ask for him."

Barbara could not help some vague apprehensions and suspicions as to the object of his visit. Why had he dressed himself in that extraordinary fashion? And why did he diffuse so overpowering a fragrance of hair-oil? Perhaps he might be going somewhere to spend the evening. She remembered the conversation at Mrs. Green's, and thought it possible.

"Miss Copley," he began, suddenly, making a desperate plunge, "I hope you will understand that in what I am going to say, I have no interested motives. I won't go so far as to say that I never have any interested motives, because, in point of fact, I don't see how a man is to get on without 'em. But there are in the

human soul heights and—and depths, to which interested motives don't apply."

"I am quite sure you have no interested motives," she said, hastily. "My uncle will be much obliged for your inquiries, and, if you will excuse me, I think I must now wish you good evening."

"Hold yet a moment! Miss Copley, I have come hither solely to seek you—I took a cab on purpose—and I hope you will not refuse to listen to what I have to say. I put it to you—to you who shineth as a star of high-mindedness above the common herd of worldlings—whether I haven't some respectful right to a hearing!"

"I really think it would be better that our interview should end here, Mr. Hopkins," answered Barbara, moving towards the door.

"Hold yet another moment! Miss Copley, I will out with it at once, if you will vouchsafe me but a moment. I lay my hand and heart at your feet. There, I am aware that there is an abruptness in my expressions, but—but what can a fellow do when he's driven like this?"

"I deeply regret, Mr. Hopkins, that you would not allow me to spare you and myself the utterance of what is painful. But since you have insisted on a plain answer—"

"Don't speak hastily, I beg and beseech you. If you were to tell me to come again this day month, or this day six months—"

"Pray understand that this is quite useless."

"This isn't a sudden fancy on my part, Miss Copley. Whatever may be the case with others, *I* have not been lured by hopes of your wealth—"

"My wealth!" echoed Barbara, so astonished that she paused with her hand on the lock of the door, and turned to look at him. "You are laboring under some extraordinary misapprehension. I am very poor!"

"Individually, perhaps; but it's very well known that there's a quarter of a million coming to the family in a month or two."

Barbara flushed crimson, and tears of painful indignation rose to her eyes.

"Mr. Hopkins," she said, "it may be well that I should take this opportunity of informing you that—for private reasons—

neither my uncle, Mr. Hughes, nor myself intend to profit in the smallest degree by your great-uncle's will." And with a haughty inclination of the head, she was about to leave the room, when Mortimer threw himself on his knees before her.

"Miss Copley," he cried; "upon my soul, I ain't going to make love to you! But do just, in pity, say that you don't believe my motives are interested! Even supposing you can never requite my ado— No, upon my soul I won't! But do let me carry to the grave the comfort of knowing that you believe my motives are *not* interested!"

"Pray get up, sir. Yes, I do believe it; and now I must ask you as a favor to go away immediately."

Mortimer rose from his knees—all the more readily, perhaps, because he had heard the door-bell ring and Larcher's step in the passage. He then took off his lavender gloves—one of which he had split from top to bottom in the energy of his appeal—and chucked them, with a sort of quiet desperation, into the crown of his hat. "Miss Copley," he said, in an artificially deep voice (founded, to say the truth, on Mr. Coney's Shakespearian assumptions), "I thank you; and I shall obey."

At this moment Larcher looked into the room, holding out a card. "This gentleman has called to ask for master," she said, "and would like to see him. But I must go up first and ask if master feels equal to it."

"Ask the gentleman to walk in and wait here," said Barbara. She supposed the visitor to be some picture-dealer, until she took the card in her hand and read the name on it.

Mortimer Hopkins had meanwhile been hurriedly unfastening the camellia from his button-hole, and, when he looked up again, something in Barbara's face gave him a curious pang, and he turned round involuntarily to see who was behind him. He saw a tall man, a stranger to him, standing in the doorway.

"Miss Copley," said Mortimer, with a little break in the artificial tragedy voice, "I will no longer intrude. But ere I go you will perhaps allow me to leave this flower on your table—as a last offering on Friendship's shrine."

And he laid the camellia close to Barbara's work-basket.

Grotesque though his words were, there was something manly and genuine in the spirit that dictated them; and Barbara's heart

was touched. She took up the flower gently and held it in her hand as she said, "Good-by, Mr. Hopkins."

And the next minute he was gone.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"MASTER will be happy to see you, sir," said Larcher.

"Oh, thank you. I will go up to him immediately. But as I am here, I will first say 'good-by' to Miss Copley."

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you will ring when—"

"I don't think I need trouble you, Mrs. Larcher. I can find my way up-stairs."

All this was said just outside the parlor, while Hopkins was letting himself out at the street door. Larcher's old-fashioned respect for the family she served constrained her to show civility to whomsoever they chose to admit into their house. But she did not think it incumbent on her to pay any peculiar attentions to Mr. Mortimer Hopkins. Larcher had understood at a glance the meaning of the lilac tie, and the camellia in the button-hole, and all the rest. And she was unspeakably indignant at such presumption.

"The audacity of him daring to think of Miss Barbara!" she muttered to herself. "A little Cockney shopboy, making the whole house reek with his nasty bear's grease!"

Then she ushered the visitor, who was Gilbert Hazel, into the parlor, and withdrew.

"I have come to say 'good-by,' Miss Copley," he said.

"Good-by! Are you going away?"

"Yes; I must be back in Staffordshire the day after to-morrow. And I may not have an opportunity of coming here again."

"Won't you sit down?" said Barbara, in her sweet, low voice. And he took a chair opposite to her.

"I was very sorry to hear that Hughes had been at the trouble of calling at my place without finding me. They did not tell me until this afternoon. The fact is, there is an officious, meddling woman there, a certain—oh, but you have heard of her! I re-

member — Miss Jenks. Well, Miss Jenks volunteered to give me your uncle's message, and, between her and the landlady, it only reached me to-day."

"Uncle William will be very glad to see you," said Barbara. She had seated herself near the little work-table, and was toying with the flower in her hand.

"I understand. I will go to him immediately. Don't grudge me these few moments, Miss Copley, they will be the last."

Barbara suddenly turned her head aside; and, although she made a gallant struggle to speak, there ensued a perceptible pause before she answered in a tone of soft reproach,

"Pray do not think I mean that, Mr. Hazel!"

"Forgive me. I know you are too kind and gentle to grudge me a farewell word. But when a man is in pain, it is hard for him to be quite reasonable. But I did not come here intending to say that, or anything like that. I wanted, if you will allow me to take the privilege of a friend who regards you very sincerely, and to offer my very best wishes for your future happiness."

"Thank you," murmured Barbara, faintly, and without looking at him.

"Well," he said, after a silence that seemed long to both of them, although, in truth, it lasted less than a minute, "the good-by must be spoken. I knew it would be bitter; but I did not know how bitter. But I don't want to distress you. Good-by. God bless you!—*Barbara!*"

The last exclamation was uttered with sudden, breathless, eager vehemence, as, advancing with outstretched hand, he caught a glimpse of her face, that was still partly averted from him. "Look at me, Barbara!"

She slowly turned her head and looked at him for an instant.

"Oh! Thank God!" he cried.

And the next moment he held her in his arms, and his lips were pressed to the soft brown hair that lay against his breast.

"Master's rung to know whether the gentleman understood that he would be happy to see him," said Larcher, peeping into the room about half an hour later.

Barbara was seated close beside her lover. He held her hand,

and they were talking together earnestly. They did not start, nor move apart suddenly. But Barbara rose up quietly and put her arms around the old servant's neck. "Oh, Larcher, dear," she said, "you knew my mother." And then she burst into tears, and sobbed out, "I am so happy, Larcher!"

The old woman folded her to her breast, soothing and patting her with her hand as though she had been a baby, while she looked solemnly at Hazel.

"The Lord bless you, sir, and prosper you according as you love and value her!" she said.

"Amen to that, my good friend, from the bottom of my heart!" answered Hazel.

"I have known her ever since she was a little toddling baby. There ain't no guile in her, nor yet no selfishness. You can't love her too well, nor think of her too high. Her price is far above rubies, Mr. Hazel—far above rubies!"

And then Larcher lifted up a corner of her apron and wiped her eyes with it.

"Shake hands, Mrs. Larcher," said Hazel, giving her toil-hardened hand a hearty squeeze. "I'm poor in a great many things, but as to loving her— Well, I don't think you will have to complain of me on that score."

"God bless you, sir! No, I don't think I shall," answered Larcher, looking at him keenly, and with a little smile.

"Why, do you know that I have been loving her day and night, sleeping and waking, for the last two years?"

"Well, sir, you can't do better than walk in the same all the days of your life. You'll forgive an old woman's freedom, won't you, sir? But what answer am I to take up to master?"

Barbara lifted her head from the faithful shoulder on which it had been nestling, and hastily declared that she would go to him herself at once. No one must speak to Uncle William before she did. And then Larcher withdrew to the kitchen to prepare "Master William's" tea and toast, and to think, with a mixture of tenderness and pride, and sorrow and hope and exultation of the new life that lay before her idolized Miss Barbara.

"May I not come with you?" said Hazel.

"No, please; not yet. Let me tell him first by myself," said Barbara, raising her eyes pleadingly to her lover's face.

"And when may I come?" asked Hazel, looking down into their inmost depths.

"In a few minutes. I will call you."

"And what will you call me? Do you know you have not once let me hear you say my name yet?"

"Gilbert," she said, shyly.

"At home they used to call me Bertie."

"I will say that if you please; but I like Gilbert best."

"Do you? Why?"

"Because—because that is the name I have always given you in my thoughts and prayers—Gilbert Hazel."

He held her two little hands between his own, looking at her with a devout earnestness. "That you should love me, Barbara," he said, "seems a kind of miracle—as though the sun were to begin shining in the middle of an Arctic winter. What a miserable brute I was!"

Then Barbara went up-stairs, where William Hughes was waiting in wondering impatience.

Since his illness he had occupied Aunt Judith's room, because of the possibility of having a fire there. He was sitting in the arm-chair, wrapped in a threadbare old summer overcoat—he did not possess a dressing-gown—and with the shepherd's plaid over his knees. Poor and shabby was every garment that belonged to him; but the glimpses of linen at his throat and wrists were fresh and spotless, and the room was exquisitely neat and airy. Larcher had taken good heed of all that.

"Barbara, what on earth has become of Hazel?" he began, impetuously. "I hope he has not gone away without seeing me? I wish particularly to speak with him."

"He is coming directly."

"Coming directly! Why the dickens didn't he come before?"

Barbara knelt down beside the arm-chair, and looked up into her uncle's face.

"What!" exclaimed William, laying his hand upon her head, and gently pressing it back so as to see her face more completely. "Has he told you?"

"Yes, Uncle William; and I love him very dearly."

William, still keeping one hand upon her head, covered his eyes with the other, and leaned back in the chair.

"But, Uncle William," Barbara went on, in a trembling voice, "although I do love him dearly—I must own it, because it is the truth—I would not marry him if I did not hope—and believe—that it would make you happy too. He knows that. I have told him so."

"That would be very wrong, Barbara," murmured William, huskily.

"No! Not in this case. We may leave father and mother—but father and mother have each other—have other children—have at least some happy life behind them. But you— Let me say something of what is in my heart, only this once. I know what your life has been. Let me tell you this one time that your nobleness has not been lost on me. If there is anything good in me— All that he loves best in me is your doing. Let me say only this once how I love you, and honor you, and bless you on my knees for all your goodness!—my dear! my dear!"

It was characteristic of them both that William was the first to break the hush that fell upon them after a while, by bidding Barbara remember that Hazel was waiting. He lifted her tear-stained face from his breast, and smoothed her hair down softly with his hands, and bade her go and call her lover. "He has been very patient—and very good, to let me have these precious minutes all to myself. But we must not be selfish—I mean I must not be selfish, Barbara."

When Hazel came, the two men silently grasped each other's hands. Neither was apt to make speeches about his deeper feelings; but they understood one another very well.

"It is a poor marriage for her," said Hazel, standing beside Hughes's chair when Barbara had left the room. "God knows I never much cared for money on my own account. But I do hanker after a few of the thousands my poor dad dropped in those ill-starred speculations, for her sake."

"She will never hanker after them."

"She! No; God bless her! She's an angel. But this is a rough world for angels. And poverty makes it rougher."

"I don't know," said William, musingly. "After all, what is poverty? A man may be happy with very little money, provided he does not covet his neighbor's goods. And no amount of money

will make him happy if he does!" Then, after a pause, he added, "I think there's only one thing a poor man need specially pray to be delivered from more than a rich one. I said just now, 'What is poverty?' Debt is poverty. Debt is an octopus that will pull down the strongest swimmer."

"I don't owe sixpence in the world," said Hazel.

And then Barbara returned with the proposal that Uncle William should come down-stairs, and have tea with them. The parlor was very warm; he could be well wrapped up; could he not manage it?

"Of course I can manage it. But Larcher won't let me," answered William, smiling and lifting his eyebrows. But it appeared that Larcher had been won over, and had consented to allow her patient to come down-stairs, due precautions being taken. And Larcher, moreover, was reported to be then engaged in cutting sundry rashers of bacon, and rounds of bread to be converted into toast; and to be in a state of great bustle and importance.

Then Hazel insisted on going down to the kitchen to help in the preparations; and on carrying up-stairs the big kettle—which had been shoved aside to make room for the frying-pan—to be kept hot on the parlor fire, in spite of the old servant's polite protests. "Oh, dear me, sir, that ain't work for the likes of you! Don't you be tiring yourself now, Mr. Hazel," and so on.

"My dear soul, I assure you that when I was in the army I went through even more tremendous experiences than carrying a kettle! You've no idea what hardships we endured in our country's service. But you must make an extra round of toast to support me, you know. I shall be terribly exhausted when I've done," said Hazel, swinging the big black kettle off the fire with one hand, and walking away with it.

Whereupon Larcher turned with a beaming face to Miss Barbara, and imparted her opinion that Mr. Hazel was the "pleasant-spokenest" gentleman she had ever come across. "And," she added, shrewdly, "I think you can tell real gentlefolks quicker by their way of joking than a'most anything else."

One anxiety which would otherwise have preyed on William Hughes, Barbara's perfect sympathy with and understanding of his character, had enabled her to anticipate and remove.

During that half-hour's talk with Hazel she had spoken of Dal-

ton's will, and had delicately touched on the reasons which made the bequest to Claude equally painful to her uncle. And she had gone on to say that her uncle had irrevocably determined to accept no share, directly or indirectly, in Dalton's wealth; and that she, fully sharing his feeling, had made a similar resolve for herself. "I thought it right to tell you this at once," she said, timidly, "because you know that I am penniless, and I might, perhaps—who can say?—some day be rich. And, perhaps, you might think it overstrained and foolish to refuse. But you cannot know—I think no one can fully realize—what my uncle feels about it. To him it would be like taking the price of his father's cruel death—and of all the misery and ruin. You would not wish me to take any part of that money—would you?"

"God forbid!"

"And you do not think my uncle is to blame?"

"To blame! Is a man to blame for renouncing the devil? I can understand that the thought of it fills him with horror!"

Enough of this she had repeated to her uncle to relieve his mind of any apprehension; and she had assured him that Gilbert would not touch upon the subject. But she did not say what had sent a thrill of pride and joy to the very core of her heart; that of all the persons whom she had heard allude to Dalton's will, Gilbert Hazel alone had accepted her uncle's repudiation of the money as being natural and inevitable. Even Fritz Hofmann—generous and disinterested as he was—had dropped a word about its being possible to take a morbidly sensitive view of things. But Gilbert—ah, there was none like him! None!

They were happy as they sat round the humble little table. There was something boyish in Hazel's gayety. Hitherto neither Barbara nor her uncle had seen him wholly free from a little shade of sadness. But now his joy seemed to bubble up at every moment like a fountain sparkling in the sun. Only now and then, when Barbara's face was turned away, he would look at her with a kind of wondering adoration, and with a moisture in his eyes.

He must return to Staffordshire on Monday; but he would not allow that thought to damp his spirits. This would be so different a parting from the parting two years ago at Thornfield Farm! And, besides, was there not all to-morrow? One whole long day to be spent with Barbara!

But before Hazel went away, and after William—who was obliged to own himself tired with the day's emotions—had gone to his rooms, there came a letter for Barbara from Aunt Judith. Claude had not been so well for some days past, and yesterday he had had a fainting-fit, followed by great exhaustion. Barbara was not to alarm her uncle. They had called in a doctor, and Claude was now better; but it was plain that Aunt Judith was greatly shaken and alarmed.

Barbara gave the letter into Hazel's hand, and when he had read it, he said at once,

"You wish to go to Norwood, dearest?"

"Yes; I think it is my duty to go."

"I will take you down there. If it will trouble Miss Hughes to see me, I can—oh, I can prowl about somewhere until it is time to bring you home again."

She put her two hands on his shoulders and looked up at him.

"You are good," she said, simply.

"Of course! I am the most self-sacrificing of men. How many fellows would consent to escort you to Norwood when they might have the privilege of spending the whole day near Miss Jenks?"

"You are laughing, Gilbert; but I am not to be laughed out of my gratitude."

"If I laugh, I think it is chiefly that I may not cry. Think of you looking up at me with those eyes and talking of gratitude!"

"You must suggest it to Uncle William to-morrow, as if it were your own idea to go to Norwood. It will seem horribly selfish to leave him—not that he will think so. Poor Claude! And poor dear Aunt Judith! You don't think—do you think these fainting-fits are very dangerous, Gilbert?"

He reassured her as well as he could; but as he walked home through the streets the thought once or twice pierced those golden visions which wrapped him round, that the sharks who were swimming after Chris Dalton's legacy might come in for their feast sooner than they anticipated.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE month of February had been unusually inclement; but just towards its close milder weather set in; and Claude Copley, who had been for three weeks confined not only to the house, but to one room, which was kept as far as possible at an even temperature, began to dream of going out into the air again.

He had been very ill; but he had not much believed in his own illness. At any rate, he had made light of Aunt Judith's apprehensions, and had called the doctor an old coddle. Nevertheless, he had not flagrantly transgressed any of the doctor's rules; and he had been exacting in his demands that all the measures for the warming and ventilating of his room should be accurately carried out. He was ruthless in giving trouble to the landlady and her servants. And if Aunt Judith hinted a remonstrance, he would haughtily reply that they were paid! And would add that if a pound or two more were needed to make things go smooth, the pound or two need not be grudged.

It was, in truth, one of poor Judith's hardest trials that Claude went on behaving, more and more, as though he were already possessed of large wealth, and insisted on being supplied with all kinds of luxuries.

Let it be said for him that he wished Aunt Judith to share in these; and was angry and irritated when she refused to order expensive wines for her own drinking, and to hire an attendant to wait upon her personally. When he was at the worst, he was too weak, and too much absorbed with his own sensations, to think about such matters. But when he began to grow better, the struggle became a daily misery to the poor old woman. But she bore it bravely, sharing the worst part of her troubles with no one, and tending Claude with the patient, inexhaustible love of a mother.

And some comfort had come to her from the news of Barbara's happiness. She would have been better pleased could Barbara

have accepted Fritz Hofmann. But Barbara had given her heart to this other man; and William had a warm regard for him; and it was much to know that their dear girl would have a loving protector. And when she saw him, Aunt Judith surrendered her last regret, and stanchly declared that he was worthy of the wife whom he had won.

Hazel was not allowed to prowl about by himself until it should be time to take Barbara back to London, on that day when they went down to Norwood together. Aunt Judith and he had a long conversation while Barbara was seated beside her brother's bed. Claude was at that time too weak to see a stranger; but Barbara, speaking in her gentle voice, and holding his hand, had told him of her engagement. And he had taken the announcement better than she had anticipated.

There was, of course, no reason why he should not take it well. But Claude had been very capricious in his behavior to his sister of late, and had kept up a smouldering resentment against her attitude respecting Dalton's will.

"He's of a very good family, isn't he, Barbara?" he said.

"His grandfather was a country gentleman of considerable property, I believe. His father was a clergyman. But I do not know much of his family. He has not spoken to me about his ancestors; perhaps, because I have none to boast of in return," said Barbara, smiling.

But Claude did not smile. On the contrary, he gave a black frown, and drew his hand pettishly away from hers.

"That's all rot and humbug," he said. "What's the good of that mock humility? You've better blood in your veins than his, I'll lay odds—ancient Welsh blood."

Barbara did not answer; but she raised his pillow a little, and gently drew a warm coverlet closer round his shoulders.

After a pause, he put out his thin, weak hand again, and laid it in his sister's.

"It is a pity," he said, "that Hazel should have left the army."

"Why, dear?"

"Because you'd make a very good figure as the wife of an official swell. Deuced few of them are as ladylike. General Sir Gilbert Hazel, K.C.B., Governor of Jellyjampore! That sounds very well."

Barbara laughed.

"Very well, indeed," she answered. "But Lieutenant Gilbert Hazel, with fifty pounds a year over and above his pay, is not quite so grand."

"No," returned Claude, quickly. "But that would be all altered when he married my sister."

Barbara had been able, on the whole, to carry back a fairly reassuring account of Claude to her uncle. She by no means fully understood how ill her brother was. But Aunt Judith spoke to Hazel far more openly and less hopefully than she had spoken to Barbara.

"You see, I want her to cheer up William," said Aunt Judith; "and she could not do that if she were despondent herself. Besides, I don't want to frighten or depress her either, poor dear child. But, you see, with you I take the privilege of an affectionate relative, by immediately laying some of my troubles on your shoulders."

"I wish you could in truth lay some of them on my shoulders, for I'm afraid you have to carry a heavy weight of care."

"Oh, I have many mercies; and many comforts. You are a comfort; for I do believe you love my Barbara as she deserves to be loved. And I have another dear friend, who loves her, too, only not exactly as you do! I hope that some day you will know Fritz Hofmann. Oh! you have met him, then? Well, when you see him again, ask him why he has deserted me; and tell him that I hear I have a rival, and am very jealous!"

Brave old Aunt Judith! One of her greatest difficulties, her most poignant anxieties, was how to pay back to Fritz Hofmann that little roll of bank-notes that he had sent her. She knew well that he would think no more of them; and that not in his innermost thoughts would he do her any injustice, or esteem her the less, because she had taken his help for her sick boy. But she had the old-fashioned, honest, *bourgeois* pride, to which debt is a deep humiliation. And the debt was growing. And she could not venture to leave Norwood. The physician whom she had employed there positively forbade his patient being taken back to town. And he hinted that in a week or two it might be well to try some sheltered spot on the Riviera.

But still Judith Hughes went bravely on, doing the task of each

day as it arose, not daring to look forward beyond it. Claude had immediate daily need of her. That need sustained her—as the need of the sick and the sorry and the helpless sustains so many loving women’s hearts, that, for themselves, would feel the strains too hard, the burden too heavy, to be borne. And this February wore itself away, and the month of March dawned wild and stormy, with flying gleams of sunshine.

By this time Mr. and Mrs. Kettering had settled down into a satisfied acceptance of their two sons-in-law elect. But they had not done so quite at first—at least, not with equal satisfaction as regarded both of themselves, and both of the sons-in-law.

Mr. Kettering had a little demurred to Fritz’s unexpected and, as it seemed to him, rash and unconsidered declaration of love for his cousin; and Mrs. Kettering had been disappointed that Rhodonides did not propose for Olga. Mrs. Kettering disliked surprises, and deviations from the line of events which she had made up her mind to consider probable. She had, however, the comfort of reminding her husband and Sally Stringer how she—Gertrude—had all along been sure that Fritz would not be so silly as to marry Miss Copley; and in a long letter that she wrote to Augusta Hofmann about the young people’s betrothal, this point was dwelt on with much complacency.

Both parents had been doubtful as to what Ida’s answer would be to her suitor’s proposal, and had warned him that they would use no kind of persuasion to influence her decision. Mr. Kettering in his heart thought that Ida had achieved astonishing success in winning such a wooer. He had a personal liking for the young man. The connection was in every way agreeable to him. And then it was a great match in the way of money—a very great match! Nevertheless, his little Ida should not be urged against her will.

But Ida, much to the surprise of all her family, except Olga, who had had her own thoughts, and kept her own counsel, very gravely and decisively accepted the proposal of Mr. Perikles Rhodonides.

“You quite understand, my darling,” said her father, speaking to her privately before she saw Rhodonides—“you quite understand that, although it is true your mother and I thoroughly ap-

prove him, you are not to be swayed by that? Your future happiness is our sole object, my child."

"Yes, papa, thank you; I am sure of that. But I like Mr. Rhodonides very much. I think I should like to marry him if he was quite poor."

"Do you, my dear?"

"Yes, papa; I think so. But it is no use imagining things all different from what they really are, is it?"

But to her sister, a short time later, Ida made a little confidence.

"He liked you best at first, Olga," she whispered, nestling close up to her sister, whose arm was round her.

"Ida? What nonsense!" cried Olga, coloring a little.

"Oh no! it isn't nonsense. Of course he did. It was very natural," answered Ida, with perfectly genuine sincerity. "And I know something, Olga: it was you who first put it into his head to think of me."

"Ida! If you say such things, I will tell Perikles to--to make you repeat ten Greek verbs every morning before breakfast!"

"It is quite true, dear," answered Ida, with a little quiet nod of the head. "But it does not make me a bit unhappy. I shall suit him a great deal better than you would, even supposing you would have had him. And he does like me best *now*, you know."

"I should rather think he did, you little goose!" cried Olga, giving her sister a great hug, and kissing her, with a tear in her eye.

Among all the congratulations that Ida received, none were more cordial than those of her cousin Fritz; while towards Rhodonides he was absolutely effusive.

"I do think he is the most kindly-hearted fellow," said Fritz to Miss Stringer (who had now taken him back into favor). "And the city people say he has a very shrewd eye, and a very long head for business."

"Well," said Sally, raising her eyebrows and looking at Fritz with the brightest of bright gray eyes, "if your lady-love is content, of course I have no right to say a word. But, positively, in her place I should think this sort of thing quite extraordinarily uncivil! As long as you thought the young man wanted to marry Olga, you pronounced him a hopeless idiot; but directly it appears

that he prefers Ida, you find out that he is an uncommonly sensible fellow !”

“ My dear Sally—I mean to call you Sally in future, you know.”

“ Do you, really ?”

“ Yes ; I do, really. My dear Sally, those laugh who win. You may say whatever you like now.”

“ I always might !” returned Sally. “ But I didn’t—quite always.”

Fritz and Olga had spoken a great deal together in these days about Barbara Copley. Ready as she was with saucy speeches to her lover on most subjects, Olga never said a light or jesting word to him about Miss Copley ; but listened to his enthusiastic praises of her as though she fully shared his feeling. Now, although she did admire and esteem Miss Copley, she naturally viewed her more coolly than Fritz did. This, however, did not occur to Fritz. He declared, indeed, that Olga had a fine, generous nature, quite above jealousy. But it requires a very rare and subtle sort of sympathy to appreciate the magnanimity whose very essence is to hide itself.

Fritz had had a letter from Barbara, announcing her engagement. It was a letter such as an affectionate sister might have written to a brother in whom she fully trusted. And once he and Olga had gone together to her house, but had failed to find her. Mrs. Kettering had sent a kind little note, inviting her to spend some evening with them quietly ; but Barbara had excused herself. Her uncle was not quite well yet ; and she could not leave him.

Miss Copley, as the affianced wife of Mr. Gilbert Hazel, assumed a very different position in the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Kettering from that of the music-teacher whom they had patronized. Mr. Hazel was poor, certainly. But he had impressed them as being a person of distinction. General Mullett would come in evening after evening, and chat about Bertie, and Bertie’s old home, and Bertie’s people ; and would expatiate on Bertie’s fine prospects—until his father had ruined himself in mining speculations.

The general had, of course, been duly informed of Hazel’s engagement, and spoke of it as an imprudent one for his young friend. “ The young lady herself is charming. I remember seeing her at your house, a very sweet, modest, lady-like creature.

How kind and good Lady Lambton was to her! But you know she hasn't a shilling—eh?"

"I am not so sure about that, general," said Mr. Kettering. "It is on the cards that Miss Copley may be a great heiress."

"But, papa," said Olga. "They say that Mr. Hughes and his niece will refuse the money if it comes to them."

"Nonsense, my dear!" replied Mr. Kettering, with a bland, superior smile. "That is mere rodomontade and nonsense. I will not do Mr. Hughes and Miss Copley the injustice to believe that they ever said anything of the kind."

"Well, it would be an uncommon, high-flown, extravagant kind of thing," said General Mullett. "But I'll tell you what—if the young lady has any such vagaries in her head, she has got hold of about the only man in England who will let her carry them out! Bertie is a dear fellow—a splendid fellow! But he knows no more of the world than a baby!"

Then they began to speak of Claude Copley's serious illness; and Miss Stringer stated that several of the relatives and connections of Christopher Dalton had gone down to Norwood or its neighborhood, and were keeping a more or less overt watch on the young man. Lady Lambton was staying for a week at a hotel near the Crystal Palace ("Finding it suit her health," said Sally Stringer, dryly). Mrs. Armour had taken a cheap lodging at Anerly; and the two Hopkinses, father and son, made frequent excursions from town to see young Copley.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mrs. Kettering, opening her eyes very wide. "That's rather horrid, isn't it? Like vampires, or vultures, you know?"

"The stakes are pretty large ones, my dear," said her husband. "It is, in fact, a race of Death against Time—for I am assured that the young man's ultimate recovery is impossible—and even an hour or two on one side or the other of midnight on the 30th of March would make a vast deal of difference to a good many persons."

CHAPTER L.

ONE pressing cause of anxiety was at this time unexpectedly removed from Aunt Judith's mind.

It may be remembered that Fritz Hofmann had commissioned Mr. Hughes to paint a picture for him. The offer had been made just before the journey to Norwood and Barbara's decisive answer to Fritz's proposal. Since then William Hughes had been too ill to resume his work; and on his part Fritz, as we know, had had a sufficient excuse for being absorbed in other matters. But now that his engagement to Olga was happily settled—now that he had convinced himself that Olga was the one woman in the world to make him happy, and that he had always loved her from his boyhood—without, he confessed, being fully aware of it—he remembered the picture, and wrote to Hughes on the subject.

He begged Mr. Hughes to do him the favor of commencing it as soon as possible, since it was to be a joint gift to his mother from Olga and himself on their marriage. Moreover, he took the liberty of enclosing a check for part of the price in advance to defray any incidental expenses that might be incurred.

The news of this windfall came to Aunt Judith as an unspeakable relief of mind, and she thanked Heaven for it on her knees. She wrote to William, confessing how matters stood between herself and Fritz Hofmann. He must not be angry with her. She had been so unhappy about Claude.

The money represented by that little roll of bank-notes was returned to Fritz with a grateful letter from Miss Hughes, and still there remained to William a considerable sum in hand. Part of this he resolved to expend in sending Barbara down to Norwood. Aunt Judith must no longer be left alone to bear the whole burden of Claude's illness. Claude was somewhat better now. And in the warmer spring weather he might return to London, or even, perhaps, attempt the journey to Vevey, whence good Madame

Martin wrote him to visit her house as a guest in the warmest terms. To the only objection which Barbara urged against leaving town—namely, the risk of losing her pupils, if she neglected to attend them—her uncle gave no great weight. Whether she lost her pupils or not, they must make up their minds to lose *her* before very long. Gilbert Hazel wrote hopefully of his prospects. Mr. Wilson had been so well satisfied with the result of his mission to London that he talked of establishing him in an office in town as agent for the business in Staffordshire, and to conduct the foreign correspondence of the firm. If this were done, Hazel would be able to offer a home to Barbara within a few months. Meanwhile her uncle would send her to stay with Aunt Judith until Claude grew stronger, or until—the end came.

William now set to work zealously on the Marypool picture. He was painting at it one afternoon when there came a sharp ring at the door of the studio. He thought that the visitor was probably Mrs. Green, who often carried him a cup of tea from her own table about that hour, and sat chatting with him while he drank it; but on opening the door he was confronted by the majestic figure of Miss Jenks.

Miss Jenks looked more striking, if not precisely more charming, than usual, by reason of her having a very small green velvet bonnet with a feather in it perched on the top of her head, where it looked extraordinarily incongruous and diminutive. Miss Jenks, however, was quite satisfied with it. She had admired it on the head of Mrs. Armour, and saw no reason to suppose that it would produce a different effect on her own.

"How do you *do*, Mr. Hughes?" said she, in a loud voice; and then, almost pushing past him, she walked into the studio.

"I'm *very* glad that you're by yourself," she said, as soon as she had sat down, which she did immediately.

"Yes; I'm alone, because I am busy," answered William, standing before her, palette and pencils in hand.

"Ah! Most industrious, I'm sure. Well, I just wanted to speak to you. My motive was in part—*monetary*," said Miss Jenks, with strong emphasis.

"*Cantabit vacuus*—she can't borrow of *me*!" said William to himself but he winced a little as he thought of what was before him,

Miss Jenks, however, did not intend to ask him for a loan, as presently appeared.

"I hear a good deal of interesting conversation at the boarding-house where I am at present residing," she continued. "It is a very genteel establishment; for Mrs. Pringle can *not* be held responsible for the somewhat low-lived charikter of the remarks made by a party named Towzer. I think—considering the very moderate rate of remuneration—it would be vain to expect it."

"Your view is very just indeed," said William, gravely. "But I must ask you, please, to tell me what you want to say with as little delay as possible."

It took Miss Jenks some time to explain what she called the monetary part of her communication; her attention being frequently diverted from the matter in hand by sudden reminiscences of the obnoxious Towzer. But at length she managed to explain that among the visitors to the boarding-house was Mr. Nathaniel Coney; and that by dint of attentively listening to all he said—whether to Mrs. Armour or to others—she, Miss Jenks, had gathered the impression that Mr. Coney was not satisfied in his mind with the administration of the vast property left behind him by Mr. Christopher Dalton; and that he wished for clearer information than had yet been obtained from the agent in New York.

"*Whether* he suspects the agent of carelessness, or dishonesty, or what his precise views may be on the subject, I cannot *clearly* explain to you because—because I haven't the least idea what he meant. But Mr. Coney is not quite satisfied—that I'm sure of. So I thought I would let you know, being a party interested—or at least your nephew. But, of course—"

But here Mr. Hughes stopped her, and said, with a sternness of eye and voice which she had never before beheld in him, that the subject of the will was one which he absolutely declined to discuss or to have discussed.

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Jenks, staring at him blankly.

"Absolutely. Let me hear no further word about it, if you please," said William.

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Jenks, once more. And then there was a brief silence. But, after it, Miss Jenks appeared to take a fresh start, and came up smiling.

"Well," said she, "but there is another point, connected with far other and softer sentiments, that I wished to mention."

William, who was still standing with his palette on his thumb, on hearing this, gave a little start, and glanced helplessly at the door. But, although Miss Jenks's language was alarming, her manner was cool, steady, and as suggestive of a respectable non-commissioned officer as ever.

"It *has* been remarked on in terms of obloquy, Mr. Hughes," she proceeded, "that when you were calling at Mrs. Pringle's boarding establishment a short time ago, you did not ask for *me*."

"My business was with a gentleman lodging there," he answered.

"Oh! *business*. Yes; but there have been sentiments between us which are of a far different nature from business. Why this cooling-off of attentions which were everything that the most delicate attachment could dictate?" said Miss Jenks, making the feather in the little green bonnet quiver with her energy.

"My dear good lady," said William, breathlessly, "I assure you you are entirely mistaken—"

She caught him up with prompt decision.

"Oh dear, no! No, Mr. Hughes, my senses could not so deceive me. Nor yet the opinion of my friends and family."

"But, bless my soul, Miss Jenks, your family never set eyes on me, so far as I know!"

"No; but I wrote about you to my brother in Northampton. And he answered back that he didn't think much of artists—you understand that, although in a most respectable way of business, furnished throughout with meogany, and *himself* a churchwarden, he has *not* been privileged to open his mind by travelling on the Continent—but, on the whole, he didn't know that I could do better. My own means are small, but certain; and a great help where earnings are precarious."

William had been gazing helplessly at Miss Jenks, watching the green bonnet and feather bob up and down as she jerked her head in a kind of dreadful fascination. But, at these words, the desperate nature of the position forced itself upon him, and gave him courage.

"Miss Jenks," he said, "before you go any further, I am bound to tell you that I long ago made up my mind never to

marry. I should not trouble you with this private detail," he added, flushing up to the roots of his hair, "but that I find it necessary to make myself clearly understood."

"And is that all you have to say to me?" demanded Miss Jenks, standing bolt upright, and looking very terrible.

"All—except good-afternoon," answered William, holding out his hand.

Miss Jenks did not take it. "Then," said she, "I think you have behaved very badly."

"Come, come, Miss Jenks, that is nonsense, you know! The whole thing is absurd. I—I dare say you were only joking. Let us shake hands and part friends."

"Joking!" echoed Miss Jenks, with unspeakable indignation. Nothing of the kind! I was *quite* in earnest."

Then she asked herself whether he possibly might have supposed her to be joking! She was aware that a great many persons found jokes where she herself saw none. And there had been a softness in the painter's eye, and a little smile round his mouth when he offered to shake hands, which forbade her to despair. "Well, but I don't see why you should never marry," she said, persuasively. "Between us, we should have quite an elegant sufficiency."

"My good lady, it is not necessary that you should see why," answered William, now fairly at bay. "It can be no business of yours. And now I must beg you to leave me to go on with my work." He opened the door as he spoke, and held it open for her to pass out. Then, at length, Miss Jenks did understand that she was vanquished. "I consider that you have behaved very bad—very bad indeed," she said, stalking by him. "After your very marked attentions in Vevey, you were bound to come forward."

She had got out on to the landing, and was almost at the top of the stairs, when she stopped and pulled a card out of her pocket.

"There," she said, holding it out to him. "That address, which is my brother's house in Northampton, will always find me, *in case*—"

And then Miss Jenks retreated down the staircase in good order.

When Barbara arrived at Norwood she found Mrs. Armour installed as a daily visitor to her brother. And she found, too,

that he was the object of a constant watchfulness and solicitude on the part of others, the meaning of which could not be doubtful. To her, at least, it was not doubtful. But she observed with astonishment that Claude himself was not troubled by it.

"They're all beginning to lick my shoes, you see," he said to her one day, with a kind of triumph, which amazed her and jarred upon her inexpressibly. And yet, as she afterwards reflected, it was a merciful blindness which hindered him from reading the eager attention lavished on him as clearly as she did. As for Aunt Judith, she was absorbed in ministering to her sick boy—cheering him, coaxing him, petting him, trying to shield him from every breath of discomfort. Lookers-on said how wonderful was her infatuation, and how little she seemed to recognize his faults. But lookers-on were a little mistaken there. His faults were plain enough, even to Aunt Judith's partial eyes. But the knowledge of them only intensified her devotion. "If I do not love him, who will, or can, love him?" That is a question to which many a man has owed the long-suffering, self-sacrificing tenderness of a woman's heart.

Among Claude's frequent visitors was Mortimer Hopkins. And his father also would sometimes make a brief call.

Mr. John Hopkins's mind was far too much occupied with the anxious balancing of probabilities as to whether young Copley would or would not live to sign a will on the 31st of March to leave any room for lamenting his son's disappointment in love. He had had a long talk with Mrs. Armour, and Mrs. Armour reported Claude to have made a wonderful rally; and, upon his—Mr. John Hopkins's—soul and body, it began to look as if the money would slip through their fingers, after all!

Mortimer did not dare to say to his father that he valued Miss Copley far above all Chris Dalton's dollars. But at the moment he genuinely felt it. And now, for the first time, his father's greed and coarsely manifested eagerness for the speedy ending of that young life, fading before their eyes, gave him a sense of repulsion.

Mortimer had probably never heard of Sir Richard Steele's noble compliment, but it was true of himself that to have loved Barbara Copley constituted the best part of his education. It is an ennobling thing for any young man to be genuinely, heartily, romantically in love with a pure woman. And to a young man

of the class to which Mortimer Hopkins belonged, it was certain to be the most refining influence of his life.

Not that he suddenly became a new creature, or dropped the affected airs which marked his demeanor out of office hours. There is no harlequin's wand in real life capable of effecting such transformations as that! Even the arch magician Cupid makes no sudden changes in the texture of a man's mind or the bent of a character. And no doubt he talked a great deal of nonsense and indulged in a great deal of fictitious misery. But, nevertheless, he was probably the better to the end of his days for having loved Barbara Copley.

When Mortimer found Miss Copley had come to remain in the lodgings at Norwood, his first anxiety was to assure her that she need fear no annoyance from him. By that time the news of her engagement had reached him; and he took a kind of painful pleasure in talking to Mrs. Green about it. Mrs. Green had heard much of Gilbert Hazel from the Shortways; and also from Fritz Hofmann, who, when he went to see Hughes at his studio, did not omit to pay a visit to the good-natured little flower-painter.

"He is dark, is he not?" Mortimer would say, glancing at his own colorless image in the mirror. "And his features—are they at all of a Grecian cast, Mrs. Green?" And then he would strike his forehead with the palm of his hand, and exclaim, "They met or e'er I had seen her! Her young heart was yielded unawares to the dark stranger from yon burning clime. And then, there hung about him the romance of a soldier's glory!"

"I don't know that there was much glory," answered Mrs. Green. "Not in the way of fighting, you know."

"Ah, but there was his uniform, Mrs. Green!" said Mortimer, folding his arm and heaving a bitter sigh.

Mrs. Green did not point out that Mr. Hazel had probably not been in the habit of fishing the trout-streams near Thornfield Farm in full regimentals; for she perceived that it afforded Mortimer some gratification to oppose to his own classic figure, radiant with the light of Art and Poetry, the contrasted image of a black-browed, Byronic, land-corsair species of rival. And she thought that if he enjoyed that kind of make-believe, he might be indulged in it; for, all things considered, Mortimer was coming out a great deal better than she had expected.

It must be owned that Barbara felt a little disquieted when, on the first evening of her arrival at Norwood, Mr. Mortimer Hopkins walked in, evidently as an accustomed visitor; and, in truth, he looked almost equally startled on seeing her. But presently he found an opportunity to say to her, in a low voice, "Miss Copley, I came here to-night all unconscious of your presence. If you object to music, I will withdraw at once. But—your brother has asked me to visit him; and I—I do assure you, Miss Copley, that I do my best to make his mind easy, and amuse him, and keep others off disagreeable topics in his presence. I am not *wholly* without some humble strain of human feeling, Miss Copley—upon my soul, I ain't!"

"I am sure you will be considerate, Mr. Hopkins," answered Barbara, kindly. And in order to justify her confidence in him, Mortimer walked away to Claude's chair, and remained near it until he went away.

On the other side of Claude's chair sat Mrs. Armour. She sat there now almost every evening. Barbara distrusted this woman, and she believed that her influence over Claude was not a good one. But Aunt Judith said that Mrs. Armour could not do any harm as things were now, and that Claude had a kind of fondness for her. "And," added Aunt Judith, "although you'll think it a strange thing to say, knowing my opinion of the woman's hardness and greediness, she has a sort of fondness for him. I'm not clever enough to explain it all in words, but I've watched her pretty closely, and I'm sure there is a touch of softness in her heart for my boy."

Another visitor to be seen occasionally at Miss Hughes's lodgings was Lady Lambton, accompanied by her sister Blanche, who was staying with her at the hotel. And sometimes Olga Kettering would spend a few days at Norwood under my lady's chaperonage; and then she and Fritz would join the circle in Claude's sitting-room of an evening.

Amy Lambton bore no malice. The Kettering sisters had robbed her of two admirers; but since she had persuaded herself that in each case the admirer had only abandoned his allegiance on the conviction that she (Amy) would never be induced to accept him, she endured his defection with equanimity. Nor did she disdain to dazzle Mortimer Hopkins, nor to play off sun-

dry captivating airs and graces for his behoof. Admiration was worth having from any man. She was never fastidious as to who professed it. To her apprehension a compliment was a compliment, as a coin is a coin. *Non olet!* Such was Lady Lambton's view, and it made her life extremely cheerful.

Claude was very weak now—too weak sometimes to endure the society of more than one or two persons at a time, although there were fluctuations, and he sometimes displayed unexpected energy. But when he was tired he would withdraw to his own room, which adjoined the sitting-room, and recline there on a couch near the fire; and Mrs. Armour or Aunt Judith, or both, would always be by his side.

Whenever this happened, Claude strenuously resisted any proposal to break up the little assembly. The people must not go away. Why should they? He would very likely return to the sitting-room by and by. And meanwhile he liked to hear their voices, and would leave his door ajar. He was only feeling a little bowled over by the relaxing feeling of the spring, or a little tried by the rasping March wind, or the damp had affected his nervous system. There was nothing to make a fuss about—nothing.

Claude was gentler to his sister than formerly; but he never desired her to be near him. He preferred Aunt Judith's ministrations, or Mrs. Armour's, in his sick-room, to Barbara's. But one day, when the brother and sister were alone together, and he was lying on his couch, which had been drawn up near the window, he said, suddenly, "Barbara, when will Hazel come? I should like to have seen your husband."

The phrase smote on her ears like a knell.

"He talks of being in London in a fortnight," she answered, choking back her tears. "But if you wished it, dear, he would make an effort to come sooner. Shall I ask him?"

He was looking steadfastly upward at a strip of pale-blue sky with gray clouds hurrying across it. His eyes were very bright and wistful. "Yes," he answered, in a whisper. "Ask him to come soon. And, Barbara—"

She drew nearer and bent her ear down to his lips.

"Don't—tell—Aunt Judith."

CHAPTER LI.

THE wind was raving and screaming, chasing the clouds across a leaden sky like a flock of huddled, terrified sheep flying over a dreary plain. Now and again a gust of rain would lash the window-panes and leave them streaming; but the gale was too strong to let the rain fall in any considerable quantity. It was not very cold, for the wind was westerly; but it was a wild, raw, cheerless morning.

As the casement shook and rattled, two persons seated on either side of a bed looked anxiously at the sleeper lying there, fearing lest he should be roughly started from his sleep. The two watchers were Barbara Copley and her uncle; and the sleeper on the bed was Claude.

It was between eight and nine o'clock, and a ghastly daylight from the gray sky fell full upon his face. It was one of his fancies to have the blinds drawn up, and the curtains pulled back as far as possible. The one window of his bedchamber had a fairly open view, and there was a wider expanse of sky visible from it than from most suburban dwellings. His face looked ashen-white as it lay on the pillow; and its pallor was enhanced by the blackness of his brows and eyelashes, and thick masses of hair. One hand lay outside the coverlet, on the side nearest to his uncle. It was painfully emaciated, as was the face, with its sharpened features and hollow cheeks. He had been very ill in the night—so ill that at one time the doctor, who had been summoned, doubted whether he could live until the morning. Towards midnight, however, the young man had fallen into a deep slumber, and the doctor had left the house with a word or two to Gilbert Hazel, who was watching in the sitting-room adjoining the sick-chamber, to the effect that the patient might yet last some time longer.

As the doctor, who lived near at hand, was leaving the garden gate, with his coat buttoned up, and his head bent down, to meet

the rising storm of wind, a man stepped up to him, and in a low tone asked how he had left his patient.

"Better," answered the doctor, briefly and roughly. He had recognized Mr. John Hopkins in this anxious inquirer; and he was disgusted by the display of Mr. John Hopkins's anxiety. The doctor, of course, knew all about the story of the will—as did, indeed, the whole neighborhood. And some hard things had been said about the way "those harpies" hovered about the poor young man. Albeit there were not wanting voices on the other side to declare it was only natural a man should be anxious about such a great fortune for his only son; and that, seeing what strange things did happen, you couldn't wonder if folks looked a little sharp so as to be sure of dates and days and hours. But the doctor was not among those who took a lenient view of Mr. John Hopkins's behavior. To him it almost seemed as though the man's keen watchfulness were directed against himself—as though he might be suspected of conniving at a concealment of the truth for a few all-important hours! Therefore it was that he answered with a rough growl, "Better," and strode quickly on his way.

Mr. John Hopkins was agitated in many ways at this time. Not only was he watching Claude Copley's decay with an almost wolfish eagerness, but he was disquieted by the tidings from America, of which Miss Jenks had conveyed some confused hints to William Hughes. He had quarrelled with his old crony and friend, Nathaniel Coney, on the first reading of Dalton's will, declaring that had Coney been faithful and zealous in pleading Mortimer's cause with his great-uncle, such a will would never have been made. And Coney, deeply resenting the injustice of the accusation, had said that he would never willingly speak to John Hopkins again.

But when rumors reached Mortimer's father that all did not seem to be going right with the property in America; when he learned that the statements of the New York agent (Mr. Reuben Wilford) were by no means clear and satisfactory respecting sundry investments which Mr. Dalton had held; when suspicions began to haunt his mind that the agent might be playing false, and might even bolt with a huge sum of money—when all these fears and dangers oppressed his mind, then John Hopkins betook

himself to his old friend, and made a humble apology for his intemperate words.

"You see, they were uttered in the 'eat of feeling, Nat," said Mr. Hopkins. "But you are not one to bear a grudge for words uttered in the 'eat of feeling. Nat Coney has too much 'igh-mindedness about him for that, if *I* know him!"

It appeared, however, that he did not know Nat Coney, for that gentleman was still very stiff and implacable, and required much humility and beseeching before he would come round at all. But at length he was so far pacified as to consent to discuss the state of affairs. Yes, he certainly had heard one or two things from private sources in the States which made him fancy that some of Dalton's investments looked a little fishy. It might be desirable to sell out here and there, even at a loss. The sum total of Dalton's wealth was so vast that a few thousands more or less would scarcely be felt when it came to be divided—if ever it did come to be divided. But he (Mr. Coney) could do nothing. What could any one do, so long as the question was still doubtful who was to inherit the money? It was true that he had been able to carry out the duties of his executorship in the matter of selling the estate in Essex and investing the proceeds for Mrs. Shortway's benefit; true also that Mrs. Armour and her sister and Miss Stringer had received their legacies. But then the money had been in English government securities, and the legacies were not contingent on young Copley's life. As for Reuben Wilford, he believed him to be on the square. And, in any case, Mr. John Hopkins had certainly no power to interfere with him.

All which utterances were not reassuring to Hopkins; they excited in him a burning impatience for Claude's death, that consumed him like a fever. He became almost incapacitated from attending to his business. He had obtained leave of absence for Mortimer from Baikie & Wiggetts's counting-house, and had insisted that his son should spend the whole of it at Norwood, so as to keep a watch on the Hugheses. But directly he himself returned to London he would be seized with mistrust of Mortimer's vigilance—indeed, Mortimer was altogether too lukewarm in the matter to please him—and would rush back to Norwood at unexpected times, and lurk about the house where the sick

youth lay. Thus it was that he had become aware of the doctor's having been summoned to Claude at an unusual hour, and had waited to interrogate him when he came out.

This had happened close upon midnight, and the next morning, between eight and nine, Claude was still sleeping profoundly, and the date of that morning was the 29th of March.

The rattling of the window-panes and the sound of the wind in the chimney did not disturb him; but all at once he opened his eyes and gazed out of the window, to where a pallid gleam of sunshine was now trying to pierce the gray vapors of the sky.

"To-morrow is my birthday," he said.

His voice was so feeble that Barbara had to bend down her ear to catch the words. Then he said more audibly,

"Where's Hazel? I want Hazel."

Gilbert Hazel had arrived a week ago in compliance with Barbara's summons. Claude was apt to be capricious and incalculable in his likings and dislikings, but he showed pleasure in Hazel's presence from the first—clinging to his strength and gentleness as a child might do. No one could lift him in his bed like Hazel; no one's arm was so strong and steady to lean upon as Hazel's, when the poor invalid was able to totter from one room to another; and then, above all, Hazel never made a fuss!

Any too strong manifestations of anxiety or sympathy worried him and made him nervous. What might be Claude's opinion of his own state it was impossible to divine with accuracy. In truth, it fluctuated. There were moments when the conviction that his malady was mortal, and that the end was near, took hold upon his mind with irresistible force. And then, again, he would be buoyed up by hope. But he had never—except by some involuntary impulse—said a word to indicate that he thought his recovery hopeless.

"Gilbert is walking near the house," said Barbara, when her brother asked for Hazel. "He would not go far away lest you might want him. I can call him immediately." And she left the room for that purpose.

When she was gone, Claude, for the first time, turned his eyes upon his uncle. "You didn't sit up all night, Uncle William?" he said.

"Oh, I did very well, my boy. This is a famous arm-chair."

"Barbara?" whispered Claude.

"No, no; we sent Barbara and Aunt Judith to bed. Hazel and I took the watch between us, turn and turn about."

"Poor Uncle William!" murmured Claude, softly. Then he resumed his wide-eyed gaze at the sky, and was silent until Barbara returned, followed by Hazel.

"Will you lift me up, and put some pillows behind my shoulders?" said Claude. And there was a gleam almost of cheerfulness on his face as he looked up at Hazel. It was done deftly and gently. Then Claude said, with his thin white fingers still twined round Hazel's hand, "Send them away! Uncle William ought to lie down and rest. Make Barbara wrap herself up and go into the garden for a breath of air. Make her go, Hazel."

"I think Claude's suggestion is a good one, dearest," said Barbara's lover, looking tenderly at her pale face.

"Yes, yes; go!" cried Claude, impatiently. "And don't let any one come until my bell rings. Will you tell them downstairs, Barbara? Nobody must come. I want to speak to Hazel."

Then William and Barbara quietly withdrew, and closed the door.

Claude remained silent for a while. There was a strange passivity about him. A little flash, a faint reflection of his old impatient humor, had come into his eyes for a moment in urging his sister to go away. But, now again, he lay propped up against his cushions, staring at the sky with a placid, solemn look.

Gilbert Hazel quietly seated himself beside the bed, and waited.

Suddenly, Claude said, with the manner of one just awakened, although his eyes had not blinked in their steadfast gaze, "Can you get a pen and ink and some paper? We mustn't waste all our time."

There were writing materials in the next room, and Hazel brought them. But he said, "Do you think you are strong enough to write now, old fellow? Would it not be better to wait until you have had some food?"

Claude shook his head. "No," he said. "I couldn't write; not much, at least. But I can't wait. There's so little time before they come back, you know. I want you to write what I dictate. It's legal, isn't it, to dictate your will, so long as you sign it yourself?"

"Your will? Oh yes; it is legal."

Then write. To-morrow I can sign it. To-morrow is my birthday. But we will get it ready now; because to-morrow I might be—too—tired."

Hazel drew a little table near to the bed, spread out a sheet of writing-paper on it, and looked gravely at Claude.

"Write first, that it is my last will and testament, and that I am clear in my mind. You can put it into proper words."

Hazel wrote silently, and then read aloud what he had written. Claude made an approving gesture of the head. Then he stretched out his hand, and took hold of the other man's—so different from his own! So warm and strong, and full of life and energy.

"You don't want to marry a rich wife, do you?" he whispered, with a faint smile. "No; I know. And she loves you very dearly. My sister Barbara is very good. They say she is like our mother. I say, Hazel—you'll always be true and kind to her? Yes; I believe it. Well, now write this. But you must put it plain and clear. Your words will be better than mine."

Hazel waited, pen in hand, looking at him earnestly. Claude seemed to be collecting himself for an effort. Then he began to dictate: "I give and bequeath all the money and property of every kind that may come to me by the will of Mr. Christopher Dalton to those persons who would have it after death, if I did not live to be twenty-one. And let it be divided among them as the will directs. And I desire it to be known that—I do this—in compliance with—the earnest wish of—all my family."

Hazel's pen sounded for a while upon the paper, and then ceased. He had finished, and there was perfect stillness in the room. The wind had dropped.

"Do you think," said Claude, feebly—"do you think Uncle William will say I have done well?"

Hazel stood up beside the bed, and laid his hand gently on the boy's forehead. "I am sure he will, Claude," he said. "We shall all say so."

There came a sudden flush of animation into Claude's face, like the flicker of a flame; and he raised his head from the pillow. "If I—when I get better—I shall stick to it, you know," he said, eagerly. "I've made up my mind. I won't take the money. To-morrow it will be mine. It will be I who give it up—of my own free will—won't it? They'll all know that—won't they, Hazel?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Look here—don't tell Uncle William yet. I know this has—worried him. But one day more won't matter now; and I will give it him, to-morrow—for a present—on my birthday. There are not many fellows who would do such a thing, are there? It's a great fortune. But I mean to give it up. Juliet Armour doesn't believe I can rise to that! But she'll see. They'll all see!"

He let his head sink back among the pillows, and closed his eyes.

"You are tired, Claude," said Hazel. "You must be still now, and rest. I will keep this paper safely until to-morrow. Shall I?"

Claude answered "Yes" by a silent motion of the lips. Then, just as Hazel was moving away from the bed, he stretched out his hand to detain him. "Sit down a minute! I want to say something to you."

Hazel hesitated; but Claude plucked at his sleeve, saying, "No; I must speak now. There is so little time." His voice scarcely rose above a whisper; and Hazel, seated by the bed, leaned down very near him to listen.

"I say, Hazel, you—you won't laugh at me?"

"That's not very likely, old fellow—unless you mean me to laugh."

"No. I want you, when I'm gone—I am going to Vevey with Aunt Judith, you know, when I get stronger—I want you to promise, when I am gone, to give a message for me to Juliet Armour."

He paused, looking up wistfully in the other man's face.

"I promise, Claude."

"I thank you, Hazel. I couldn't ask the others. They—they wouldn't understand." He softly put his arm round Hazel's neck and clung to him, as he whispered, brokenly, "In a little box on my table, you'll find a piece of silver paper folded up. Inside it

there's a lock—of her hair. I cut it off at Vevey when we said 'good-by.' She laughed at me—and called me a foolish boy. But she let me take it—and she let me kiss her. I know she's not—not so good as Barbara. But she is better than—some people think. She has been very good to me—since I've been ill. She'll be sorry for a little while when—I'm gone. Will you give her back that lock of hair, and say that I had—always kept it—even when she was so angry—about the will? Tell her that. And tell her that I sent her—my love, at the last, before I—went away."

"I will do it, my brother."

"God bless you, Hazel! If you'll just wait there—one quarter of an hour, I will doze a little. And then you may ring. I'm—so—tired!"

He closed his eyes, but opened them again almost immediately, looking over Hazel's shoulder. "Is that my mother beside you?" he murmured. Then he shut his eyes once more with a smile, and, holding Hazel's hand, fell asleep.

Half an hour later the doctor stood with Hazel beside the bed, looking down on the marble serenity of the young face on the pillow. "Poor boy!" he murmured. "He's smiling as if he saw kind faces in his dreams. He will never suffer more in this world. And which of us would have the heart to wake him if we could?"

CHAPTER LII.

PEACE and a great stillness in the chamber of death. Peace and a hushed sorrow in the hearts of the living who had loved Claude Copley. Their love had been made up mainly of self-sacrifice—the most enduring kind of all.

Poor old Judith had sorrowed bitterly, but the first violence of her grief was over. Judith's feelings were quick and strong even in her old age; but with her the fire flared and died down; the tears gushed forth abundantly, and were dried. William was of a different temperament. In him intense passionateness was

blended with constant, clinging affection. The exquisite sensitiveness, which might otherwise have eaten away some of the finer parts of his character by generating a kind of egoism, was counteracted by the life-long habit of considering the feelings of others rather than his own. It was he who chiefly consoled and supported Aunt Judith. And yet his compassionate tenderness for Claude would quiver at a touch long after Judith could speak calmly of poor Olive's boy.

To Barbara there was something inexpressibly sweet and comforting in the knowledge that Gilbert had received her brother's last confidence and soothed her brother's last moments. He had died holding Gilbert's hand.

When Claude had been laid in his coffin, Hazel sought Juliet Armour and faithfully delivered the message intrusted to him by the dead.

- "May I see him?" she asked. And Hazel led her privately into the room, and stood beside her as she looked down on the white young face, so much sweeter and more serene now than she had ever beheld it in life. Then Hazel took the lock of her own yellow hair from the box where Claude had treasured it, and gently put it into her hand.

Juliet stood there, silent and dry-eyed. At length she bent down and kissed Claude's brow, and then turned away and went into the sitting-room without a word.

"Thank you," she said to Hazel when the door of the death-chamber was closed again. "Good-by."

She held out her hand in farewell, and Hazel took it. All at once her fingers clasped his tightly, and she said, gazing at him intently with the hard, blue eyes that had a haggard, suffering look in them,

"You are going to be married?"

"Yes."

She paused, still holding his hand with a strong grip that had no suggestion of tenderness in it. Then she said,

"You are very much in love?"

"With all my heart, and soul, and strength!"

"Yes. I used to think no man really loved like that. Men are such liars! But you are true. Good-by, Bertie Hazel. When that poor boy died, the last heart on this earth that had

one pulse of love for me ceased to beat. That's dreary, isn't it? He was foolish, and selfish, and wayward; but—do you know, I feel at this moment that I would give up the money to have him back alive. You would hardly believe that of me, would you? Perhaps I sha'n't believe it of myself to-morrow."

Suddenly she pressed the hand she still held to her lips; and her tears streamed over it. But the next moment she drew her veil down with an abrupt, resolute gesture, and went away.

The will that the dying boy had dictated moved William profoundly. Legally it had, of course, no force or value. Death had stepped in to decide the question of the inheritance, and had won the race against Time. But the will had lifted a heavy load from the soul of William Hughes. Claude had been loyal to honor and duty at the last! Characteristically, William was full of loving pride in speaking of his dear boy's renunciation, unconscious that it had been inspired by himself, and oblivious that it had been made but tardily.

In the little household there was no dissentient feeling about the fortune they had lost. It seemed to them all very natural to thank God that they were rid forever of the contamination of Dalton's money; and Claude's last words had taken away the painful sense that their immunity from this shame was purchased by his death. Even had Claude lived, he would have renounced it! They, at least, did not doubt that.

A great peace fell upon them. Barbara, as she kissed her brother's face for the last time, whispered a blessing and a thanksgiving. Claude had spared their uncle the rankling of a life-long wound.

But while these pure-spirited persons were well content to be left tranquil in their poverty, a fever of excitement was raging in the breasts of the heirs, to whom Claude's death had assigned Dalton's million and a half—more or less—of dollars.

The sharks that had so long and so eagerly been following on the track of death were at length about to seize their prey. The morsels were very unequally distributed, it was true; but the smallest of them was a respectable mouthful, even for a shark.

It had not hitherto been possible to obtain from Mr. Reuben Wilford the complete list of Dalton's investments. Mr. Coney,

to whom John Hopkins again appealed on the subject, answered that no doubt most of Dalton's papers—script shares, debentures, and vouchers of all kinds—were deposited with his bankers in New York. But there was no knowing whether they were all there. He had been very close and secret, employing at one time several agents in different and far-distant parts of the States, who knew nothing of each other. He (Coney) believed that latterly Mr. Reuben Wilford had been intrusted with the management of nearly all Dalton's property. But who could say positively?

Meanwhile, one or two investments in which Dalton was stated to have embarked large sums were rumored to be becoming daily more precarious. Within ten days of Claude Copley's death, the collapse was announced of a railway company in which Dalton was said to have been a large shareholder; and shortly afterwards there followed the most dismal reports of some silver mines which Mr. Wilford had mentioned as being among the speculations Dalton had invested in. The city of London was, probably, not profoundly moved by these tidings; but to a certain set of persons in the city of London it appeared as though Chris Dalton's will, and the "risky" nature of Chris Dalton's wealth, were the all-absorbing topics of the day.

The Concrete has an irresistible attraction for human nature, and the most radical reformer extant—supposing it possible that such a one should postpone his public duty to his private gratification—would infinitely more enjoy the narrative of an eye-witness as to how some illustrious personage stood with his hands in his pockets, or pulled out his handkerchief, or said with good-humored affability, "How do you do, Mr. Smith? I remember you very well at Toronto," than the most scathing and conclusive arguments against princes and peers in the abstract. Therefore it was that the fact of young Rhodonides being engaged to marry a relative of one of Chris Dalton's legatees, and of Chris Dalton's grandnephew and chief heir actually occupying a stool in the counting-house of Messrs. Baikie & Wiggetts, gave to every clerk, cashier, and office-boy in those eminent mercantile establishments a zest and interest in the whole affair quite incommensurable with the financial interests involved in it.

Sundry circles in the West End also were agreeably agitated

by the vicissitudes of the Dalton will case. Lady Lambton went about appealing to her male friends; making artless inquiries with clasped hands and much play of her handsome eyes.

"As it is not for myself, you know, I don't mind asking. I am not greedy of money, really! I don't boast of it, you know. Very likely I am too careless of my own interests; and there is no wisdom in that. But I have one merit, at any rate—I am candid about my faults. But this matter is so important to mamma and the girls! How strangely romantic it seems—does it not?—that mamma's Cousin Christopher should have remembered their boy-and-girl attachment after all those years!"

Lady Lambton would say this kind of thing to General Mullett, or, confidentially, to Mr. Kettering. But she did not venture on such allusions in the hearing of Miss Sally Stringer, who always declared with the utmost frankness that her distant relative, Chris Dalton, had been a selfish rascal—and a mean, sneaking kind of selfish rascal to boot. Sally would certainly have scouted the attempt to get up any tender sentiment in connection with his memory. But the unadorned prose of life—in simple language, the plain truth—was seldom agreeable to Amy Lambton.

Then, too, Mrs. Armour was eager for her rights. And, above all, Mr. John Hopkins, on behalf of his son, was feverishly restless and anxious.

At length Hopkins took a resolution. He would go to America and see after things for himself. And, accordingly, on the 14th of April, a little over a fortnight after Claude's death, he sailed from Liverpool for New York, leaving his foreman in charge of the carving and gilding business, and the picture-dealing department in a state of suspended animation.

He did not purpose being absent more than six weeks, including the two voyages across the Atlantic. And during his father's absence Mortimer solaced himself with the society of the faithful Green and Toller; and also made frequent visits to Mrs. Green, the flower-painter, with whom he enjoyed a kind of luxury of woe in talking about Miss Copley. Barbara, it seemed, was to be married early in May. "It will be a very simple, quiet wedding," said Mrs. Green. "Not only because of the family being in mourning, but because, by what I hear, their means will be very modest—anyway at first. But Mr. Hazel isn't likely to

mind its being quiet. I think bridegrooms, in general, rather like hiding their light under a bushel."

"Mind it!" echoed Mortimer, bitterly. "What has he got to mind? Could pearls and diamonds, or even powdered footmen, shed a lustre upon *her*? Nay, rather would her mild effulgence turn the barren walls of a registrar's office into things of beauty. Mind it! No, I don't suppose he'll mind it!"

The Hugheses had returned to London, but Mortimer had not seen them. He even tried to avoid any chance meeting with William Hughes in the neighborhood of his studio.

"It can't be very agreeable to any of the family to see *me* at present," he said to Mrs. Green, with more delicacy of feeling than she had given him credit for. Many of Mortimer's evenings were spent at this time in the boarding-house near the Red Lion Square, where Mr. Coney had introduced him. He was an object of intense interest to the inmates of that genteel establishment, and was much gratified and flattered by the attention he attracted. Mrs. Armour was still there, as was also Miss Jenks; but the latter lady had announced her intention of shortly returning to the mahogany-furnished mansion of her brother in Northampton, in order to recruit her health and spirits, greatly shaken—as she emphatically declared in a loud voice, and standing bolt upright on the hearth-rug in the boarding-house drawing-room—by an unrequited attachment.

Mr. John Hopkins had been gone about four weeks, during which time only one letter had been received from him, saying that he and Mr. Wilford were about to "go into" Chris Dalton's affairs together, when one evening the landlady of the boarding-house appeared in the drawing-room, and requested Mr. Mortimer Hopkins to go down-stairs, where a gentleman was urgently desirous to speak with him.

Mortimer, who had been displaying his Greek profile for the benefit of the boarders, turned round with a lofty and languid air, and inquired who the person was.

"Well, sir, I think it's your father," said Mrs. Pringle. "He gave the name of 'Opkins."

"The governor, by Jingo!" cried Mortimer, jumping up and forgetting his languor, and he forthwith ran down-stairs. He was closely followed by Juliet Armour, who, divining that there was

news about the inheritance, was resolved to hear it, and by Mr. Coney.

They entered the dining-room only a minute or so after Mortimer, and they found him staring at his father, who, pale, dirty, and unshaven, and evidently in a state of considerable bodily prostration, was seated at the end of the long dining-table.

"Why, Hopkins," exclaimed Mr. Coney, advancing towards him, "what's up?"

"What's up? It's *all* up! If ever there was a scoundrel, a robber, an unprincipled swindler, a—a—get me a drop of brandy, Mortimer. I've not got over the sea-sickness yet."

"But what is it? Who is it?" asked Coney, while the young man rang the bell for some brandy, and Mrs. Armour, with fixed, angry eyes, demanded to be informed of the true state of the case without further delay.

"Has Wilford bolted with the swag?" inquired the Early Greek youth, impelled by his anxiety to the use of somewhat Late English.

"Swag? A fat lot of swag! No; Wilford hasn't bolted, but the swag has bolted—if ever there was any. Look here. If anybody'll offer you five hundred pounds down for your share of the plunder, just you close with him sharp!"

And then by degrees Mr. Hopkins told his story, interspersed with some groans, several profane oaths, and a great many sips of brandy-and-water.

His story amounted to this: The amount of Dalton's wealth had been enormously exaggerated (apparently, in the first place, by himself), and what money he had had been recklessly embarked in wildly speculative investments—many of them clearly dishonest in their nature. For some time before Dalton's death he must have been aware that these investments were menacing ruin, and now they had, for the most part, collapsed altogether. Hopkins declared that, so far as he could discern, the whole estate would not realize a thousand pounds. But it may as well be stated that the sum total to be finally divided among the heirs proved to be a trifle over four thousand pounds. And that was the end of Chris Dalton's great fortune.

* * * * *

"But all that nonsense, my dear Olga," said Mr. Kettering,

“about refusing the inheritance always struck me as being in extremely bad taste.”

Mr. and Mrs. Hazel, who had been dining at the Ketterings' to meet their old friends Fritz and Olga, had just gone away. Mr. and Mrs. Perikles Rhodonides were also of the party. So, too, was General Mullett, whom Lady Lambton had very nearly succeeded in marrying, but who had saved himself by a masterly inactivity, and was still in the uninterrupted enjoyment of his bachelor comforts.

“Barbara Hazel is the sweetest woman in the world!” said Olga. Whereupon Olga's husband kissed her hand.

“Yes, yes; very sweet, very charming,” returned Mr. Kettering. “But as to that cock-and-bull story that was spread about at the time, of the young man having drawn up a document renouncing the money, and all the family agreeing to it—one really ought not to be expected to swallow that Rosa-Matilda kind of stuff.”

“Why not? *I* believe it, papa,” said Ida, very unexpectedly.

Mr. Kettering looked round in surprise. His respect for his younger daughter had been greatly increased by her behavior at the time of her engagement to Perikles Rhodonides. In the first place, it argued the possession of some uncommon qualities to have attracted so wealthy and altogether eligible a suitor; and since her marriage Ida had comported herself with a good sense and dignity most remarkable in so young a girl. Olga had always been considered the cleverer of the sisters; but Mr. Kettering had for some time past begun to doubt whether Ida's were not the better brain of the two.

“Indeed!” said he, raising his eyebrows at Ida's remark. “I confess you surprise me, Ida.”

“Yes; I quite believe it, papa. The Hugheses are like that. I dare say they would be glad to have more money. But there are so many things they put before it. I think money would come very low down in a list of the things that the Hugheses value.”

Ida was not in the least impelled to follow the Hugheses' example in this respect. Neither did she feel any sense of inferiority in herself for holding money in a different regard—a feeling which unconsciously influenced a good many people to declare that they didn't believe in such high-flown sentiments. But her

inflexible honesty made her acknowledge the fact when she saw it.

“Well, I suppose they are as poor as mice,” said Sally Stringer. “But if so—as somebody said on a very different occasion—’twere pity it were known! For two more radiantly happy-looking creatures than Hazel and his wife I never beheld. And you’ll have a lot of stupid, coarse-grained people thinking, like the Cornish giant, that ‘hur can do that hursel,’ marrying in haste on nothing a year, and repenting at leisure before the honeymoon’s over!”

“They are certainly not rich,” said Mr. Kettering; “but Hazel is doing well. They have a—a competency.”

“Ah!” said Sally, nodding thoughtfully. “I see. A competency. Well, I think a competency may be defined as an income that is amply sufficient—for other people.”

Certain it was that in Hazel’s modest household no complaints of poverty were ever heard. The household included, now, Aunt Judith and William, and the faithful Larcher. In two years after Barbara’s marriage, William and his old aunt had continued to live in the shabby little house, in the dingy little street, where we first knew them. But at length they yielded to the solicitations of Gilbert and Barbara, and took up their abode with them. And no breath of family discord ever ruffled their daily lives.

William Hughes’s name rose into high esteem among a few connoisseurs; and his pictures fetched considerable prices. But he never reaped the full benefit of his reputation. He had been clogged from the beginning by debt to the dealers; and, as he had said to Hazel, debt is an octopus that will pull down the strongest swimmer. He did not live to be old; but he had the joy of hearing Barbara’s little daughter lisp his name. Aunt Judith survived him. And when she and Barbara hung weeping over his bed, knowing that he must leave them, his last words, spoken with a radiant smile that was like the very light of Heaven shining on his worn, care-lined face, were: “Don’t cry, dears—don’t cry. I have been—very happy.”

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