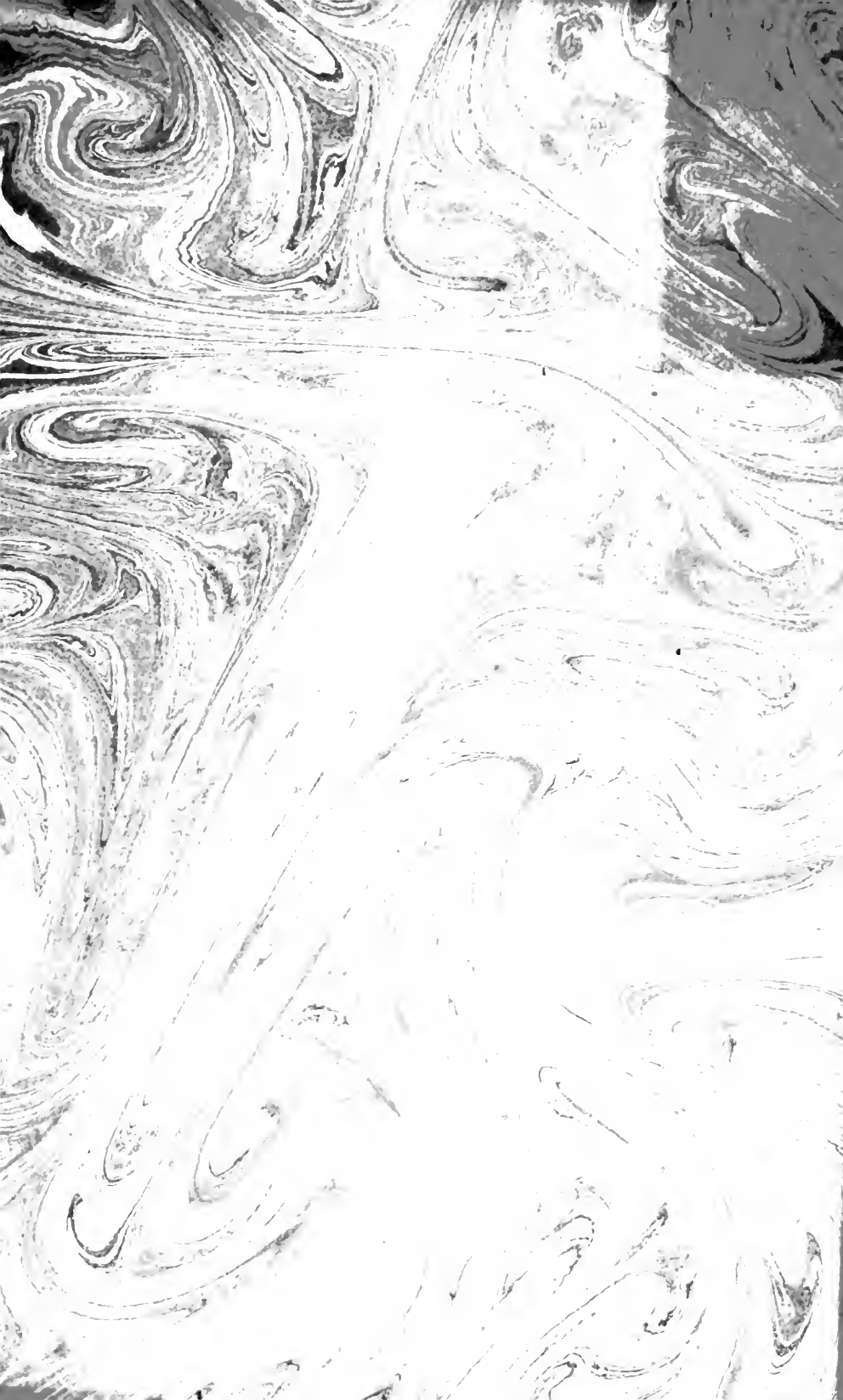


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TWO ON A TOWER.

VOL. III.

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# TWO ON A TOWER.

A Romance.

BY

THOMAS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD,"  
"THE TRUMPET MAJOR," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

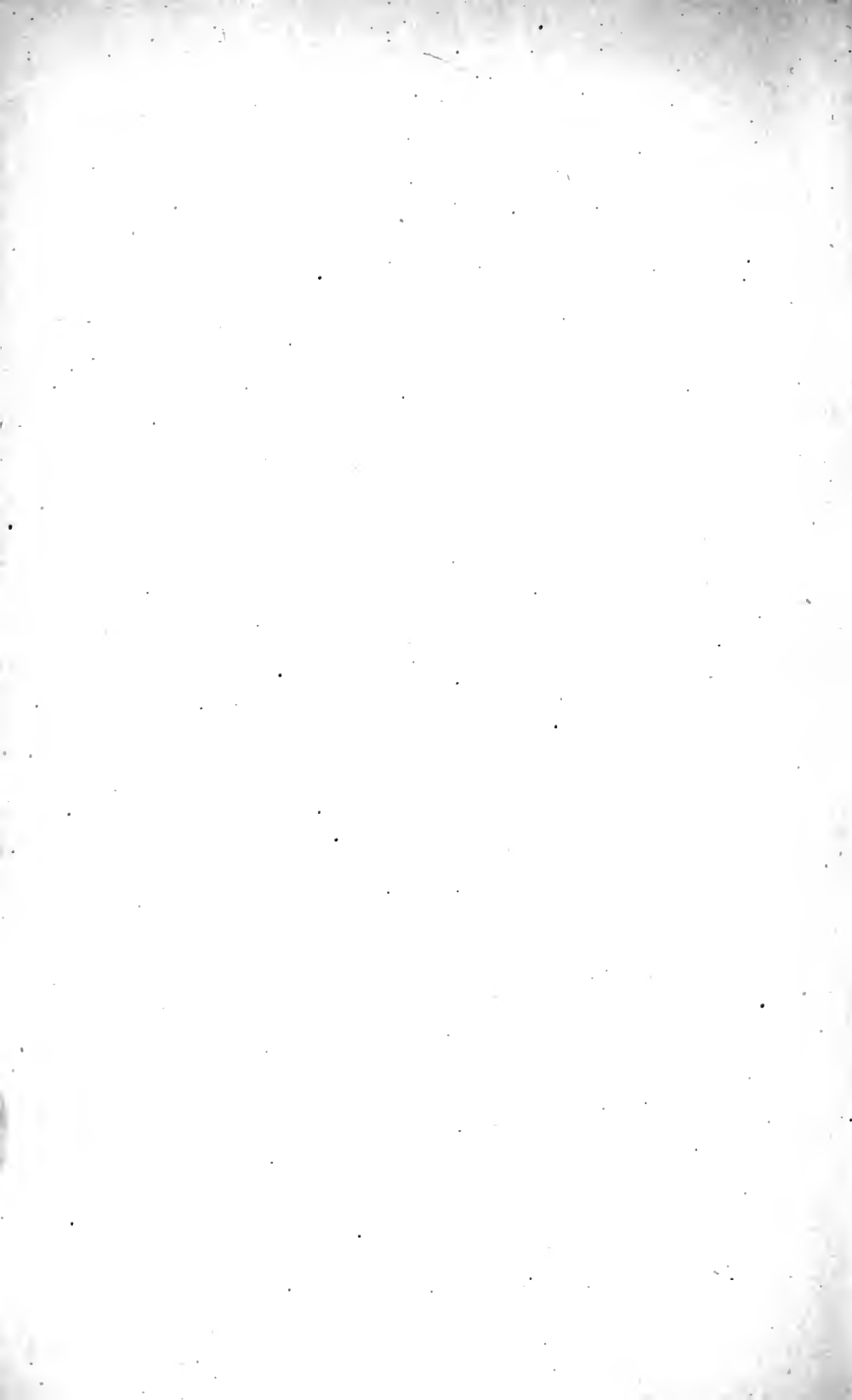
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## TWO ON A TOWER.

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### CHAPTER I.

LOUIS began his stratagem by calling at the tower one afternoon, as if on the impulse of the moment.

After a friendly chat with Swithin, whom he found there (having watched him enter), Louis invited the young man to dine the same evening at the House, that he might have an opportunity of showing him some interesting old scientific works in folio, which according to Louis's account, he had stumbled on in overhauling the library. Louis set no great bait for St. Cleeve in this statement, for old

science was not old art, which, having perfected itself, has died and left its secret hidden in its remains. But Swithin was a responsive fellow, and readily agreed to come; being, moreover, always glad of a chance of meeting Viviette *en famille*. Besides, he hoped to tell her of a scheme that had lately suggested itself to him as likely to benefit them both: that he should go away for a while, and endeavour to raise sufficient funds to visit the great observatories of Europe, possibly with a view to obtaining a post in one of them. Hitherto the only bar to the plan had been the exceeding narrowness of his income, which, though sufficient for his present life, was absolutely inadequate to the requirements of a travelling astronomer.

Meanwhile Louis Glanville had returned to the House, and told his sister in the

most innocent manner that he had been in the company of St. Cleeve that afternoon, getting a few wrinkles on astronomy; that they had grown so friendly over the fascinating subject as to leave him no alternative but to invite St. Cleeve to dine at Welland the same evening, with a view to certain researches in the library afterwards.

“I could quite make allowances for any youthful errors into which the young man may have been betrayed,” he continued sententiously, “since, for a scientist, he is really admirable. No doubt the Bishop’s caution will not be lost upon him; and as for his birth and connexions,—those he can’t help.”

Lady Constantine showed such alacrity in adopting the idea of having Swithin to dinner, and she ignored his “youthful errors” so completely, as almost to betray

herself. In fulfilment of her promise to see him oftener, she had been intending to run across to Swithin on that identical evening. Now the trouble would be saved in a very delightful way, by the exercise of a little hospitality, which Viviette herself would not have dared to suggest.

Dinner-time came, and with it Swithin, exhibiting rather a blushing and nervous manner, that was, unfortunately, more likely to betray their cause than was Viviette's own more practised bearing. Throughout the meal Louis sat like a spider in the corner of his web, observing them narrowly, and at moments flinging out an artful thread, here and there, with a view to their entanglement.

But they underwent the ordeal marvelously well. Perhaps the actual tie between them, through being so much closer and of so much more practical a nature than



even their critic supposed it, was in itself a protection against their exhibiting that ultra-reciprocity of manner which, had they been merely lovers, might have betrayed them.

After dinner the trio duly adjourned to the library, as had been planned, and the volumes were brought forth by Louis with the zest of a bibliophile. Swithin had seen most of them before, and thought but little of them; but the pleasure of staying in the house made him welcome any reason for doing so, and he willingly looked at whatever was put before him, from Bertius's Ptolemy to Rees's Cyclopædia.

The evening thus passed away, and it began to grow late. Swithin, who, among other things had planned to go to Greenwich next day, to view the Royal Observatory, would every now and then start up and prepare to leave for home, when Glan-

ville would unearth some other volume, and so detain him yet another half-hour.

“By George!” he said, looking at the clock, when Swithin was at last really about to depart. “I didn’t know it was so late. Why not stay here to-night, St. Cleeve? It is very dark, and the way to your place is an awkward cross-cut over the fields.”

“It would not inconvenience us at all, Mr. St. Cleeve, if you would care to stay,” said Lady Constantine.

“I am afraid—the fact is, I wanted to take an observation at twenty minutes past two,” began Swithin.

“Oh, now, never mind your observation,” said Louis. “That’s only an excuse. Do that to-morrow night. Now you will stay. It is settled. Viviette, say he must stay, and we’ll have another

hour of these charming intellectual researches."

Viviette obeyed with delightful ease. "Do stay, Mr. St. Cleeve!" she said sweetly.

"Well, in truth I can do without the observation," replied the young man, as he gave way. "It is not of the greatest consequence."

Thus it was arranged; but the researches among the tomes were not prolonged to the extent that Louis had suggested. In three-quarters of an hour from that time they had all retired to their respective rooms; Lady Constantine's being on one side of the west corridor, Swithin's opposite, and Louis's at the further end.

Had a person followed Louis when he withdrew, that watcher would have discovered, on peeping through the key-hole of his door, that he was engaged in one of

the oddest of occupations for such a man, —sweeping down from the ceiling, by means of a walking-cane, a long cobweb which lingered on high in the corner. Keeping it stretched upon the cane, he gently opened the door, and set the candle in such a position on the mat that the light shone down the corridor. Thus guided by its rays, he passed out slipperless, till he reached the door of St. Cleeve's room, where he applied the dangling spider's thread in such a manner that it stretched across, like a tight rope, from jamb to jamb, barring, in its fragile way, entrance and egress. The operation completed, he retired again, and, extinguishing his light, went through his bedroom window out upon the flat roof of the portico, to which it gave access.

Here Louis made himself comfortable in his chair and smoking-cap, enjoying the fra-

grance of a cigar for something like half an hour. His position commanded a view of the two windows of Lady Constantine's room, and from these a dim light shone continuously. Having the window partly open at his back, and the door of his room also scarcely closed, his ear retained a fair command of any sounds that might be caused by meeting and whispering lovers, either in the corridor or out upon the lawn.

In due time certain sounds became audible; whereupon, returning to his room, he re-entered the corridor, and listened intently. All was silent again, and darkness reigned from end to end. Glanville, however, groped his way along the passage till he again reached Swithin's door, where he examined, by the light of a wax-match he had brought, the condition of the spider's thread. It was gone; somebody

had carried it off bodily, as Samson carried off the pin and the web. In other words, a person had passed through the door.

Still holding the faint wax-light in his hand, Louis turned to the door of Lady Constantine's chamber, where he observed first that, though it was pushed together so as to appear fastened to cursory view, the door was not really closed by about a quarter of an inch. He dropped his light, and extinguished it with his foot. Listening, he heard a voice within,—Viviette's voice, in a subdued murmur, though speaking earnestly.

Without any hesitation, Louis then returned to Swithin's door, opened it, and walked in. The starlight from without was sufficient, now that his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, to reveal that the room was unoccupied, and that nothing therein had been disturbed.

With a heavy tread Louis came forth, walked loudly across the corridor, knocked at Lady Constantine's door, and called "Viviette!"

She heard him instantly, replying "Yes" in startled tones. Immediately afterwards she opened her door, and confronted him in her dressing-gown, with a light in her hand. "What is the matter, Louis?" she said.

"I am greatly alarmed. Our visitor is missing."

"Missing? What, Mr. St. Cleeve?"

"Yes. I was sitting up to finish a cigar, when I thought I heard a noise in this direction. On coming to his room, I find he is not there."

"Good Heaven! I wonder what has happened!" she exclaimed, in apparently intense alarm.

"I wonder," said Glanville grimly.

“Suppose he is a somnambulist! If so, he may have gone out and broken his neck. I have never heard that he is one, but they say that sleeping in strange places disturbs the mind of people who are given to that sort of thing, and provokes them to it.”

“Unfortunately for your theory, his bed has not been touched.”

“Oh, what then can it be?”

Her brother looked her full in the face. “Viviette!” he said sternly.

She seemed puzzled. “Well?” she replied, in simple tones.

“I heard voices in your room,” he continued.

“Voices?”

“A voice,—yours.”

“Yes, you may have done so. It was mine.”

“A listener is required for a speaker.”

“True, Louis.”



“ Well, to whom were you speaking ? ”

“ God.”

“ Viviette ! I am ashamed of you.”

“ I was saying my prayers.”

“ Prayers—to God ! To St. Swithin, rather ! ”

“ What do you mean, Louis ? ” she asked, flushing up warm, and drawing back from him. “ It was a form of prayer I use, particularly when I am in trouble. It was recommended to me by the Bishop, and Mr. Torkingham commends it very highly.”

“ On your honour, if you have any,” he said bitterly, “ whom have you there in your room ? ”

“ No human being.”

“ Flatly, I don't believe you.”

She gave a dignified little bow, and, waving her hand into the apartment, said, “ Very well ; then search and see.”

Louis entered, and glanced round the

room, behind the curtains, under the bed, out of the window,—a view from which showed that escape thence would have been impossible,—everywhere, in short, capable or incapable of affording a retreat to humanity; but discovered nobody. All he observed was that a light stood on the low table by her bedside; that on the bed lay an open Prayer Book, the counterpane being unpressed, except into a little pit beside the Prayer Book, apparently where her head had rested in kneeling.

“But where is St. Cleeve?” he said, turning in bewilderment from these evidences of innocent devotion.

“Where can he be?” she chimed in, with real distress. “I should so much like to know. Look about for him. I am quite uneasy!”

“I will, on one condition: that you own that you love him.”

“Why should you force me to that?” she murmured. “It would be no such wonder if I did.”

“Come, you do.”

“Well, I do.”

“Now I’ll look for him.”

Louis took a light, and turned away, his ignorance of her legal relation to Swithin leaving him astonished that she had not indignantly resented his intrusion and the nature of his questioning.

At this moment a slight noise was heard on the staircase, and they could see a figure rising step by step, and coming forward against the long lights of the staircase window. It was Swithin, in his ordinary dress, and carrying his boots in his hand.

When he beheld them standing there so motionless, he looked rather disconcerted, but came on towards his room.

Lady Constantine was too much agitated

to speak, but Louis said, "I am glad to see you again. Hearing a noise, a few minutes ago, I came out to learn what it could be. I found you absent, and we have been very much alarmed."

"I am very sorry," said Swithin, with contrition. "I owe you a hundred apologies: but the truth is that on entering my bedroom I found the sky remarkably clear, and though I told you that the observation I was to make was of no great consequence, on thinking it over alone I felt it ought not to be allowed to pass; so I was tempted to run across to the observatory, and make it, as I had hoped, without disturbing anybody. If I had known that I should alarm you I would not have done it for the world."

Swithin spoke very earnestly to Louis, and did not observe the tender reproach in Viviette's eyes, when he showed by his

tale his decided notion that the prime use of starlight nights lay in their furtherance of practical astronomy.

Everything being now satisfactorily explained, the three retired to their several chambers, and Louis heard no more noises that night, or rather morning; his attempts to solve the mystery of Viviette's life here and her relations with St. Cleeve having thus far resulted chiefly in perplexity. True, an admission had been wrung from her; and even without such an admission, it was clear that she had a tender feeling for Swithin. How to extinguish that romantic folly it now became his object to consider.

## CHAPTER II.

SWITHIN'S midnight excursion to the tower in the cause of science led him to oversleep himself, and when the brother and sister met at breakfast in the morning he did not appear.

“Don't disturb him,—don't disturb him,” said Louis laconically. “Hullo, Viviette, what are you reading there that makes you flame up so?”

She was glancing over a letter that she had just opened, and at his words looked up with misgiving.

The incident of the previous night left her in great doubt as to what her bearing

towards him ought to be. She had made no show of resenting his conduct at the time, from a momentary supposition that he must know all her secret; and afterwards, finding that he did not know it, it seemed too late to affect indignation at his suspicions. So she preserved a quiet neutrality. Even had she resolved on an artificial part, she might have forgotten to play it at this instant, the letter being of a kind to banish previous considerations.

“It is a letter from Bishop Helmsdale,” she faltered.

“Well done! I hope for your sake it is an offer.”

“That’s just what it is.”

“No,—surely?” said Louis, beginning a laugh of surprise.

“Yes,” she returned indifferently. “You can read it, if you like.”

“I don’t wish to pry into a communication of that sort.”

“Oh, you can read it,” she said, tossing the letter across to him.

Louis thereupon read as under :—

“THE PALACE, MELCHESTER,

“*June 28, 18—.*

“MY DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE,—During the two or three weeks that have elapsed since I experienced the great pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with you, the varied agitation of my feelings has clearly proved that my only course is to address you by letter, and at once. Whether the subject of my communication be acceptable to you or not, I can at least assure you that to suppress it would be far less natural, and upon the whole less advisable, than to speak out frankly, even if afterwards I hold my peace for ever.



“The great change in my experience during the past year or two—the change, that is, which has resulted from my advancement to a bishopric—has frequently suggested to me, of late, that a discontinuance in my domestic life of the solitude of past years was a question which ought to be seriously contemplated. But whether I should ever have contemplated it without the great good fortune of my meeting with you is doubtful. However, the thing has been considered at last, and without more ado I candidly ask if you would be willing to give up your life at Welland, and relieve my household loneliness here by becoming my wife.

“I am far from desiring to force a hurried decision on your part, and will wait your good pleasure patiently, should you feel any uncertainty at the moment as to the step. I am quite disqualified, by habits

and experience, for the delightful procedure of urging my suit in the ardent terms which would be so appropriate towards such a lady, and so expressive of my inmost feeling. In truth, a prosy cleric of five-and-forty wants encouragement to make him eloquent. Of this, however, I can assure you: that if admiration, esteem, and devotion can compensate in any way for the lack of those qualities which might be found to burn with more outward brightness in a younger man, those it is in my power to bestow for the term of my earthly life. Your steady adherence to church principles and your interest in ecclesiastical polity (as was shown by your bright questioning on those subjects during our morning walk round your grounds) have indicated strongly to me the grace and appropriateness with which you would fill the position of a

bishop's wife, and how greatly you would add to his reputation, should you be disposed to honour him with your hand. Formerly there have been times when I was of opinion—and you will rightly appreciate my candour in owning it—that a wife was an impediment to a bishop's due activities; but constant observation has convinced me that, far from this being the truth, a meet consort infuses life into episcopal influence and teaching.

“Should you reply in the affirmative I will at once come to see you, and with your permission will, among other things, show you a few plain, practical rules which I have interested myself in drawing up for our future guidance. Should you refuse to change your condition on my account, your decision will, as I need hardly say, be a great blow to me. In any event, I could not do less than I have done, after

giving the subject my full consideration. Even if there be a slight deficiency of warmth on your part, my earnest hope is that a mind comprehensive as yours will perceive the immense power for good that you might exercise in the position in which a union with me would place you, and allow that perception to weigh in determining your answer.

“I remain, my dear Lady Constantine, with the highest respect and affection,

“Yours always,

“C. MELCHESTER.”

“Well, you will not have the foolhardiness to decline, now that the question has actually been popped, I should hope,” said Louis, when he had done reading.

“Certainly I shall,” she replied.

“You will really be such a flat, Viviette?”

“You speak without much compliment. I have not the least idea of accepting him.”

“Surely you will not let your infatuation for that young fellow carry you so far, after my acquainting you with the shady side of his character? You call yourself a religious woman, say your prayers out loud, follow up the revived methods in church practice, and what not; and yet you can think with partiality of a person who, far from having any religion in him, breaks the most elementary commandments in the decalogue.”

“I cannot agree with you,” she said, turning her face askance, for she knew not how much of her brother’s language was sincere, and how much assumed, the extent of his discoveries with regard to her secret ties being a mystery. At moments she was disposed to declare the

whole truth, and have done with it. But she hesitated, and left the words unsaid; and Louis continued his breakfast in silence.

When he had finished, and she had eaten little or nothing, he asked once more, "How do you intend to answer that letter? Here you are, the poorest woman in the county, abandoned by people who used to be glad to know you, and leading a life as dismal and dreary as a nun's, when an opportunity is offered you of leaping at once into a leading position in this part of England. Bishops are given to hospitality; you would be welcomed everywhere. In short, your answer must be yes."

"And yet it will be no," she said, in a low voice. She had at length learnt, from the tone of her brother's latter remarks, that at any rate he had no know-

ledge of her actual marriage, whatever indirect ties he might suspect her guilty of.

Louis could restrain himself no longer at her answer. "Then conduct your affairs your own way. I know you to be leading a life that won't bear investigation, and I'm hanged if I'll stay here any longer!"

Saying which, Glanville jerked back his chair, and strode out of the room. In less than a quarter of an hour, and before she had moved a step from the table, she heard him leaving the house.

## CHAPTER III.

WHAT to do she could not tell. The step to which Swithin had entreated her, objectionable and premature as it had seemed, in a county aspect, would at all events have saved her from this dilemma. Had she allowed him to tell the Bishop his simple story in its fulness, who could say but that that divine might have generously bridled his own impulses, entered into the case with sympathy, and forwarded with zest their designs for the future, owing to his interest of old in Swithin's father, and in the naturally attractive features of the young man's career?



A puff of wind from the open window, wafting the Bishop's letter to the floor, aroused her from her reverie. With a sigh she stooped and picked it up, glanced at it again ; then arose, and with the deliberateness of inevitable action wrote her reply :—

“ WELLAND HOUSE,

“ *June 29, 18—.*

“ MY DEAR BISHOP OF MELCHESTER,—I confess to you that your letter, so gracious and flattering as it is, has taken your friend somewhat unawares. The least I can do in return for its contents is to reply as quickly as possible.

“ There is no one in the world who esteems your high qualities more than myself, or who has greater faith in your ability to adorn the episcopal seat that you have been called on to fill. But to your question I can give only one reply, and that is an un-

qualified negative. To state this unavoidable decision distresses me, without affectation; and I trust you will believe that, though I decline the distinction of becoming your wife, I shall never cease to interest myself in all that pertains to you and your office; and shall feel the keenest regret if this refusal should operate to prevent a lifelong friendship between us.

“I am, my dear Bishop of Melchester,

“Ever sincerely yours,

“VIVIETTE ——.”

“Viviette what?” she exclaimed to herself hopelessly, as she flung down the pen.

A sudden revulsion from the subterfuge of signing herself “Viviette Constantine,” in a letter of this serious sort, and the impracticability of using another signature for the present, wrought in her mind a feeling of dissatisfaction with the whole

epistle, and pushing it aside she allowed it to remain unsubscribed. In a few minutes she heard Swithin approaching, when she put the letter out of the way, and turned to receive him.

Swithin entered quietly, and looked round the room. Seeing, with unexpected pleasure, that she was there alone, he came over and kissed her. Her discomposure at some foregone event was soon obvious.

“Has my staying caused you any trouble?” he asked, in a whisper. “Where is your brother this morning?”

She smiled through her perplexity as she took his hand. “The oddest things happen to me, dear Swithin,” she said. “Do you wish particularly to know what has happened now?”

“Yes, if you don’t mind telling me.”

“I do mind telling you. But I must. Among other things, I am resolving to give

way to your representations,—in part, at least. It will be best to tell the Bishop everything, and my brother, if not other people.”

“I am truly glad to hear it, Viviette,” said he cheerfully. “I have felt for a long time that honesty is the best policy.”

“I at any rate feel it now. But it is a policy that requires a great deal of courage!”

“It certainly requires some courage,—I should not say a great deal; and indeed, as far as I am concerned, it demands less courage to speak out than to hold my tongue.”

“But, you silly boy, you don’t know what has happened. The Bishop has made me an offer of marriage.”

“Good gracious, what an impertinent old man! What have you done about it, dearest?”

“ Well, I have hardly accepted him,” she replied, laughing. “ It is this event which has suggested to me that I should make my refusal a reason for confiding our situation to him.”

“ What would you have done if you had not been already appropriated ? ”

“ That’s an inscrutable mystery. He is a worthy man ; but he has very pronounced views about his own position, and some other undesirable qualities. Still, who knows ? You must bless your stars that you have secured me. Now let us consider how to draw up our confession to him. I wish I had listened to you at the first, and allowed you to take him into our confidence before his declaration arrived. He may possibly resent the concealment now. However, this cannot be helped.”

“ I tell you what, Viviette,” said Swithin, after a thoughtful pause, “ if the Bishop

is such an earthly sort of man as this, a man who goes falling in love, and wanting to marry you, and so on, I am not disposed to confess anything to him at all. I fancied him altogether different from that."

"But he's none the worse for it, dear."

"I think he is—to lecture me and love you, all in one breath!"

"Still, that's only a passing phase; and you first proposed making a confidant of him."

"I did. . . . Very well. Then we are to tell nobody but the Bishop?"

"And my brother Louis. I must tell him; it is unavoidable. He suspects me in a way I could never have credited of him!"

Swithin, as was before stated, had arranged to start for Greenwich that morning, permission having been accorded him by the Astronomer-Royal to view the Observatory; and their final decision was that,

as he could not afford time to sit down with her and write to the Bishop in collaboration, each should, during the day, compose a well-considered letter, disclosing their position from his and her own point of view; Lady Constantine leading up to her confession by her refusal of the Bishop's hand. It was necessary that she should know what Swithin contemplated saying, that her statements might precisely harmonize. He ultimately agreed to send her his letter by the next morning's post, when, having read it, she would in due course dispatch it with her own.

As soon as he had breakfasted Swithin went his way, promising to return from Greenwich by the end of the week.

Viviette passed the remainder of that long summer day, during which her young husband was receding towards the capital, in an almost motionless state. At some

instants she felt exultant at the idea of announcing her marriage, and defying general opinion. At another her heart misgave her, and she was tormented by a fear lest Swithin should some day accuse her of having hampered his deliberately shaped plan of life by her intrusive romanticism. That was often the trick of men who had sealed by marriage, in their inexperienced youth, a love for those whom their maturer judgment would have rejected as too obviously disproportionate in years.

However, it was now too late for these lugubrious thoughts ; and, bracing herself, she began to frame the new reply to Bishop Helmsdale—the plain, unvarnished tale that was to supplant the undivulging answer first written. She was engaged on this difficult production till daylight faded in the west, and the broad-faced moon edged upwards, like a plate of old gold,



over the elms towards the village. By that time Swithin had reached Greenwich; her brother had gone she knew not where; and she and loneliness dwelt solely, as before, within the walls of Welland House.

At this hour of sunset and moonrise the new parlour-maid entered, to inform her that Mr. Cecil's head clerk, from Warborne, particularly wished to see her.

Mr. Cecil was her solicitor, and she knew of nothing whatever that required his intervention just at present. But he would not have sent at this time of day without excellent reasons, and she directed that the young man might be shown in where she was. On his entry, the first thing she noticed was that in his hand he carried a newspaper.

“In case you should not have seen this

evening's paper, Lady Constantine, Mr. Cecil has directed me to bring it to you at once, on account of what appears there in relation to your ladyship. He has only just seen it himself."

"What is it? How does it concern me?"

"I will point it out."

"Read it yourself to me. Though I am afraid there's not enough light."

"I can see very well here," said the lawyer's clerk, stepping to the window. Folding back the paper he read:—

““ NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

““ CAPE TOWN, *May 17, viâ Plymouth.*—A correspondent of the *Cape Chronicle* states that he has interviewed an Englishman just arrived from the interior, and learns from him that a considerable misapprehension exists in England concerning the

death of the traveller and hunter, Sir Blount Constantine—’”

“Oh, he’s living! My husband is alive” she cried, sinking down in nearly a fainting condition.

“No, my lady. Sir Blount is dead enough, I am sorry to say.”

“Dead, did you say?”

“Certainly, Lady Constantine; there is no doubt of it.”

She sat up, and her intense relief almost made itself perceptible like a fresh atmosphere in the room. “Yes. Then what did you come for?” she asked calmly.

“That Sir Blount has died is unquestionable,” replied the lawyer’s clerk gently. “But there has been some mistake about the date of his death.”

“He died of malarious fever on the banks of the Zouga, October 24, 18—.”

“No; he only lay ill there a long time

it seems. It was a companion who died at that date. But I'll read the account to your ladyship, with your permission :—

“ ‘ The decease of this somewhat eccentric wanderer did not occur at the time hitherto supposed, but only in last December. The following is the account of the Englishman alluded to, given as nearly as possible in his own words : During the illness of Sir Blount and his friend by the Zouga, three of the servants went away, taking with them a portion of his clothing and effects ; and it must be they who spread the report of his death at this time. After his companion's death he mended, and when he was strong enough he and I travelled on to a healthier district. I urged him not to delay his return to England ; but he was much against going back there again, and became so rough in his manner towards me that we parted com-

pany at the first opportunity I could find. I joined a party of white traders returning to the West Coast. I stayed here among the Portuguese for many months. I then found that an English travelling party were going to explore a district adjoining that which I had formerly traversed with Sir Blount. They said they would be glad of my services, and I joined them. When we had crossed the territory to the south of Ulunda, and drew near to Marzambo, I heard tidings of a man living there whom I suspected to be Sir Blount, although he was not known by that name. Being so near, I was induced to seek him out, and found that he was indeed the same. He had dropped his old name altogether, and had married a native princess—' ”

“Married a native princess !” said Lady Constantine.

“That’s what it says, my lady,—‘ mar-

ried a native princess according to the rites of the tribe, and was living very happily with her. He told me he should never return to England again. He also told me that, having seen this princess just after I had left him, he had been attracted by her, and had thereupon decided to reside with her in that country, as being a land which afforded him greater happiness than he could hope to attain elsewhere. He asked me to stay with him, instead of going on with my party, and not reveal his real title to any of them. After some hesitation I did stay, and was not uncomfortable at first. But I soon found that Sir Blount drank much harder now than when I had known him, and that he was at times very greatly depressed in mind at his position. One morning in the middle of December last I heard a shot from his dwelling. His wife rushed frantically past

me, as I hastened to the spot, and when I had entered I found that he had put an end to himself with his revolver. His princess was broken-hearted all that day. When we had buried him, I discovered in his house a little box directed to his solicitors at Warborne, in England, and a note for myself, saying that I had better get the first chance of returning that offered, and requesting me to take the box with me. It is supposed to contain papers and articles for friends in England who have deemed him dead for some time.' ”

The clerk stopped his reading, and there was a silence. “The middle of last December,” she at length said, in a whisper. “Has the box arrived yet?”

“Not yet, my lady. We have no further proof of anything. As soon as the package comes to hand you shall know of it immediately.

Such was the clerk's mission; and, leaving the paper with her, he withdrew. The intelligence amounted to thus much: that, Sir Blount having been alive till at least six weeks after her marriage with Swithin St. Cleeve, Swithin St. Cleeve was not her husband in the eye of the law; that she would have to consider how her marriage with the latter might be instantly repeated, to establish herself legally as that young man's wife.



## CHAPTER IV.

NEXT morning Viviette received a visit from Mr. Cecil himself. He informed her that the box spoken of by the servant had arrived quite unexpectedly, just after the departure of his clerk on the previous evening. There had not been sufficient time for him to thoroughly examine it as yet, but he had seen enough to enable him to state that it contained letters, dated memoranda in Sir Blount's handwriting, notes referring to events which had happened later than his supposed death, and other irrefragable proofs that the account in the newspapers was correct as to the

main fact—the comparatively recent date of Sir Blount's decease.

She looked up, and spoke with the irresponsible helplessness of a child.

“On reviewing the circumstances, I cannot think how I could have allowed myself to believe the first tidings!” she said.

“Everybody else believed them, and why should not you have done so?” said the lawyer.

“How came the will to be permitted to be proved, as there could, after all, have been no complete evidence?” she asked. “If I had been the executrix I would not have attempted it! As I was not, I know very little about how the business was pushed through. In a very unseemly way, I think.”

“Well, no,” said Mr. Cecil, feeling himself morally called upon to defend legal

procedure from such imputations. “It was done in the usual way in all cases where the proof of death is only presumptive. The evidence, such as it was, was laid before the court by the applicants, your husband’s cousins; and the servants who had been with him deposed to his death with a particularity that was deemed sufficient. Their error was, not that somebody died—for somebody did die at the time affirmed—but that they mistook one person for another; the person who died being not Sir Blount Constantine. The court was of opinion that the evidence led up to a reasonable inference that the deceased was actually Sir Blount, and probate was granted on the strength of it. As there was a doubt about the exact day of the month, the applicants were allowed to swear that he died on or after the date last given of his existence—

which, in spite of their error then, has really come true, now, of course."

"They little think what they have done to me by being so ready to swear!" she murmured.

Mr. Cecil, supposing her to allude only to the pecuniary straits in which she had been prematurely placed by the will taking effect a year before its due time, said, "True. It has been to your ladyship's loss, and to their gain. But they will make ample restitution, no doubt; and all will be wound up satisfactorily."

Lady Constantine was far from explaining that this was not her meaning; and after some further conversation of a purely technical nature, Mr. Cecil left her presence.

When she was again unencumbered with the necessity of exhibiting a proper bearing, the sense that she had greatly suffered

in pocket by the undue haste of the executors weighed upon her mind with a pressure quite inappreciable beside the greater gravity of her personal position. What was her position as legatee to her situation as a woman! Her face crimsoned with a flush which she was almost ashamed to show to the daylight, as she hastily penned the following note to Swithin at Greenwich—certainly one of the most informal documents she had ever written.

“WELLAND, *Thursday*.

“O Swithin, my dear Swithin, what I have to tell you is so sad and so humiliating that I can hardly write it—and yet I must. Though we are dearer to each other than all the world besides, and as firmly united as if we were one, I am not legally your wife! Sir Blount did not die till some time after we in England sup-

posed. The service must be repeated instantly! I have not been able to sleep all night. I feel so frightened and ashamed that I can scarcely arrange my thoughts. The newspaper sent with this will explain, if you have not seen particulars. Do come to me as soon as you can, that we may consult on what to do. Burn this at once.

“YOUR VIVIETTE.”

When the note was despatched, she remembered that there was another hardly less important question to be answered—the proposal of the Bishop for her hand. His communication had sunk into nothingness beside the momentous news that had so greatly distressed her. The two replies lay before her—the one she had first written, simply declining to become Dr. Helmsdale’s wife, without giving reasons; the second, which she had elaborated with

so much care on the previous day, relating in confidential detail the history of her love for Swithin, their secret marriage, and their hopes for the future; asking his advice on what their procedure should be to escape the strictures of a censorious world. It was the letter she had barely finished writing when Mr. Cecil's clerk announced news tantamount to a declaration that she was no wife at all.

This epistle she now destroyed—and with the less reluctance in knowing that Swithin had been somewhat averse to the confession as soon as he found that Bishop Helmsdale was also a victim to tender sentiment concerning her. The first—which she had been unable to honestly sign “Viviette Constantine,” and could not openly sign “Viviette St. Cleeve,” she sadly filled in with the former surname, and sent the missive on its way.

Strange it was to her, and yet in keeping with the tenour of human affairs, that the difficulty of signing that letter should have resolved itself by the only means which at the time of writing she would have deemed non-existent. There had been a thousand reasons why she should sign "Viviette Constantine," even when believing herself no longer owner of that name: that she should ultimately sign it because it had never ceased to be hers, was a reason that distanced all conjecture.

The sense of her undefinable position kept her from much repose on the second night also; but the following morning brought an unexpected letter from Swithin, written about the same hour as hers to him, and it comforted her much.

He had seen the account in the papers almost as soon as it had come to her knowledge, and sent this line to reassure her



in the perturbation she must naturally feel. She was not to be alarmed at all. They two were husband and wife in moral intent and antecedent belief, and the legal flaw which accident had so curiously uncovered could be mended in half-an-hour. He would return on Saturday night at latest, but as the hour would probably be far advanced, he would ask her to meet him by slipping out of the house to the tower any time during service on Sunday morning, when there would be few persons about likely to observe them. Meanwhile he might provisionally state that their best course in the emergency would be, instead of confessing to anybody that there had already been a solemnization of marriage between them, to arrange their re-marriage in as open a manner as possible—as if it were the just-reached climax of a sudden affection, instead of a harking

back to an old departure—prefacing it by a public announcement in the usual way.

This plan of approaching their second union with all the show and circumstance of a new thing, recommended itself to her strongly, but for one objection—that by such a course the wedding could not, without appearing like an act of unseemly haste, take place so quickly as she desired for her own moral satisfaction. It might take place somewhat early, say in the course of a month or two, without bringing down upon her the charge of levity; for Sir Blount, a notoriously unkind husband, had been out of her sight four years, and in his grave nearly one. But what she naturally desired was that there should be no more delay than was positively necessary for obtaining a new licence—two or three days at longest; and in view of this celerity it was next to im-

possible to make due preparation for a wedding of ordinary publicity, performed in her own church, from her own house, with a feast and amusements for the villagers, a tea for the school children, a bonfire, and other of those proclamatory accessories which, by meeting wonder half-way, deprive it of much of its intensity. It must be admitted, too, that she even now shrank from the shock of surprise that would inevitably be caused by her openly taking for husband such a mere youth of no position as Swithin still appeared, notwithstanding that in years he was by this time within a trifle of one-and-twenty.

The straightforward course had, nevertheless, so much to recommend it, so well avoided the disadvantage of future revelation which a private repetition of the ceremony would entail, that, assuming she

could depend upon Swithin, as she knew she could do, good sense counselled its serious consideration.

She became more composed at her queer situation : hour after hour passed, and the first spasmodic impulse of womanly decorum—not to let the sun go down upon her present improper state—was quite controllable. She could regard the strange contingency that had arisen with something like philosophy. The day slipped by : she thought of the awkwardness of the accident rather than of its humiliation ; and, loving Swithin now in a far calmer spirit than at that past date when they had rushed into each other's arms and vowed to be one for the first time, she ever and anon caught herself reflecting, “ Were it not that for my honour's sake I must remarry him, I should perhaps be a nobler woman in not allowing him to encumber his

bright future by a union with me at all."

This thought, at first artificially raised, as little more than a mental exercise, became by stages a genuine conviction; and while her heart enforced her reason regretted the necessity of abstaining from self-sacrifice—the being obliged, despite his curious escape from the first attempt, to lime Swithin's young wings again solely for her credit's sake.

However, the deed had to be done; Swithin was to be made legally hers. Selfishness in a conjuncture of this sort was excusable, and even obligatory. Taking brighter views, she hoped that upon the whole this yoking of the young fellow with her, a portionless woman and his senior, would not greatly endanger his career. In such a mood night overtook her, and she went to bed conjecturing that Swithin had

by this time arrived in the parish, was perhaps even at that moment passing homeward beneath her walls, and that in less than twelve hours she would have met him, have ventilated the secret which oppressed her, and have satisfactorily arranged with him the details of their reunion.

## CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY morning came, and complicated her previous emotions by bringing a new and unexpected shock to mingle with them. The postman had delivered among other things an illustrated newspaper, sent by a hand she did not recognize ; and on opening the cover the sheet that met her eyes filled her with a horror which she could not express. The print was one which drew largely on its imagination for its engravings, and it already contained an illustration of the death of Sir Blount Constantine. In this work of art he was represented as standing with his pistol to

his mouth, his brains being in process of flying up to the roof of his chamber, and his native princess rushing terror-stricken away to a remote position in the thicket of palms which neighboured the dwelling.

The crude realism of the picture, possibly harmless enough in its effect upon others, overpowered and sickened her. By a curious fascination she would look at it again and again, till every line of the engraver's performance seemed really a transcript from what had happened before his eyes. With such details fresh in her thoughts she was going out of the door to make arrangements for confirming, by repetition, her marriage with another. No interval was available for serious reflection on the tragedy, or for allowing the softening effects of time to operate in her mind. It was as though her first husband had died that moment, and she was keeping an



appointment with another in the presence of his corpse.

So revived was the actuality of Sir Blount's recent life and death by this incident, that the distress of her personal relations with Swithin was the single force in the world which could have coerced her into abandoning to him the interval she would fain have set apart for getting over these new and painful impressions. Self-pity for ill-usage afforded her good reasons for ceasing to love Sir Blount; but he was yet too closely intertwined with her past life to be destructible on the instant as a memory.

But there was no choice of occasions for her now, and she steadily waited for the church bells to cease chiming. At last all was silent; the surrounding cottagers had gathered themselves within the walls of the adjacent building. Tabitha

Lark's first voluntary then droned from the tower window, and Lady Constantine left the garden in which she had been loitering and went towards Rings-Hill Speer.

The sense of her situation obscured the morning prospect. The country was unusually silent under the intensifying sun, the songless season of birds having just set in. Choosing her path amid the efts that were basking upon the outer slopes of the plantation, she wound her way up the tree-shrouded camp to the wooden cabin in the centre.

The door was ajar, but on entering she found the place empty. The tower door was also partly open; and listening at the foot of the stairs she heard Swithin above, shifting the telescope and wheeling round the rumbling dome, apparently in preparation for the next nocturnal reconnoitre. There was no doubt that he would descend

in a minute or two to look for her, and not wishing to interrupt him till he was ready she re-entered the cabin, where she patiently seated herself among the books and papers that lay scattered about.

She did as she had often done before when waiting there for him; that is, she occupied her moments in turning over the papers and examining the progress of his labours. The notes were mostly astronomical of course, and she had managed to keep sufficiently abreast of him to catch the meaning of a good many of these. The litter on the table, however, was somewhat more profuse and miscellaneous in character this morning than usual, as if it had been hurriedly overhauled. Among the rest of the sheets lay an open note, and, in the entire confidence that existed between them, she glanced over and read it as a matter of course.

It was a most business-like communication, and beyond the address and date contained only the following words:—

“DEAR SIR,—We beg leave to draw your attention to a letter we addressed to you on the 26th ult., to which we have not yet been favoured with a reply. As the time for payment of the first moiety of the four hundred pounds per annum settled on you by your late uncle is now at hand, we should be obliged by your giving directions as to where and in what manner the money is to be handed over to you, and shall also be glad to receive any other definite instructions from you with regard to the future.

“We are, dear sir,

“Yours faithfully,

“HANNER AND RAWLES.

“Switwin St. Cleeve, Esq.”

An income of four hundred a year for Swithin, whom she had hitherto understood to be possessed of an annuity of eighty pounds at the outside, with no prospect of increasing the sum but by hard work! What could this communication mean? He whose custom and delight it was to tell her all his heart, had breathed not a syllable of this matter to her, though it met the very difficulty towards which their discussions invariably tended—how to secure for him a competency that should enable him to establish his pursuits on a wider basis, and throw himself into more direct communion with the scientific world. Quite bewildered by the lack of any explanation, she rose from her seat, and with the note in her hand ascended the winding tower-steps.

Reaching the upper aperture she perceived him under the dome, moving

musingly about as if he had never been absent an hour, his light hair frilling out from under the edge of his velvet skullcap as it had always been wont to do. No question of marriage or not marriage seemed to be disturbing the mind of this juvenile husband of hers. The *primum mobile* of his gravitation was apparently the equatorial telescope which she had given him, and which he was carefully adjusting by means of screws and clamps. Hearing her movements, he turned his head.

“O here you are, my dear Viviette! I was just beginning to expect you,” he exclaimed, coming forward. “I ought to have been looking out for you, but I have found a little defect here in the instrument, and I wanted to set it right before evening comes on. As a rule it is not a good thing to tinker your glasses; but I have

found that the diffraction-rings are not perfect circles. I learnt at Greenwich how to correct them—so kind they have been to me there!—and so I have been loosening the screws and gently shifting the glass, till I think that I have at last made the illumination equal all round. I have so much to tell you about my visit; one thing is, that the astronomical world is getting quite excited about the coming Transit of Venus. There is to be a regular expedition fitted out. How I should like to join it!”

He spoke enthusiastically, and with eyes sparkling at the mental image of the said expedition; and as it was rather gloomy in the dome he rolled it round on its axis, till the shuttered slit for the telescope directly faced the morning sun, which thereupon flooded the concave interior, touching the bright metal-work of the

equatorial, and lighting up her pale, troubled face.

“But Swithin!” she faltered; “my letter to you—our marriage!”

“O yes, this marriage question,” he added. “I had not forgotten it, dear Viviette—or at least only for a few minutes.”

“Can you forget it, Swithin, for a moment? Oh, how can you?” she said reproachfully. “It is such a distressing thing. It drives away all my rest?”

“Forgotten is not the word I should have used,” he apologized. “Temporarily dismissed it from my mind, is all I meant. The simple fact is, that the vastness of the field of astronomy reduces every terrestrial thing to atomic dimensions. Do not trouble, dearest. The remedy is quite easy, as I stated in my letter. We can now be married in a prosy public way. Yes, early or late—next week, next month,



six months hence—just as you choose. Say the word when, and I will obey.”

The absence of all anxiety or consternation from his face contrasted strangely with hers, which at last he saw, and, looking at the writing she held, inquired,—

“But what paper have you in your hand?”

“A letter which to me is actually inexplicable,” said she, her curiosity returning to the letter, and overriding for the instant her immediate concerns. “What does this income of four hundred a year mean? Why have you never told me about it, dear Swithin? or does it not refer to you?”

He looked at the note, flushed slightly, and was absolutely unable to begin his reply at once.

“I did not mean you to see that, Viviette,” he murmured.

“Why not?”

“I thought you had better not, as it does not concern me further now. The solicitors are labouring under a mistake in supposing that it does. I have to write at once and inform them that the annuity is not mine to receive.”

“What a strange mystery in your life!” she said, forcing a perplexed smile. “Something to balance the tragedy in mine. I am absolutely in the dark as to your past history, it seems. And yet I had thought you told me everything.”

“I could not tell you that, Viviette, because it would have endangered our relations—though not in the way you may suppose. You would have reproved me. You, who are so generous and noble, would have forbidden me to do what I did; and I was determined not to be forbidden.”

“To do what?”

“To marry you.”

“Why should I have forbidden?”

“Must I tell—what I would not?” he said, placing his hands upon her arms, and looking somewhat sadly at her. “Well, perhaps as it has come to this you ought to know all, since it can make no possible difference to my intentions now. We are one for ever—legal blunders notwithstanding; for happily they are quickly reparable—and this question of a devise from my uncle Jocelyn only concerned me when I was a single man.”

Thereupon, with obviously no consideration of the possibilities that were reopened by the nullity of their marriage contract, he related in detail, and not without misgiving for having concealed them so long, the events that had occurred on the morning of their wedding-day; how he had

met the postman on his way to Warborne, after dressing in the cabin, and how he had received from him the letter his dead uncle had confided to his family lawyers, informing him of the bequest, and of the important conditions attached—that he should remain unmarried until his five-and-twentieth year; how in comparison with the possession of her dear self he had reckoned the income as nought, abandoned all idea of it there and then, and had come on to the wedding as if nothing had happened to interrupt for a moment the working out of their plan; how he had scarcely thought with any closeness of the circumstances of the case since, until reminded of them by this note she had seen, and a previous one of a like sort received from the same solicitors.”

“O, Swithin! Swithin!” she cried, bursting into tears as she realized it all,

and sinking on the observing-chair; "I have ruined you! yes, I have ruined you!"

The young man was dismayed by her unexpected grief, and endeavoured to soothe her; but she seemed touched by a poignant remorse which would not be comforted.

"And now," she continued, as soon as she could speak, "when you are once more free, and in a position—actually in a position to claim the annuity that would be the making of you, I am compelled to come to you, and beseech you to undo yourself again, merely to save me!"

"Not to save you, Viviette, but to bless me. You do not ask me to remarry; it is not a question of alternatives at all; it is my straight course. I do not dream of doing otherwise. I should be wretched if you thought for one moment I could entertain the idea of doing otherwise."

But the more he said the worse he made the matter. It was a state of affairs that would not bear discussion at all, and the unsophisticated view he took of his course seemed to increase her responsibility.

“Why did your uncle attach such a cruel condition to his bounty?” she cried bitterly. “O, he little thinks how hard he hits me from the grave—me, who have never done him wrong; and you, too! Swithin, are you sure that he makes that condition indispensable? Perhaps he meant that you should not marry beneath you; perhaps he did not mean to object in such a case as your marrying (forgive me for saying it) a little above you.”

“There is no doubt that he did not contemplate a case which has led to such happiness as this has done,” the youth murmured with hesitation: for though he scarcely remembered a word of his uncle’s

letter of advice, he had a dim apprehension that it was couched in terms alluding specifically to Lady Constantine.

“Are you sure you cannot retain the money, and be my lawful husband too?” she asked piteously. “O, what a wrong I am doing you! I did not dream that it could be as bad as this. I knew I was wasting your time by letting you love me, and hampering your projects; but I thought there were compensating advantages. This wrecking of your future at my hands I did not contemplate. You are sure there is no escape? Have you his letter with the conditions, or the will? Let me see the letter in which he expresses his wishes.”

“I assure you it is all as I say,” he pensively returned.

“But how does he put it? How does he justify himself in making such a harsh

restriction. Do let me see the letter, Swithin. I shall think it a want of confidence if you do not. I may discover some way out of the difficulty if you let me look at the papers. Eccentric wills can be evaded in all sorts of ways."

Still he hesitated. "I would rather you did not see the papers," he said.

But she persisted as only a fond woman can. Her conviction was that she who, as a woman many years his senior, should have shown her love for him by guiding him straight into the paths he aimed at, had (though in some respect unwittingly) blocked his attempted career for her own happiness. This made her more intent than ever to find out a device by which, while she still retained him, he might also retain the life-interest under his uncle's will.

Her entreaties were at length too potent



for his resistance. Accompanying her down-stairs to the cabin, he opened the desk from which the other papers had been taken, and against his better judgment handed her the ominous communication of Jocelyn St. Cleeve, which lay in the envelope just as it had been received three-quarters of a year earlier.

“Don’t read it now,” he said. “Don’t spoil our meeting by entering into a subject which is virtually past and done with. Take it with you, and look it over at your leisure—merely as an old curiosity, remember, and not as a still operative document. I have almost forgotten what the contents are, beyond the general advice and stipulation that I was to remain a bachelor.”

“At any rate,” she rejoined, “do not reply to the note I have seen from the solicitors till I have read this also.”

He promised. "But now about our public wedding," he said. "Like certain royal personages, we shall have had the religious rite and the civil contract performed on independent occasions. Will you fix the day? When is it to be? and shall it take place at a registrar's office, since there is no necessity for having the sacred part over again?"

"I'll think," replied she. "I'll think it over."

"And let me know as soon as you can how you decide to proceed."

"I will write to-morrow, or come. I do not know what to say now. I cannot forget how I am wronging you. This is almost more than I can bear!"

To divert her mind he began talking about Greenwich Observatory, and the great instruments therein, and how he had been received by the astronomers, and the

details of the expedition to observe the Transit of Venus, together with many other subjects of the sort, to which she had not power to lend her attention.

“I must reach home before the people are out of church,” she at length said wearily. “I wish nobody to know I have been out this morning.” And forbidding Swithin to cross into the open in her company, she left him on the edge of the isolated plantation, which had latterly known her tread so well.

## CHAPTER VI.

LADY CONSTANTINE crossed the field and the park beyond, and found on passing the church that the congregation was still within. There was no hurry for getting indoors, the open windows enabling her to hear that Mr. Torkingham had only just given out his text. So instead of entering the house she went through the garden-door to the old bowling-green, and sat down in the arbour that Louis had occupied when he overheard the interview between Swithin and the Bishop. Not until then did she find courage to draw out the letter and papers relating to the bequest, which

Swithin in a critical moment had handed to her.

Had he been ever so little older he would not have placed that unconsidered confidence in Viviette which had led him to give way to her curiosity. But the influence over him which eight outnumbering years lent her was immensely increased by her higher position and wider experiences, and he had yielded the point, as he yielded all social points ; while the same conditions exempted him from any deep consciousness that it was his duty to protect her even from herself.

The preamble of Dr. St. Cleeve's letter, in which he referred to his pleasure at hearing of the young man's promise as an astronomer, disturbed her not at all—indeed, somewhat prepossessed her in favour of the old gentleman who had written it. The first item of what he called “ unfavourable

news," namely, the allusion to the inadequacy of Swithin's income to the wants of a scientific man, whose lines of work were not calculated to produce pecuniary emolument for many years, deepened the cast of her face to concern. She reached the second item of the so-called unfavourable news; and her face flushed as she read how the doctor had learnt "that there was something in your path worse than narrow means, and that something is a woman."

"To save you, if possible, from ruin on these heads," she read on, "I take the preventive measures detailed below." And then followed the announcement of the 400*l.* a year settled on the youth for life, on the single condition that he remained unmarried till the age of twenty-five—just as Swithin had explained to her. She next learnt that the bequest was for a definite object—that he might have re-

sources sufficient to enable him to travel in an inexpensive way, and begin a study of the southern constellations, which, according to the shrewd old man's judgment, were a mine not so thoroughly worked as the northern, and therefore to be recommended. This was followed by some sentences which hit her in the face like a switch:—

“The only other preventive step in my power is that of exhortation . . . Swithin St. Cleeve, don't make a fool of yourself, as your father did. If your studies are to be worth anything, believe me they must be carried on without the help of a woman. Avoid her, and every one of the sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing. Eschew all of that sort for many a year yet. Moreover, I say, the lady of your acquaintance avoid in particular. . . . She has, in addition to her original disqualifi-

cation as a companion for you (that is, that of sex) these two special drawbacks: she is much older than yourself—”

Lady Constantine's indignant flush forsook her, and pale despair succeeded in its stead. Alas, it was true. Handsome, and in her prime, she might be; but she was too old for Swithin!

“And she is so impoverished. . . . Beyond this, frankly, I don't think well of her. I don't think well of any woman who dotes upon a man younger than herself. . . . To care to be the first fancy of a young fellow like you shows no great common sense in her. If she were worth her salt she would have too much pride to be intimate with a youth in your unassured position, to say no more.” (Viviette's face by this time tingled hot again.) “She is old enough to know that a *liaison* with her may, and almost certainly would,



be your ruin ; and, on the other hand, that a marriage would be preposterous—unless she is a complete fool ; and in that case there is even more reason for avoiding her than if she were in her few senses.

“ A woman of honourable feeling, nephew, would be careful to do nothing to hinder you in your career, as this putting of herself in your way most certainly will. Yet I hear that she professes a great anxiety on this same future of yours as a physicist. The best way in which she can show the reality of her anxiety is by leaving you to yourself.”

Leaving him to himself ! She paled again, as if chilled by a conviction that in this the old man was right.

“ She'll blab your most secret plans and theories to every one of her acquaintance, and make you appear ridiculous by announcing them before they are matured.

If you attempt to study with a woman, you'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. . . . .

“A woman waking your passions just at a moment when you are endeavouring to shine intellectually, is like stirring up the mud at the bottom of a clear brook. All your brightness and sparkle are taken away; you become moping and thick-headed; obstructions that before only brought out your brilliancies, now disfigure each dull attempt to surmount them.”

Thus much the letter; and it was enough for her, indeed. The flushes of indignation which had passed over her as she gathered this man's opinion of herself, combined with flushes of grief and shame

when she considered that Swithin—her dear Swithin—was perfectly acquainted with this cynical view of her nature; that, reject it as he might, and as he unquestionably did, such thoughts of her had been implanted in him, and lay in him. Stifled as they were, they lay in him like seeds too deep for germination, which accident might some day bring near the surface and aërate into life.

The humiliation of such a possibility was almost too much to endure; the mortification—she had known nothing like it till now. But this was not all. Those tingling emotions were succeeded by a feeling, in comparison with which resentment and mortification were happy moods—a miserable conviction that this old man who spoke from the grave was not altogether wrong in his speaking; that he was only half wrong; that he was, perhaps, virtually

right. Only those persons who are by nature affected with that ready esteem for others' positions which induces an undervaluing of their own, fully experience the deep smart of such convictions against self—the wish for annihilation that is engendered in the moment of despair, at feeling that at length we, our best firmest friend, cease to believe in our cause.

Viviette could hear the people coming out of church on the other side of the garden wall. Their footsteps and their cheerful voices died away; the bell rang for lunch; and she went in. But her life during that morning and afternoon was wholly introspective. Knowing the full circumstances of his situation as she knew them now—as she had never before known them—ought she to make herself the legal wife of Swithin St. Cleeve, and so secure

her own honour at any price to him? such was the formidable question which Lady Constantine propounded to her startled understanding. As a subjectively honest woman solely, beginning her charity at home, there was no doubt that she ought. Save thyself was sound Old Testament doctrine, and not altogether discountenanced in the New. But was there a line of conduct which transcended mere self-preservation? and would it not be an excellent thing to put it in practice now?

That she had wronged St. Cleeve by marrying him—that she would wrong him infinitely more by completing the marriage—there was, in her opinion, no doubt. She in her experience had sought out him in his inexperience, and had led him like a child. She remembered—as if it had been her fault, though it was in fact only her misfortune—that she had been the one to

go for the licence and take up residence in the parish in which they were wedded. He was now just one-and-twenty. Without her, he had all the world before him, four hundred a year, and leave to cut as straight a road to fame as he should choose: with her, this story was negatived. Beyond leading him to waste the active spring-time of his life in idle adoration of her as his sweetheart, and depriving him of his inestimable independency by allowing him to make her his wife, she had indirectly been the means of ruining him in the good opinion of Bishop Helmsdale—a man who was once his father's acquaintance, and who had been strongly disposed to become the younger man's friend. Encouragement and aid from the Bishop would have been of no mean value to a youth without backers of any kind.

On the other hand, what had he gained

by his alliance with her? Well, an equatorial telescope—that was about all. While, to set against this, there was the disinclination to adventure further which her constant presence had imparted; the yoke with a woman whose disparity of years, though immaterial just now, would operate in the future as a wet blanket upon his social ambitions; and that content with life as it was which she had noticed more than once in him latterly, and which was imperilling his scientific spirit by abstracting his zeal for progress.

It was impossible, in short, to blind herself to the inference that marriage with her had not benefited him, as a man who (in her fond belief) had a work to do, to the extent they both had expected. Matters might improve in the future; but to take upon herself the whole liability of Swithin's life, as she would do by depriving him of the

help his uncle had offered, was a fearful responsibility. How could she, an undowered woman, replace such assistance? His recent visit to Greenwich, which had momentarily revived that zest for his pursuit that was now less constant than heretofore, should by rights be supplemented by other such expeditions. It would be true benevolence not to deprive him of means to continue them, so as to keep his ardour alive, regardless of the cost to herself.

It could be done. By the extraordinary favour of a unique accident she had now an opportunity of redeeming Swithin's seriously compromised future, and restoring him to a state no worse than his first. His annuity could be enjoyed by him, his travels undertaken, his studies pursued, his high vocation initiated, by one little sacrifice—that of herself. She only had to



refuse to legalize their marriage, to part from him for ever, and all would be well with him thenceforward. The pain to him would after all be but slight, whatever it might be to his wretched Viviette.

Such passion as he had shown for her—boyish, and never perhaps very strong—had, in the inevitable course of marriage on such terms, been softened down to mild affection. She had seen only too clearly this morning that owing to his Greenwich visit she had again sunk to a second place in his heart, if she had ever occupied a higher, his darling science reasserting its right to the first. It was the ordinary fate of scientific men's wives; she should have thought of it before. Was there not, then, something reactionary and selfish in her persisting to clinch a union for the assurance of her individual virtue, now that her conception of that course as an

advantage to him had been proved wildly erroneous?

The ineptness of retaining him at her side lay not only in the fact itself of injury to him, but in the likelihood of his living to see it as such, and reproaching her for selfishness in not letting him go in this unprecedented opportunity for correcting a move proved to be false. He wished to examine the southern heavens—perhaps his uncle's letter was the father of the wish—and there was no telling what good might not result to mankind at large from his exploits there. Why should she, to save her narrow honour, waste the wide promise of his ability?

True, an objector might have urged, on her side, that her dear Swithin's wondrous works among the children of men existed as yet only in her imagination; while her present quandary was an unquestionable

fact. But Lady Constantine would have been the first to deprecate the ungenerous-ness of such a sceptical reasoner.

That in immolating herself by refusing him, and leaving him free to work wonders for the good of his fellow-creatures, she would in all probability add to the sum of human felicity, consoled her by its breadth as an idea, even while it tortured her by making herself the scapegoat or single unit on whom the evil would fall. Ought a possibly large number, Swithin included, to remain unbenefited, because the one individual to whom his release would be an injury chanced to be herself? Love between man and woman, which in Homer, Moses, and other early exhibitors of life, is mere desire, had for centuries past so far broadened as to include sympathy and friendship; surely it should in this advanced stage of the world include benevolence

also. If so, it was her duty to set her young man free.

Thus she laboured, with a generosity more worthy even than its object, to sink her love for her own decorum in devotion to the world in general, and to Swithin in particular. To counsel her activities by her understanding, rather than by her emotions as usual, was hard work for a tender woman ; but she strove hard, and made advance. The self-centred attitude natural to one in her situation was becoming displaced by the sympathetic attitude, which, though it had to be artificially fostered at first, gave her, by degrees, a certain sweet sense that she was rising above self-love. That maternal element which had from time to time evinced itself in her affection for the youth, and was imparted by her superior ripeness in experience and years, appeared now again, as she drew

nearer the resolve not to secure propriety in her own social condition at the expense of this youth's earthly utility.

Unexpectedly grand fruits are sometimes forced forth by harsh pruning. The illiberal letter of Swithin's uncle was suggesting to Lady Constantine an altruism whose thoroughness would probably have amazed that queer old gentleman into a withdrawal of the conditions that had induced it. To love St. Cleeve so far better than herself as this was to surpass the love of women as conventionally understood, and as mostly existing.

Before, however, clinching her decision by any definite step she worried her little brain by devising every kind of ingenious scheme, in the hope of lighting on one that might show her how that decision could be avoided with the same good result. But to secure for him the advantages

offered, and to retain him likewise; reflection only showed it to be impossible!

Yet to let him go *for ever* was more than she could endure, and at length she jumped at an idea which promised some sort of improvement on that design. She would propose that reunion should not be entirely abandoned, but simply postponed—namely, till after his twenty-fifth birthday—when he might be her husband without, at any rate, the loss to him of the income. By this time he would approximate to a man's full judgment, and that painful aspect of her as one who had deluded his raw immaturity would have passed for ever.

The plan somewhat appeased her disquieted honour. To let a marriage sink into abeyance for four or five years was not to nullify it; and though she would leave it to him to move its substantiation at the end

of that time, without present stipulations, she had not much doubt upon the issue.

The clock struck five. This silent mental debate had occupied her whole afternoon. Perhaps it would not have ended now but for an unexpected incident—the entry of her brother Louis. He came into the room where she was sitting, or rather writhing, and after a few words to explain how he had got there and about the mistake in the date of Sir Blount's death, he walked up close to her. His next remarks were apologetic in form, but in essence they were bitterness itself.

“Viviette,” he said, “I am sorry for my hasty words to you when I last left this house. I readily withdraw them. My suspicions took a wrong direction. I think now that I know the truth. You have been even madder than I supposed!”

“In what way?” she asked distantly.

“I lately thought that unhappy young man was only your too-favoured lover.”

“You thought wrong: he is not.”

“He is not—I believe you—for he is more. I now am persuaded that he is your lawful husband. Can you deny it?”

“I can.”

“On your sacred word!”

“On my sacred word he is not that either.”

“Thank heaven for that assurance!” said Louis, exhaling a breath of relief. “I was not so positive as I pretended to be—but I wanted to know the truth of this mystery. Since you are not fettered to him in that way I care nothing.”

Louis turned away; and that afforded her an opportunity for leaving the room. Those few words were the last grains that had turned the balance, and settled her doom.

She would let Swithin go. All the voices in her world seemed to clamour for



that consummation. The morning's mortification, the afternoon's benevolence, and the evening's instincts of evasion had joined to carry the point.

Accordingly she sat down, and wrote to Swithin a summary of the thoughts above detailed.

“We shall separate,” she concluded. “You to obey your uncle's orders and explore the southern skies; I to wait as one who can implicitly trust you. Do not see me again till the years have expired. You will find me still the same. I am your wife through all time; the letter of the law is not needed to reassert it at present; while the absence of the letter secures your fortune.”

Nothing can express what it cost Lady Constantine to marshal her arguments; but she did it, and vanquished self-comfort by a sense of the general expediency. It may unhesitatingly be affirmed that the

only ignoble reason which might have dictated such a step was non-existent; that is to say, a serious decline in her affection. Tenderly she had loved the youth at first, and tenderly she loved him now, as time and her after-conduct proved.

Women the most delicate get used to strange moral situations. Eve probably regained her normal sweet composure about a week after the Fall. On first learning of her anomalous position, Lady Constantine had blushed hot, and her pure instincts had prompted her to legalize her marriage without a moment's delay. Heaven and earth were to be moved at once to effect it. Day after day had passed; her union had remained unsecured, and the idea of its nullity had gradually ceased to be strange to her; till it became of little account beside her bold resolve for the young man's sake.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE immediate effect upon St. Cleeve of the receipt of her well-reasoned argument for retrocession was, naturally, a bitter attack upon himself for having been guilty of such cruel carelessness as to leave in her way the lawyer's letter that had first made her aware of his uncle's provision for him. Immature as he was, he could realize Viviette's position sufficiently well to perceive what the poor lady must suffer at having suddenly thrust upon her the responsibility of repairing her own situation as a wife by ruining his as a legatee. True, it was by the purest inadvertence

that his pending sacrifice of means had been discovered ; but he should have taken special pains to render such a mishap impossible. If on the first occasion, when a revelation might have been made with impunity, he would not put it in the power of her good nature to relieve his position by refusing him, he should have shown double care not to do so now, when she could not exercise that benevolence without the loss of honour.

With a young man's inattention to issues, he had not considered how sharp her feelings as a woman must be in this contingency. It had seemed the easiest thing in the world to remedy the defect in their marriage, and therefore nothing to be anxious about. And in his innocence of any thought of securing the bequest, by taking advantage of the loophole in his matrimonial bond, he undervalued the im-

portance of concealing the existence of that bequest.

The looming fear of unhappiness between them revived in Swithin the warm emotions of their earlier acquaintance. Almost before the sun had set he hastened to Welland House in search of her. The air was disturbed by stiff summer blasts, productive of windfalls and premature descents of leafage. It was an hour when unripe apples shower down in orchards, and unbrowned chestnuts descend in their husks upon the park glades. There was no help for it this afternoon but to call upon her in a direct manner, regardless of suspicions. He was thunderstruck when, while waiting in the full expectation of being admitted to her presence, the answer brought back to him was that she was unable to see him.

This had never happened before in the

whole course of their acquaintance. But he knew what it meant, and turned away with a vague disquietude. He did not know that Lady Constantine was just above his head, listening to his movements with the liveliest emotions, and, while praying for him to go, longing for him to insist on seeing her and spoil all. But the faintest symptom being always sufficient to convince him of having blundered, he unwittingly took her at her word, and went rapidly away.

However, he called again the next day, and she, having gained strength by one victory over herself, was enabled to repeat her refusal with greater ease. Knowing this to be the only course by which her point could be maintained she clung to it with strenuous and religious pertinacity.

Thus immured and self-controlling she passed a week. Her brother, though he

did not live in the house (preferring the nearest watering-place at this time of the year), was continually coming there; and one day he happened to be present when she denied herself to Swithin for the third time. Louis, who did not observe the tears in her eyes, was astonished and delighted: she was coming to her senses at last. Believing now that there had been nothing more between them than a too-plainly shown partiality on her part, he expressed his commendation of her conduct to her face. At this, instead of owning to its advantage also, her tears burst forth outright.

Not knowing what to make of this, Louis said,—

“Well, I am simply upholding you in your course.”

“Yes, yes; I know it!” she cried.

“And it is my deliberately chosen course.”

I wish he—Swithin St. Cleeve—would go on his travels at once, and leave the place! Four hundred a year has been left him for travel and study of the southern constellations; and I wish he would use it. You might represent the advantage to him of the course if you cared to.”

Louis thought he could do no better than let Swithin know this as soon as possible. Accordingly when St. Cleeve was writing in the hut the next day he heard the crackle of footsteps over the fir-needles outside, and jumped up, supposing them to be hers; but, to his disappointment, it was her brother who appeared at the door.

“Excuse my invading the hermitage, St. Cleeve,” he said, in his careless way, “but I have heard from my sister of your good fortune.”

“My good fortune?”



“Yes, in having an opportunity for roving; and with a traveller’s conceit I couldn’t help coming to give you the benefit of my experience. When do you start?”

“I have not formed any plan as yet. Indeed, I had not quite been thinking of going.”

Louis stared.

“Not going? Then I may have been misinformed. What I have heard is, that a good uncle has kindly bequeathed you a sufficient income to make a second Isaac Newton of you, if you only use it as he directs.”

Swithin breathed quickly, but said nothing.

“If you have not decided so to make use of it, let me implore you, as your friend, and one nearly old enough to be your father, to decide at once. Such a

chance does not happen to a scientific youth once in a century."

"Thank you for your good advice—for it is good in itself, I know," said Swithin, in a low voice. "But has Lady Constantine spoken of it at all?"

"She thinks as I do."

"She has spoken to you on the subject?"

"Certainly. More than that; it is at her request—though I did not intend to say so—that I come to speak to you about it now."

"Frankly and plainly," said Swithin, his voice trembling with a compound of scientific and amatory emotion that defies definition, "does she say seriously that she wishes me to go?"

"She does."

"Then go I will," replied Swithin firmly. "I have been fortunate enough to interest

some leading astronomers, including the Astronomer Royal; and in a letter received this morning I learn that the use of the Cape Observatory has been offered me for any southern observations I may wish to make. This offer I will accept. Will you kindly let Lady Constantine know this, since she is interested in my welfare?"

Louis promised, and when he was gone Swithin looked blankly at his own situation, as if he could scarcely believe in its reality. Her letter to him, then, had been deliberately written; she meant him to go.

But he was determined that none of those misunderstandings which ruin the happiness of lovers should be allowed to creep in, in the present case. He would see her, if he slept under her walls all night to do it, and would hear the order to depart from her own lips. This unex-

pected stand she was making for his interests was winning his admiration to such a degree as to be in danger of defeating the very cause it was meant to subserve. A woman like this was not to be forsaken in a hurry. He wrote two lines, and left the note at the house with his own hand.

“THE CABIN, RINGS-HILL.

“DEAREST VIVIETTE,—If you insist I will go. But letter-writing will not do. I must have the command from your own two lips, otherwise I shall not stir. I am here every evening at seven. Can you come?”

“S.”

This note, as fate would have it, reached her hands in the single hour of that week when she was in a mood to comply with his request, just when moved by the reflex emotion that had followed Louis's praise

of her for dismissing Swithin. She went upstairs to the window that had so long served purposes of this kind, and signalled "Yes."

St. Cleeve soon saw the answer she had given, and watched her approach from the tower as the sunset drew on. The vivid circumstances of his life at this date led him ever to remember the external scenes in which they were set. It was an evening of phenomenal irradiations, and the west heaven gleamed like a foundry of all metals common and rare. The clouds were broken into a thousand fragments, and the margin of every fragment shone. Foreseeing the disadvantage and pain to her of maintaining a resolve under the pressure of a meeting, he vowed not to urge her by word or sign; to put the question plainly and calmly, and to discuss it on a reasonable basis only, like the philosophers they assumed themselves to be.

But this intention was scarcely adhered to in all its integrity. She duly appeared on the margin of the field, flooded with the metallic radiance that marked the close of this day; whereupon he quickly descended the steps, and met her at the cabin door.

As the evening grew darker and darker he listened to her reasoning, which was precisely a repetition of that already sent him by letter, and by degrees accepted her decision, since she would not revoke it. Time came for them to say good-bye, and then—

He turn'd and saw the terror in her eyes,  
That yearn'd upon him, shining in such wise  
As two stars midway in the midnight fix'd.

It was the misery of her own condition that showed forth, hitherto obscured by her ardour for ameliorating his. They closed together and kissed each other, as though the emotion of their whole year-

and-half's acquaintance had settled down upon that moment.

"I won't go away from you," said Swithin huskily. "Why did you propose it for an instant?"

Thus the nearly ended interview was again prolonged. Time, however, was merciless, and the hour came when she was compelled to depart. Swithin walked with her towards the house, as he had walked many times before, believing that all was now smooth again between them, and caring, it must be owned, very little for his fame as an expositor of the southern constellations just then.

When they reached the silent house he said what he had not ventured to say before, "Fix the day—you have decided that it is to be soon, and that I am not to go?"

But youthful Swithin was far, very far,

from being up to the fond subtlety of Viviette this evening. "I cannot decide here," she said gently, releasing herself from his arm; "I will speak to you from the window. Wait for me."

She vanished; and he waited. It was a long time before the window opened, and he was not aware that, with her customary complication of feeling, she had knelt for some time inside the room before looking out.

"Well?" said he.

"It cannot be," she answered. "I cannot ruin you. But the day after you are five-and-twenty our marriage shall be confirmed, if you choose."

"Oh, my Viviette, how is this!" he cried.

"Swithin, I have not altered. But I feared for my powers, and could not tell you whilst I stood by your side. Take



the bequest, and go. You are too young—to be fettered—I should have thought of it! Do not communicate with me for at least a year: it is imperative. Do not tell me your plans. If we part we do part. I have vowed a vow not to further obstruct the course you had decided on before you knew me and my puling ways; and by Heaven's help I'll keep that vow. . . . Now go. These are the parting words of your own Viviette!”

Swithin, who was stable as a giant in all that appertained to nature and life outside humanity, was childishly flexible in domestic matters. He was quite awed by her firmness, and looked vacantly at her for a time, till she closed the window. Then he mechanically turned, and went, as she had commanded.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A WEEK had passed away. It had been a time of cloudy mental weather to Swithin and Viviette, but the only noteworthy fact about it was that what had been planned to happen therein had actually taken place. Swithin had gone from Welland, and would shortly go from England.

She became aware of it by a note that he posted to her on his way through Warborne. There was much evidence of haste in the note, and something of reserve. The latter she could not understand, but it might have been obvious enough if she had considered.

On the morning of his departure he had sat on the edge of his bed, the sunlight streaming through the early mist, the house-martins scratching the back of the ceiling over his head, as they scrambled out from the roof for their day's gnat-chasing, the thrushes cracking snails on the garden stones outside with the noisiness of little smiths at work on little anvils. The sun, in sending its rods of yellow fire into his room, sent, as he suddenly thought, mental illumination with it. For the first time, as he sat there, it had crossed his mind that Viviette might have reasons for this separation which he knew not of. There might be family reasons—mysterious blood necessities which are said to rule members of old musty-mansioned families, and are unknown to other classes of society—and they may have been just now brought before her by her brother Louis on the

condition that they were religiously concealed.

The idea that some family skeleton, like those he had read of in memoirs, had been unearthed by Louis, and held before her terrified understanding as a matter which rendered Swithin's departure, and the neutralization of the marriage, no less indispensable to them than it was an advantage to himself, seemed a very plausible one to Swithin just now. Viviette might naturally have taken Louis into her confidence at last, for the sake of his brotherly advice. Swithin knew that of her own heart she would never wish to get rid of him; but coerced by Louis, might she not have grown to entertain views of its expediency? Events made such a supposition on St. Cleeve's part as natural as it was inaccurate, and, conjoined with his own excitement at the thought of seeing

a new heaven overhead, influenced him to write but the briefest and most hurried final note to her, in which he fully obeyed her sensitive request that he would omit all reference to his plans. These at the last moment had been modified to fall in with the winter expedition formerly mentioned, to observe the Transit of Venus at a remote southern station.

The business being done, and himself fairly plunged into the preliminaries of an important scientific pilgrimage, Swithin acquired that lightness of heart which most men feel in forsaking old love for new adventure, no matter how charming may be the girl they leave behind them. Moreover, in the present case, the man was endowed with that schoolboy temperament which does not see, or at least consider with much curiosity, the effect of a given scheme upon others than himself. The

bearing upon Lady Constantine of what was an undoubted predicament for any woman, was forgotten in his feeling that she had done a very handsome and noble thing for him, and that he was therefore bound in honour to make the most of it.

His going had resulted in anything but lightness of heart for her. Her sad fancy could, indeed, indulge in dreams of her yellow-haired laddie without that formerly besetting fear that those dreams would prompt her to actions likely to distract and weight him. She was wretched on her own account, relieved on his. She no longer stood in the way of his advancement, and that was enough. For herself she could live in retirement, visit the wood, the old camp, the column, and, like *Cenone*, think of the life they had led there—

Mournful *Cenone*, wandering forlorn  
Of Paris, once her playmate on the hills,

leaving it entirely to his goodness whether he would come and claim her in the future, or desert her for ever.

She was diverted for a time from these sad performances by a letter which reached her from Bishop Helmsdale. To see his handwriting again on an envelope, after thinking so anxiously of making a father-confessor of him, started her out of her equanimity. She speedily regained it, however, when she read his note.

“ THE PALACE, MELCHESTER,

“ *July 30, 18—.*

“ MY DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE,—I am shocked and grieved that, in the strange dispensation of things here below, my offer of marriage should have reached you almost simultaneously with the intelligence that your widowhood had been of several months less duration than you and I, and

the world, had supposed. I can quite understand that, viewed from any side, the news must have shaken and disturbed you; and your unequivocal refusal to entertain any thought of a new alliance at such a moment was, of course, intelligible, natural, and praiseworthy. At present I will say no more beyond expressing a hope that you will accept my assurances that I was quite ignorant of the news at the time of writing, and a sincere desire that in due time, and as soon as you have recovered your equanimity, I may be allowed to renew my proposal.

“I am, my dear Lady Constantine,

“Yours ever sincerely,

“C. MELCHESTER.”

She laid the letter aside, and thought no more about it, beyond a momentary meditation on the errors into which people



fall in reasoning from actions to motives. Louis, who was now again with her, became in due course acquainted with the contents of the letter, and was satisfied with the promising position in which matters seemingly stood all round.

Lady Constantine went her mournful ways as she had planned to do, her chief resort being the familiar column, where she experienced the unutterable melancholy of seeing two carpenters dismantle the dome of its felt covering, detach its ribs, and clear away the enclosure at the top till everything stood as it had stood before Swithin had been known to the place. The equatorial had already been packed in a box, to be in readiness if he should send for it from abroad. The cabin, too, was in course of demolition, such having been his directions, acquiesced in by her, before he started. Yet she could not bear the

idea that these structures, so germane to the events of their romance, should be removed as if removed for ever. Going to the men, she bade them store up the materials intact, that they might be re-erected if desired. She had the junctions of the timbers marked with figures, the boards numbered, and the different sets of screws tied up in independent papers for identification. She did not hear the remarks of the workmen when she had gone, to the effect that the young man would as soon think of buying a halter for himself as come back and spy at the moon from Rings-Hill Speer, after seeing the glories of other nations and the gold and jewels that were found there, or she might have been more unhappy than she was.

On returning from one of these walks to the column a curious circumstance occurred. It was evening, and she was

coming as usual down through the sighing plantation, choosing her way between the ramparts of the camp towards the outlet giving upon the field, when suddenly in a dusky vista among the fir-trunks she saw, or thought she saw, a golden-haired, toddling child. The child moved a step or two, and vanished behind a tree. Lady Constantine, fearing it had lost its way, went quickly to the spot, searched, and called aloud. But no child could she perceive or hear anywhere around. She returned to where she had stood when first beholding it, and looked in the same direction, but nothing reappeared. The only object at all resembling a little boy or girl was the upper tuft of a bunch of fern, which had prematurely yellowed to about the colour of a fair child's hair, and waved occasionally in the breeze. This, however, did not sufficiently explain the phenome-

non, and she returned to make inquiries of the man whom she had left at work, removing the last traces of Swithin's cabin. But he had gone with her departure and the approach of night. Feeling an indescribable dread, she retraced her steps and hastened homeward, doubting, yet half believing, what she had seemed to see, and wondering if her imagination had played her some trick.

The tranquil mournfulness of these few days of solitude was now terminated in a most unexpected manner.

The morning after the above-mentioned incident Lady Constantine, after meditating awhile, arose with a strange personal conviction. She realized a condition of things that she had never anticipated, and for a moment the discovery so overwhelmed her that she thought she must die outright. In her terror she said she had sown the

wind to reap the whirlwind. Then the instinct of self-preservation flamed up in her like a fire. Her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence, and letting Swithin go away from her, was demolished by the new necessity, as if it had been a gossamer web.

There was no resisting or evading the spontaneous plan of action which matured in her mind in five minutes. Where was Swithin? how could he be got at instantly?—that was her ruling thought. She searched about the room for his last short note, hoping, yet doubting, that its contents were more explicit on his intended movements than the few meagre syllables which alone she could call to mind. She could not find the letter in her room, and came downstairs to Louis as pale as a ghost.

He looked up at her, and with some concern said, “What’s the matter?”

“I am searching everywhere for a letter—a note from Mr. St. Cleeve—just a few words telling me when the *Occidental* sails, that he goes in.”

“Why do you want that unimportant document?”

“It is of the utmost importance that I should know whether he has actually sailed or not!” said the poor lady, in agonized tones. “Where *can* that letter be?”

Louis knew where that letter was, for having seen it on her desk he had, without reading it, torn it up and thrown it into the waste-paper basket, thinking the less that remained to remind her of the young philosopher the better.

“I destroyed it,” he said.

“O Louis! why did you?” she cried. “I am going to follow him; I think it best to do so; and I want to know if he is gone—and now the date is lost!”

“Going to run after St. Cleeve?  
Absurd!”

“Yes, I am!” she said with vehement firmness. “I must see him; I want to speak to him as soon as possible.”

“Good Lord, Viviette! Are you mad?”  
“O what was the date of that ship? But it cannot be helped. I start at once for Southampton. I have made up my mind to do it. He was going to his uncle’s solicitors in the North first; then he was coming back to Southampton. He cannot have sailed yet.”

“I believe he has sailed,” muttered Louis sullenly.

She did not wait to argue with him, but returned upstairs, where she rang to tell Green to be ready with the pony to drive her to Warborne station in a quarter of an hour.

## CHAPTER IX.

VIVIETTE'S determination to hamper Swithin no longer had led her, as has been shown, to thwart any weak impulse of hers to write and entreat his return, by forbidding him to furnish her with his foreign address. His obedient disposition, his fear that there might be other reasons behind, made him obey her command only too literally. Thus, to her terror and dismay, she had placed a gratuitous difficulty in the way of her present endeavour.

She was ready before Green, and urged on that factotum so wildly as to leave him no time to change his corduroys and skitty-



boots in which he had been gardening; he therefore turned himself into a coachman as far down as his waist merely—clapping on his proper coat, hat, and waistcoat, and wrapping a rug over his horticultural half below. In this compromise he appeared at the door, mounted, and reins in hand.

Seeing how sad and determined Viviette was, Louis pitied her so far as to put nothing in the way of her starting, though he forebore to help her. He thought her conduct sentimental foolery, the outcome of mistaken pity and such a kind of gain-giving as would trouble a woman; and he decided that it would be better to let this mood burn itself out than to keep it smouldering by obstruction.

“Do you remember the date of his sailing?” she said finally, as the pony-carriage turned to drive off.

“He sails on the 25th, that is, to-day.

But it may not be till late in the evening.”

With this she started, and reached Warborne in time for the up-train. How much longer than it really is a long journey can seem to be, was fully learnt by the unhappy Viviette that day. The changeful procession of country seats past which she was dragged, the names and memories of their owners, had no points of interest for her now. She reached Southampton about mid-day, and drove straight to the docks.

On approaching the gates she was met by a crowd of people and vehicles coming out—men, women, children, porters, police, cabs, and carts. The *Occidental* had just sailed.

The adverse intelligence came upon her with such odds after her morning's tension, that she could scarcely crawl back to the

cab which had brought her. But this was not a time to succumb. As she had no luggage she dismissed the man, and, without any real consciousness of what she was doing, crept away, and sat down on a pile of merchandise.

After long thinking her case assumed a more hopeful complexion. Much might probably be done towards communicating with him in the time at her command. The obvious step to this end, which she should have thought of sooner, would be to go to his grandmother in Welland Bottom, and there obtain his itinerary in detail—no doubt well known to Mrs. Martin. There was no leisure for her to consider longer, if she would be home again that night; and returning to the railway she waited on a seat without eating or drinking till a train was ready to take her back.

By the time she again stood in Warborne the sun rested his chin upon the meadows, and enveloped the distant outline of the Rings-Hill column in his humid rays. Hiring an empty fly that chanced to be at the station, she was driven through the little town onward to Welland, which she approached about eight o'clock. At her request the man set her down at the entrance to the park, and when he was out of sight, instead of pursuing her way to the House, she went along the high road in the direction of Mrs. Martin's.

Dusk was drawing on, and the bats were wheeling over the green basin called Welland Bottom by the time she arrived; and had any other errand instigated her call she would have postponed it till the morrow. Nobody responded to her knock, but she could hear footsteps going hither and thither upstairs, and dull noises as of

articles moved from their places. She knocked again and again, and ultimately the door was opened by Hannah as usual.

“I could make nobody hear,” said Lady Constantine, who was so weary she could scarcely stand.

“I am very sorry, my lady,” said Hannah, slightly awed on beholding her visitor. “But we was a putting poor Mr. Swithin’s room to rights, now that he is, as a woman may say, dead and buried to us; so we didn’t hear your ladyship. I’ll call Mrs. Martin at once. She is up in the room that used to be his work-room.”

Here Hannah’s voice implied moist eyes, and Lady Constantine’s instantly overflowed.

“No, I’ll go up to her,” said Viviette; and almost in advance of Hannah she passed up the shrunken ash stairs.

The ebbing light was not enough to reveal to Mrs. Martin's aged gaze the personality of her visitor, till Hannah explained.

"I'll get a light, my lady," said she.

"No, I would rather not. What are you doing, Mrs. Martin?"

"Well, the poor misguided boy is gone—and he's gone for good to me! I am a woman of over fourscore years, my Lady Constantine; my junketting days are over, and whether 'tis feasting or whether 'tis sorrowing in the land will soon be nothing to me. But his life may be long and active, and for the sake of him I care for what I shall never see, and wish to make pleasant what I shall never enjoy. I am setting his room in order, as the place will be his own freehold when I am gone, so that when he comes back he may find all his poor jim-cracks and trangleys as he

left 'em, and not feel that I have betrayed his trust."

Old Mrs. Martin's voice revealed that she had burst into such few tears as were left her, and then Hannah began crying likewise; whereupon Lady Constantine, whose heart had been bursting all day (and who, indeed, considering her coming trouble, had reason enough for tears) broke into bitterer sobs than either—sobs of absolute pain, that could no longer be concealed.

Hannah was the first to discover that Lady Constantine was weeping with them; and her feelings being probably the least intense among the three, she instantly controlled herself.

"Refrain yourself, my dear woman," she said hastily to Mrs. Martin; "don't ye see how it do raft my lady." And turning to Viviette she whispered, "Her

years be so great, your ladyship, that perhaps ye'll excuse her for busting out afore ye? We know when the mind is dim, my lady, there's not the manners there should be; but decayed people can't help it, poor old soul!"

"Hannah, that will do now. Perhaps Lady Constantine would like to speak to me alone," said Mrs. Martin. And when Hannah had retreated Mrs. Martin continued: "Such a charge as she is, my lady, on account of her great age! You'll pardon her biding here as if she were one of the family. I put up with such things because of her long service, and we know that years lead to childishness."

"What are you doing? Can I help you?" Viviette asked, as Mrs. Martin, after speaking, turned to lift some large article.

"Oh, 'tis only the skeleton of a telescope



that's got no works in his inside," said Swithin's grandmother, seizing the huge pasteboard tube that Swithin had made, and abandoned because he could get no lenses to suit it. "I am going to hang it up to these hooks, and there it will bide till he comes again."

Lady Constantine took one end, and the tube was hung up against the whitewashed wall by strings that the old women had tied round it.

"Here's all his equinoctial lines, and his topics of Capricorn, and I don't know what besides," Mrs. Martin continued, pointing to some charcoal scratches on the wall. "I shall never rub 'em out; no, though 'tis such untidiness as I was never brought up to, I shall never rub 'em out."

"Where has Swithin gone to first?" asked Viviette anxiously. "Where does he say you are to write to him?"

“Nowhere yet, my lady. He’s going traipsing all over Europe and America, and then to the South Pacific Ocean about this Transit of Venus that’s going to be done there. He is to write to us first—God knows when!—for he said that if we didn’t hear from him for six months we were not to be galled at all.”

At this intelligence, so much worse than she had expected, Lady Constantine stood mute, sank down, and would have fallen to the floor if there had not been a chair behind her. Controlling herself by a strenuous effort, she disguised her despair and asked vacantly: “From America to the South Pacific—Transit of Venus?” (Swithin’s arrangement to accompany the expedition had been made at the last moment, and therefore she had not as yet been informed.)

“Yes, to a lone island, I believe.”

“ Yes ; a lone islant, my lady ! ” echoed Hannah, who had crept in and made herself one of the family again, in spite of Mrs. Martin.

“ He is going to meet the English and American astronomers there at the end of the year. After that he will most likely go on to the Cape.”

“ But before the end of the year—what places did he tell you of visiting ? ”

“ Let me collect myself ; he is going to the observatory of Cambridge, United States, to meet some gentlemen there, and spy through the great refractor. Then there’s the observatory of Chicago ; and I think he has a letter to make him beknown to a gentleman in the observatory at Mar-seilles—and he wants to go to Vienna—and Poulkowa, too, he means to take in his way—there being learned instruments and a lot of astronomers at each place.”

“Does he take Europe or America first?” she asked faintly, for the account seemed hopeless.

Mrs Martin could not tell till she had heard from Swithin. It depended upon what he had decided to do on the day of his leaving England.

Lady Constantine bade the old people good-bye, and dragged her weary limbs homeward. The fatuousness of forethought had seldom been evinced more ironically. Had she done nothing to hinder him, he would have kept up an unreserved communication with her, and all might have been well.

For that night she could undertake nothing further, and she waited for the next day. Then at once she wrote two letters to Swithin, directing one to the Marseilles observatory, one to the observatory of Cambridge, U.S., as being the only

two spots on the face of the globe at which they were likely to intercept him. Each letter stated to him the urgent reasons which existed for his return, and contained a passionately regretful intimation that the annuity on which his hopes depended must of necessity be sacrificed by the completion of their original contract without delay.

But letter conveyance was too slow a process to satisfy her. To send an epitome of her epistles by telegraph was, after all, indispensable. Such an imploring sentence as she desired to address to him it would be hazardous to despatch from Warborne, and she took a dreary journey to a strange town on purpose to send it from an office at which she was unknown.

There she handed in her messages in duplicate, addressing them as she had addressed the letters; and again returned home.

With regard to Marseilles, she assumed that an answer might be expected in a day, if he had gone there. She waited two days, three days; and there being no return telegram from Marseilles, the inference was that he had gone to America. For an answer to her American telegram she ought to wait a week or ten days longer, to allow him time to get to Cambridge and receive it.

Then she considered the weakness, the stultifying nature of her attempt at recall.

Events mocked her on all sides. By the favour of an accident, and by her own immense exertions against her instincts, Swithin had been restored to the rightful heritage that he had nearly forfeited on her account. He had just started off to utilize it; when she, without a moment's warning, was asking him again to cast it away. She had set a certain machinery in motion—to stop it before it had revolved once.

A horrid apprehension possessed her. It had been easy for Swithin to give up what he had never known the advantages of keeping; but having once begun to enjoy his possession, would he give it up now? Could he be depended on for such self-sacrifice? Before leaving, he would have done anything at her request; but the *mollia tempora fandi* had now passed. Suppose there arrived no reply from him for the next three months; and that when his answer came he were to inform her that having now fully acquiesced in her original decision, he found the life he was leading so profitable as to be unable to abandon it, even to please her; that he was very sorry, but having embarked on this course by her advice, he meant to adhere to it by his own.

There was, indeed, every probability that, moving 'about as he was doing, and

cautioned as he had been by her very self against listening to her too readily, she would receive no reply of any sort from him for three or perhaps four months. This would be on the eve of the Transit; and what likelihood was there that a young man, full of ardour for that spectacle, would forego it at the last moment to return to a humdrum domesticity with a woman who was no longer a novelty?

If she could only leave him to his career, and save her own situation also! But at that moment the proposition seemed as impossible as to construct a triangle of two straight lines.

In her walk home, pervaded by these hopeless views, she passed near the dark and deserted tower. Night in that solitary place, which would have caused her some uneasiness in her years of blitheness, had no terrors for her now. She went up the



winding-path, and, the door being unlocked, felt her way to the top. The open sky greeted her as in times previous to the dome-and-equatorial period; but there was not a star to suggest to her in which direction Swithin had gone. The absence of the dome suggested a way out of her difficulties. A leap in the dark, and all would be over. But she had not reached that stage of action as yet, and the thought was dismissed as quickly as it had come.

The new consideration which at present occupied her mind was whether she could have the courage to leave Swithin to himself, as in the original plan, and singly meet her impending trial, despising the shame, till he should return at five-and-twenty and claim her? Yet was this assumption of his return so very safe? How altered things would be at that time! At twenty-five he would still be young and

handsome; she would be three-and-thirty, faded, middle-aged, and homely. A fear sharp as a frost settled down upon her, that in any such scheme as this she would be building upon the sand.

She hardly knew how she reached home that night. Entering by the lawn door, she saw a red coal in the direction of the arbour. Louis was smoking there, and he came forward.

He had not seen her since the morning, and was naturally anxious about her. She blessed the chance which enveloped her in night, and lessened the weight of the encounter one half by depriving him of vision.

“Did you accomplish your object?” he asked.

“No,” said she.

“How was that?”

“He has sailed.”

“A very good thing for both, I say. I believe you would have married him if you could have overtaken him.”

“That would I!” she said.

“Good God! What, would you marry anybody or anything?” asked Louis aghast.

“I would marry a tinker for that matter,” she said recklessly, “only I should prefer to drown myself.”

Louis held his breath, and stood rigid: such was the force of the meaning her words conveyed.

“But Louis, you don’t know all!” cried poor Viviette. “I am not so bad as you think; mine has been folly—not vice. I thought I had married him—and then I found I had not; the marriage was invalid—Sir Blount was alive! And now Swithin has gone away, and will not come back for my calling! How can he? His fortune

is left him on condition that he forms no legal tie. O will he—will he, come again?”

“Never, if that’s the position of affairs,” said Louis firmly, after a pause.

“What then shall I do?” said Viviette.

Louis escaped the formidable difficulty of replying by pretending to continue his Havanah; and she, bowed down to dust by what she had revealed, crept from him into the house. Louis’s cigar went out in his hand as he stood looking intently at the ground.

## CHAPTER X.

LOUIS got up the next morning with an idea in his head. He had dressed for a journey, and breakfasted hastily.

Before he had started Viviette came downstairs. Louis, who was now greatly disturbed about her, went up to his sister and took her hand.

“*Aux grands maux les grands remèdes,*” he said gravely. “I have a plan.”

“I have a dozen!” said she.

“You have?”

“Yes. But what are they worth? And yet there must—there *must* be a way!”

“Viviette,” said Louis, “promise that

you will wait till I come home to-night, before you do anything."

Her distracted eyes showed slight comprehension of his request as she said "Yes."

An hour after that time Louis entered the train at Warborne, and was speedily crossing a country of ragged woodland, which, though intruded on by the plough at places, remained largely intact from prehistoric times, and still abounded with yews of gigantic growth and oaks tufted with mistletoe. It was the route to Melchester.

On setting foot in that city he took the cathedral spire as his guide, the place being strange to him; and went on till he reached the archway dividing Melchester sacred from Melchester secular. Thence he threaded his course into the precincts of the damp and venerable Close, level as a

bowling-green, and beloved of rooks, who from their elm perches on high threatened any unwary gazer with the mishap of Tobit. At the corner of this reposeful spot stood the episcopal palace.

Louis entered the gates, rang the bell, and looked around. Here the trees and rooks seemed older, if possible, than those in the Close behind him. Everything was dignified, and he felt himself like Punchinello in the king's chambers. Verily in the present case Glanville was not a man to stick at trifles any more than his illustrious prototype; and on the servant bringing a message that his lordship would see him at once, Louis marched boldly in.

Through an old dark corridor, roofed with old dark beams, the servant led the way to the heavily-moulded door of the Bishop's room. Dr. Helmsdale was there,

and welcomed Louis with considerable stateliness. But his condescension was tempered with a curious anxiety, and even with nervousness.

He asked in pointed tones after the health of Lady Constantine; if Louis had brought an answer to the letter he had addressed to her a day or two earlier; and if the contents of the letter, or the previous one, were known to him.

I have brought no answer from her," said Louis. "But the contents of your letter have been made known to me."

Since entering the building Louis had more than once felt some hesitation, and it might now, with a favouring manner from his entertainer, have operated to deter him from going further with his intention. But the Bishop had personal weaknesses that were fatal to sympathy for more than a moment.



“Then I may speak in confidence to you as her nearest relative,” said the prelate, “and explain that I am now in a position with regard to Lady Constantine which, in view of the important office I hold, I should not have cared to place myself in, unless I had felt quite sure of not being refused by her. And hence it is a great grief, and some mortification to me, that I was refused—owing, of course, to the fact that I unwittingly risked making my proposal at the very moment when she was under the influence of those strange tidings; and hence not herself, to judge what was best for her.”

The Bishop's words disclosed a mind whose sensitive fear of danger to its own dignity hindered it from criticism elsewhere. Things might have been worse for Louis's Puck-like idea of mis-mating his Hermia with this Demetrius.

Throwing a strong flavour of earnestness into his mien, he replied: "Bishop, Viviette is my only sister; I am her only brother and friend. I am alarmed for her health and state of mind. Hence I have come to consult you on this very matter that you have broached. I come absolutely without her knowledge, and I hope unconventionality may be excused in me on the score of my anxiety for her."

"Certainly. I trust that the prospect opened up by my proposal, combined with this other news, has not proved too much for her?"

"My sister is distracted and distressed, Bishop Helmsdale. She wants comfort."

"Not distressed by my letter?" said the Bishop, turning red. "Has it lowered me in her estimation?"

"On the contrary; while your disinter-

ested offer was uppermost in her mind she was a different woman. It is this other matter that oppresses her. The result upon her of the recent discovery with regard to the late Sir Blount Constantine is peculiar. To say that he ill-used her in his lifetime is to understate a truth. He has been dead now a considerable period; but this revival of his memory operates as a sort of terror upon her. Images of the manner of Sir Blount's death are with her night and day, intensified by a hideous picture of the supposed scene, which was cruelly sent her. She dreads being alone. Nothing will restore my poor Viviette to her former cheerfulness but a distraction—a hope—a new prospect."

"That is precisely what acceptance of my offer would afford."

"Precisely," said Louis, with great respect. "But how to get her to avail

herself of it after once refusing you, is the difficulty, and my earnest problem.”

“Then we are quite at one.”

“We are. And it is to promote our wishes that I am come; since she will do nothing of herself.”

“Then you can give me no hope of a reply to my second communication?”

“None whatever—by letter,” said Louis. “Her impression plainly is that she cannot encourage your lordship. Yet, in the face of all this reticence, the secret is that she loves you warmly.”

“Can you indeed assure me of that? Indeed, indeed!” said Bishop Helmsdale musingly. “Then I must try to see her. I begin to feel—to feel strongly—that a course which would seem premature and unbecoming in other cases would be true and proper conduct in this. Her unhappy dilemmas—her unwonted position—yes,

yes—I see it all! I can afford to have some little misconstruction put upon my motives. I will go and see her immediately. Her past has been a cruel one; she wants sympathy; and with Heaven's help I'll give it."

"I think the remedy lies that way," said Louis, gently. "Some words came from her one night which seemed to show it. I was standing on the terrace: I heard somebody sigh in the dark, and found that it was she. I asked her what was the matter, and gently pressed her on this subject of boldly and promptly contracting a new marriage as a means of dispersing the horrors of the old. Her answer implied that she would have no objection to do it, and to do it at once, provided she could remain externally passive in the matter, that she would tacitly yield, in fact, to pressure, but would not meet

solicitation half-way. Now, Bishop Helmsdale, you see what has prompted me. On the one hand is a dignitary of high position and integrity, to say no more, who is anxious to save her from the gloom of her situation; on the other is this sister, who will not make known to you her willingness to be saved—partly from apathy, partly from a fear that she may be thought forward in responding favourably at so early a moment, partly also, perhaps, from a modest sense that there would be some sacrifice on your part in allying yourself with a woman of her secluded and sad experience.”

“ Oh, there is no sacrifice! Quite otherwise. I care greatly for this alliance, Mr. Glanville. Your sister is very dear to me. Moreover, the advantages her mind would derive from the enlarged field of activity that the position of a bishop’s wife would afford, are palpable. I am induced to

think that an early settlement of the question—an immediate coming to the point—which might be called too early in the majority of cases, would be a right and considerate tenderness here. My only dread is that she should think an immediate following up of the subject premature. And the risk of a rebuff a second time is one which, as you must perceive, it would be highly unbecoming in me to run.”

“I think the risk would be small, if your lordship would approach her frankly. Write she will not, I am assured; and knowing that, and having her interest at heart, I was induced to come to you and make this candid statement in reply to your communication. Her late husband having been virtually dead these four or five years, believed dead two years, and actually dead nearly one, no reproach

could attach to her if she were to contract another union to-morrow."

"I agree with you, Mr. Glanville," said the Bishop warmly. "I will think this over. Her motive in not replying I can quite understand: your motive in coming I can also understand and appreciate in a brother. If I feel convinced that it would be a seemly and expedient thing I will come to Welland to-morrow."

The point to which Louis had brought the Bishop being so satisfactory, he feared to endanger it by another word. The conversation having ended as far as its object was concerned he went away almost hurriedly, and at once left the precincts of the cathedral, lest another encounter with Bishop Helmsdale should lead the latter to take a new and slower view of his duties as Viviette's suitor.

He reached Welland by dinner-time,



and came upon Viviette in the same pensive mood in which he had left her. It seemed she had hardly moved since.

“Have you discovered Swithin St. Cleeve’s address?” she said, without looking up at him.

“No,” said Louis.

Then she broke out with indescribable anguish: “But you asked me to wait till this evening; and I have waited through the long day, in the belief that your words meant something, and that you would bring good tidings! And now I find your words meant nothing, and you have *not* brought good tidings!”

Louis could not decide for a moment what to say to this. Should he venture to give her thoughts a new course by a revelation of his design? No: it would be better to prolong her despair yet another night, and spring relief upon her suddenly,

that she might jump at it and commit herself without an interval for reflection on certain aspects of the proceeding.

Nothing, accordingly, did he say; and conjecturing that she would be hardly likely to take any desperate step that night, he left her to herself.

His anxiety at this crisis continued to be great. Everything depended on the result of the Bishop's self-communion. Would he or would he not come the next day? Perhaps instead of his important presence there would appear a letter postponing the visit indefinitely; if so, all would be lost. The Bishop was as abjectly in love as only pompous people can be; and this thought gave him hope.

Louis's suspense kept him awake, and he was not alone in his sleeplessness. Through the night he heard his sister walking up and down, in a state which

betokened that for every pang of grief she had disclosed, twice as many had remained unspoken. He almost feared that she might seek to end her existence by violence, so unreasonably sudden were her moods; and he lay and longed for the day.

It was morning. She came down the same as usual, and asked if there had arrived any telegram or letter; but there was neither. Louis avoided her, knowing that nothing he could say just then would do her any good. No communication had reached him from the Bishop, and that looked well. By one ruse and another, as the day went on, he led her away from contemplating the remote possibility of hearing from Swithin, and induced her to look at the worst contingency as her probable fate. It seemed as if she really made up her mind to this, for by the afternoon

she was apathetic, like a woman who neither hoped nor feared.

And then a fly drove up to the door.

Louis, who had been standing in the hall the greater part of that day, glanced out through a private window, and went to Viviette. "The Bishop has called," he said. "Be ready to see him."

"The Bishop of Melchester?" said Viviette, bewildered.

"Yes. I asked him to come. He comes for an answer to his letters."

"An answer—to—his—letters?" she murmured.

"An immediate reply of yes or no."

Her face showed the workings of her mind. How entirely an answer of assent, at once acted on for better or for worse, would clear the spectre from her path, there needed no tongue to tell. It would, moreover, accomplish that end without

involving the impoverishment of Swithin—the inevitable result if she had adopted the legitimate road out of her trouble. Hitherto there had seemed to her dismayed mind, unenlightened as to any course save one of honesty, no possible achievement of *both* her desires—the saving of Swithin and the saving of herself. But behold, here was a way! A tempter had shown it to her. It involved a great wrong, which to her had quite obscured its feasibility. But she perceived now that it was indeed a way. Nature was forcing her hand at this game; and to what will not nature compel her weaker victims, in extremes?

Louis left her to think it out. When he reached the drawing-room Dr. Helmsdale was standing there with the air of a man too good for his destiny—which, to be just to him, was not far from the truth this time.

“Have you broken my message to her?” asked the Bishop sonorously.

“Not your message; your visit,” said Louis. “I leave the rest in your lordship’s hands. I have done all I can for her.”

She was in her own small room to-day; and, feeling that it must be a bold stroke or none, he led the Bishop across the hall till he reached her apartment, and opened the door; but instead of following he shut it behind his visitor.

Then Glanville passed an anxious time. He walked from the foot of the staircase to the star of old swords and pikes on the wall; from these to the stags’ horns; thence down the corridor as far as the door, where he could hear murmuring inside, but not its import. The longer they remained closeted, the more excited did he become. That she had not peremptorily

negatived the proposal at the outset was a strong sign of its success. It showed that she had admitted argument; and the worthy Bishop had a pleader on his side whom he knew little of. The very weather seemed to favour Dr. Helmsdale in his suit. A blustering wind had blown up from the west, howling in the smokeless chimneys, and suggesting to the feminine mind storms at sea, a tossing ocean, and the hopeless inaccessibility of all astronomers and men on the other side of the same.

The Bishop had entered Viviette's room at ten minutes past three. The long hand of the hall clock lay level at forty-five minutes past when the knob of the door moved, and he came out. Louis met him where the passage joined the hall.

Dr. Helmsdale was decidedly in an emotional state, his face being slightly flushed.

Louis looked his anxious inquiry without speaking it.

“She accepts me,” said the Bishop in a low voice. “And the wedding is to be soon. Her long solitude and sufferings justify haste. What you said was true. Sheer weariness and distraction have driven her to me. She was quite passive at last, and agreed to anything I proposed—such is the persuasive force of logical reasoning! A good and wise woman, she perceived what a true shelter from sadness was offered in me, and was not the one to despise Heaven’s gift.”



## CHAPTER XI.

THE silence of Swithin was to be accounted for by the circumstance that neither to Marseilles nor to America had he in the first place directed his steps. Feeling himself absolutely free, he had, on arriving at Southampton, decided to make straight for the Cape. His object was to leave his heavier luggage there, examine the capabilities of the spot for his purpose, find out the necessity or otherwise of shipping over his own equatorial, and then cross to America as soon as there was a good opportunity. Here he might inquire the movements of the Transit expedition to the South Pacific,

and join it at such a point as might be convenient.

Thus, though wrong in her premisses, Viviette had intuitively decided with absolute precision. There was, as a matter of fact, no chance of her being able to communicate with him for several months, notwithstanding that he might possibly communicate with her.

This excursive time was an awakening for Swithin. To altered circumstances inevitably followed altered views. That such changes should have a marked effect upon a young man who had made neither grand tour nor petty one—who had, in short, scarcely been away from home in his life—was nothing more than natural. New ideas struggled to disclose themselves; and with the addition of strange twinklers to his southern horizon came an absorbed attention that way, and a corre-

sponding forgetfulness of what lay to the north behind his back, whether human or celestial. Whoever may deplore it, few will wonder that Viviette, who till then had stood high in his heaven, if she had not dominated it, sank lower and lower with his retreat like the North Star. Master of a large advance of his first year's income in circular notes and other forms, he perhaps too readily forgot that the mere act of honour, but for her self-suppression, would have rendered him penniless.

Meanwhile, to come back and claim her at the specified time, four years hence, if she did not object to be claimed, was as much a part of his programme as were the exploits abroad and elsewhere that were to prelude it. The very thoroughness of his intention for that advanced date inclined him all the more readily to shelve the subject now. Her unhappy caution to him not

to write too soon was a comfortable licence in his present state of tensity about sublime scientific things, which knew not woman, nor her sacrifices, nor her fears. In truth he was not only too young in years, but too literal, direct, and uncompromising in nature, to understand such a woman as Lady Constantine; and she suffered for that limitation in him, as was antecedently probable she would do.

He stayed but a little time at Cape Town on this his first reconnoitring journey; and on that account wrote to no one from the place. On leaving he found there remained some weeks on his hands before he wished to cross to America; and feeling an irrepressible desire for further studies in navigation on shipboard, and under clear skies, he took the steamer for Melbourne; returning thence in due time, and pursuing his journey to America, where he landed at Boston.

Having at last had enough of great circles and other nautical reckonings, and taking no interest in men or cities, this indefatigable scrutineer of the universe went immediately on to Cambridge; and there, by the help of an introduction he had brought from England, he revelled for a time in the glories of the gigantic refractor (which he was permitted to use on odd occasions), and in the pleasures of intercourse with the scientific group around. This brought him on to the time of starting with the Transit expedition, when he and his kind became lost to the eye of civilization behind the horizon of the Pacific Ocean.

To speak of their doings on this pilgrimage, of ingress and egress, of tangent and parallax, of external and internal contact, would avail nothing. Is it not all written in the chronicles of the Astronomical

Society? More to the point will it be to mention that poor Viviette's telegram and letter to Cambridge had been returned long before he reached that place, while her missives to Marseilles were, of course, misdirected altogether. On arriving in America, uncertain of an address in that country to which he would return, Swithin wrote his first letter to his grandmother; and in this he ordered that all communications should be sent to await him at Cape Town, as the only safe spot for finding him, sooner or later. The equatorial he also directed to be forwarded to the same place. At this time, too, he ventured to break Viviette's commands, and address a letter to her, not knowing of the strange results that had followed his absence from home.

It was February. The Transit was over, the scientific company had broken up, and Swithin had steamed towards the Cape, to

take up his permanent abode there, with a view to his great task of surveying, charting, and theorizing on those exceptional features in the southern skies which had been but partially treated by the younger Herschel. Having entered Table Bay, and landed on the quay, he called at once at the post-office.

Two letters were handed him, and he found from the date that they had been waiting there for some time. One of these epistles, which had a weather-worn look as regarded the ink, and was in old-fashioned penmanship, he knew to be from his grandmother. He opened it before he had as much as glanced at the superscription of the second.

Besides immaterial portions, it contained the following:—

“J reckon you know by now of our

main news this fall, but lest you should not have heard of it J send the exact thing snipped out of the newspaper. Nobody expected her to do it quite so soon; but it is said hereabout that my lord bishop and my lady had been drawing nigh to an understanding before the glum tidings of Sir Blount's taking of his own life reached her; and the account of this wicked deed was so sore afflicting to her mind, and made her poor heart so timid and low, that in charity to my lady her few friends agreed on urging her to let the bishop go on paying his court as before, notwithstanding she had not been a widow-woman near so long as was thought. This, as it turned out, she was willing to do; and when my lord asked her she told him she would marry him at once or never. That's as J was told, and J had it from those that know."



The cutting from the newspaper was an ordinary announcement of marriage between the Bishop of Melchester and Lady Constantine.

Swithin was so astounded at the intelligence of what for the nonce seemed Viviette's wanton fickleness that he quite omitted to look at the second letter; and remembered nothing about it till an hour afterwards, when sitting in his own room at the hotel.

It was in her handwriting, but so altered that its superscription had not arrested his eye. It had no beginning, or date; but its contents soon acquainted him with her motive for the precipitate act. The few concluding sentences are all that it will be necessary to quote here:—

“There was no way out of it, even if I could have found you without infringing

one of the conditions I had previously laid down. The long desire of my heart has been not to impoverish you or mar your career. The new desire was to save myself and another . . . . I have done a desperate thing. Yet for myself I could do no better, and for you no less. I would have sacrificed my single self to honesty, but I was not alone concerned. What woman has a right to blight a coming life to preserve her personal integrity? . . . The one bright spot is that it saves you and your endowment from further catastrophes, and preserves you to the pleasant paths of scientific fame. I no longer lie like a log across your path, which is now as open as on the day before you saw me, and ere I encouraged you to win me. Alas, Swithin, I ought to have known better. The folly was great, and the suffering be upon my head! I have borne much, and am not unprepared. As

for you, Swithin, by simply pressing straight on, your triumph is assured. Do not communicate with me in any way—not even in answer to this. Do not think of me. Do not see me ever any more. Your unhappy

“VIVLETTE.”

Swithin's heart swelled within him in sudden pity for her, first; then he blanched with a horrified sense of what she had done, and at his own relation to the deed. He felt like an awakened somnambulist who should find that he had been accessory to a tragedy during his unconsciousness. She had loosened the knot of her difficulties by cutting it unscrupulously through and through.

The big tidings rather dazed than crushed him, his predominant feeling being soon again one of keenest sorrow and sympathy.

Yet one thing was obvious; he could do nothing—absolutely nothing. The event which he now heard of for the first time had taken place five long months ago. He reflected, and regretted—and mechanically went on with his preparations for settling down to work under the shadow of Table Mountain. He was as one who suddenly finds the world a stranger place than he thought; but is excluded by age, temperament, and situation from being much more than an astonished spectator of its strangeness.

The Royal Observatory was about a mile out of the town, and hither he repaired as soon as he had established himself in lodgings. He had decided, on his first visit to the Cape, that it would be highly advantageous to him if he could supplement the occasional use of the large instruments

here by the use at his own house of his own equatorial, and had accordingly given directions that it might be sent over from England. The precious possession now arrived; and although the sight of it—of the brasses on which her hand had often rested, of the eyepiece through which her dark eyes had beamed—engendered some decidedly bitter regrets in him for a time, he could not long afford to give to the past the days that were meant for the future.

Unable to get a room convenient for a private observatory, he resolved at last to fix the instrument on a solid pillar in the garden; and several days were spent in accommodating it to its new position. In this latitude there was no necessity for economizing clear nights as he had been obliged to do on the old tower at Welland. There it had happened more than once, to his sorrow, that after waiting idle through

days and nights of cloudy weather, poor Viviette would fix her time for meeting him at an hour when at last he had an opportunity of seeing the sky; so that in giving to her the golden moments of cloudlessness he was losing his chance with the orbs above. But here there was clear atmosphere enough for both science and love, had an object for the latter been present with him.

Those features which usually attract the eye of the visitor to a new latitude are the novel forms of human and vegetable life, and other such sublunary things. But our young man glanced slightly at these; the changes overhead had his attention. The old subject was imprinted there, but in a new type. Here was a heaven, fixed and ancient as the northern; yet it had never appeared above the Welland hills since they were heaved up from beneath.

Here was an unalterable circumpolar region; but the polar patterns stereotyped in history and legend—without which it had almost seemed that a polar sky could not exist—had never been seen therein.

St. Cleeve, as was natural, began by cursory surveys, which were not likely to be of much utility to the world or to himself. He wasted several weeks—indeed above two months—in a comparatively idle survey of southern novelties; in the mere luxury of looking at stellar objects whose wonders were known, recounted, and classified, long before his own personality had been heard of. With a child's simple delight he allowed his instrument to rove, evening after evening, from the gorgeous glitter of Canopus to the hazy clouds of Magellan. Before he had well-finished this optical prelude there floated over to him from the other side of the Equator the

postscript to the epistle of his lost Viviette. It came in the vehicle of a common newspaper, under the head of "Births:"—

"April 10th, 18—, at the Palace, Melchester, Lady Helmsdale, of a son."



## CHAPTER XII.

THREE years passed away, and Swithin still remained at the Cape, quietly pursuing the work that had brought him there. His memoranda of observations had accumulated to a wheelbarrow load, and he was beginning to shape them into a treatise which should possess some scientific utility.

He had gauged the southern skies with greater results than even he himself had anticipated. Those unfamiliar constellations which, to the casual beholder, are at most a new arrangement of ordinary points of light, were to this professed astronomer, as to his brethren, a far greater matter. It

was below the surface that his material lay. There, in regions revealed only to the instrumental observer, were suns of hybrid kind—fire-fogs, floating nuclei, globes that flew in groups like swarms of bees, and other extraordinary sights—which, when decomposed by Swithin's equatorial, turned out to be the beginning of a new series of phenomena, instead of the end of an old one.

There were gloomy deserts in those southern skies such as the north shows scarcely an example of; sites set apart for the position of suns which for some unfathomable reason were left uncreated, their places remaining ever since conspicuous by their emptiness.

The inspection of these chasms brought him a second pulsation of that old horror which he had used to describe to Viviette as produced in him by bottomlessness in

the north heaven. The ghostly finger of limitless vacancy touched him now on the other side. Infinite deeps in the north stellar region had a homely familiarity about them, when compared with infinite deeps in the region of the south pole. This was an even more unknown tract of the unknown. Space here, being less the historic haunt of human thought than overhead at home, seemed to be pervaded with a more lonely loneliness.

Were there given on paper to these astronomical exertions of St. Cleeve a space proportionable to that occupied by his year with Viviette at Welland, this narrative would treble its length; but not a single additional glimpse would be afforded of Swithin in his relations with old emotions. In these experiments with convex glasses, important as they were to eye and intellect, there was little food for

the sympathetic instincts which create the changes in a life, and are therefore more particularly the question here. That which is the foreground and measuring base of one perspective draught may be the vanishing-point of another perspective draught, while yet they are both draughts of the same thing. Swithin's doings and discoveries in the southern sidereal system were, no doubt, incidents of the highest importance to him; and yet from our present point of view they served but the humble purpose of *killing time* while other doings, more nearly allied to his heart than to his understanding, developed themselves at home.

In the intervals between his professional occupations he took walks over the sand-flats near, or among the farms which were gradually overspreading the country in the vicinity of Cape Town. He grew familiar

with the outline of Table Mountain, and the fleecy "Devil's Table-cloth" which used to settle on its top when the wind was south-east. On these promenades he would more particularly think of Viviette, and of that curious pathetic chapter in his life with her, which seemed to have wound itself up and ended for ever. Those scenes were rapidly receding into distance, and the intensity of his sentiment regarding them had proportionately abated. He felt that there had been something wrong in that period of his existence, and yet he could not exactly define the boundary of the wrong. Viviette's sad and amazing sequel to that chapter had still a fearful, catastrophic aspect in his eyes; but instead of musing over it and its bearings he shunned the subject, as we shun by night the shady scene of a disaster, and keep to the open road.

He sometimes contemplated her apart from the past—leading her life in the Cathedral Close at Melchester; and wondered how often she looked south, and thought of where he was.

On one of these afternoon walks in the neighbourhood of the Royal Observatory he turned and looked towards the signal-post on the Lion's Rump. This was a high promontory to the north-west of Table Mountain, and overlooked Table Bay. Before his eyes had left the scene the signal was suddenly hoisted on the staff. It announced that a mail steamer had appeared in view over the sea. In the course of an hour he retraced his steps, as he had often done on such occasions, and strolled leisurely across the intervening mile and a half till he arrived at the Post Office door.

There was no letter from England for him; but there was a newspaper, addressed

in the seventeenth-century handwriting of his grandmother, who, in spite of her great age, still retained a steady hold on life. He turned away disappointed, and resumed his walk into the country, opening the paper as he went along.

A cross in black ink attracted his attention; and it was opposite a name among the "Deaths." His blood ran icily as he discerned the word "Helmsdale." But it was not she. Her husband, the Bishop of Melchester, had, after a short illness, departed this life at the comparatively early age of fifty years.

All the enactments of the bygone days at Welland now started up like an awakened army from the ground. But a few months were wanting to the time when he would be of an age to marry without sacrificing the annuity which formed his means of subsistence. It was

a point in his life that had had no meaning or interest for him since his separation from Viviette, for women were now no more to him than the inhabitants of Jupiter. But the whirligig of time having again set Viviette free, the aspect of home altered, and conjecture as to her future found room to work anew.

But beyond the simple fact that she was a widow, he for some time gained not an atom of intelligence concerning her. There was no one of whom he could inquire but his grandmother, and she could tell him nothing about a lady who dwelt far away at Melchester.

Several months slipped by thus; and no feeling within him rose to sufficient strength to force him out of a passive attitude.

Then by the merest chance his granny stated in one of her rambling epistles that



Lady Helmsdale was coming to live again at Welland, in the old house, with her child, now a little boy between three and four years of age.

Swithin, however, lived on as before.

But by the following autumn a change became necessary for the young man himself. His work at the Cape was done. His uncle's wishes that he should study there had been more than observed. The materials for his great treatise were collected, and it now only remained for him to arrange, digest, and publish them, for which purpose a return to England was indispensable.

So the equatorial was unscrewed, and the stand taken down; the astronomer's barrow-load of precious memoranda, and rolls upon rolls of diagrams, representing three years of continuous labour, were safely packed; and Swithin departed for

good and all from the shores of Cape Town.

He had long before informed his grandmother of the date at which she might expect him; and in a reply from her, which reached him just previous to sailing, she casually mentioned that she frequently saw Lady Helmsdale; that on the last occasion her ladyship had shown great interest in the information that Swithin was coming home, and had inquired the time of his return.

On a late summer day Swithin stepped from the train at Warborne, and, directing his baggage to be sent on after him, set out on foot for old Welland once again.

It seemed but the day after his departure, so little had the scene changed. True, there was that change which is always the first to arrest attention in

places that are conventionally called unchanging—a higher and broader vegetation at every familiar corner than at the former time.

He had not gone a mile when he saw walking before him a clergyman whose form, after consideration, he recognized, in spite of a novel whiteness in that part of his hair that showed below the brim of his hat. Swithin walked much faster than this gentleman, and soon was at his side.

“Mr. Torkingham! I knew it was,” said Swithin.

Mr. Torkingham was slower in recognizing the astronomer, but in a moment had greeted him with a warm shake of the hand.

“I have been to the station on purpose to meet you!” cried Mr. Torkingham, “and was returning with the idea that you had not come. I am your grandmother’s

emissary. She could not come herself, and as she was anxious, and nobody else could be spared, I came for her."

Then they walked on together. The parson told Swithin all about his grandmother, the parish, and his endeavours to enlighten it; and in due course said, "You are no doubt aware that Lady Helmsdale—the Lady Constantine of former days—is living again at Welland?"

Swithin said he had heard as much, and added, what was far within the truth, that the news of the Bishop's death had been a great surprise to him.

"Yes," said Mr. Torkingham, with nine thoughts to one word, "one might have prophesied, to look at him, that Melchester would not lack a bishop for the next forty years. Yes; pale death knocks at the cottages of the poor and the palaces of kings with an impartial foot!"

“Was he a particularly good man?” asked Swithin.

“He was not a Ken or a Heber. To speak candidly, he had his faults, of which arrogance was not the least. But who is perfect?”

Swithin, somehow, felt relieved to hear that the Bishop was not a perfect man.

“His poor wife, I fear, had not a great deal more happiness with him than with her first husband. But one might almost have foreseen it: the marriage was hasty—the result of a red-hot caprice, hardly becoming to a man in his position; and it betokened a want of temperate discretion which soon showed itself in other ways. That’s all there was to be said against him; and now it’s all over, and things have settled again into their old course. But Lady Helmsdale is not Lady Constantine. No; put it as you will, she

is not the same. There seems to be a nameless something on her mind—a trouble—a rooted melancholy, which no man's ministry can reach. Formerly she was a woman whose confidence it was easy to gain; but neither religion nor philosophy avails with her now. Beyond that, her life is strangely like what it was when you were with us."

Conversing thus, they pursued the turnpike road till their conversation was interrupted by a crying voice on their left. They looked, and perceived that a child, in getting over an adjoining stile, had fallen on his face.

Mr. Torkingham and Swithin both hastened up to help the sufferer, who was a lovely little fellow with flaxen hair, which spread out in a frill of curls from beneath a quaint, close-fitting velvet cap that he wore. Swithin picked him up, while Mr.

Torkingham wiped the sand from his lips and nose, and administered a few words of consolation, together with a few sweetmeats, which, somewhat to Swithin's surprise, the parson produced as if by magic from his pocket. One half the comfort rendered would have sufficed to soothe such a disposition as the child's. He ceased crying, and ran away in delight to his unconscious nurse, who was reaching up for blackberries at a hedge some way off.

"You know who he is, of course?" said Mr. Torkingham, as they resumed their journey.

"No," said Swithin.

"Oh, I thought you did. Yet how should you? It is Lady Helmsdale's boy—her only child. His fond mother little thinks he is so far away from home."

"Dear me!—Lady Helmsdale's—ah,

how interesting!" Swithin paused abstractedly for a moment, then stepped back again to the stile, where he stood watching the little boy out of sight.

"I can never venture out of doors now without sweets in my pocket," continued the good-natured vicar; "and the result is that I meet that young man more frequently on my rounds than any other of my parishioners."

St. Cleeve was silent, and they turned into Welland Lane, where their paths presently diverged, and Swithin was left to pursue his way alone. He might have accompanied the vicar yet further, and gone straight to Welland House; but it would have been difficult to do so then without provoking inquiry. It was easy to go there now: by a cross path he could be at the mansion almost as soon as by the direct road. And yet Swithin did not



turn; he felt an indescribable reluctance to see Viviette. He could not exactly say why. Moreover, before he knew how the land lay it might be awkward to attempt to call: and this was a sufficient excuse for postponement.

In this mood he went on, following the direct way to his grandmother's homestead. He reached the garden-gate, and, looking into the bosky basin where the old house stood, saw a graceful female form moving before the porch, bidding adieu to some one within the door.

He wondered what creature of that mould his grandmother could know, and went forward with some hesitation. At his approach the apparition turned, and he beheld, developed into blushing womanhood, one who had once been known to him as the village maiden Tabitha Lark. Seeing Swithin, and apparently from an

instinct that her presence would not be desirable just then, she moved quickly round into the garden.

The returned traveller entered the house, where he found awaiting him poor old Mrs. Martin, to whose earthly course death stood rather as the asymptote than as the end. She was perceptibly smaller in form than when he had left her, and she could see less distinctly. A rather affecting greeting followed, in which his grandmother murmured the words of Israel: “‘Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.’”

The form of Hannah had disappeared from the kitchen, that ancient servant having been gathered to her fathers about six months before, her place being filled by a young girl who knew not Joseph.

They presently chatted with much cheerfulness, and his grandmother said, “Have

you heard what a wonderful young woman Miss Lark has become?—a mere fleet-footed, slithering maid when you were last home.”

St. Cleeve had not heard, but he had partly seen, and he was informed that Tabitha had left Welland shortly after his own departure, and had studied music with great success in London, where she had resided ever since till quite recently; that she played at concerts, oratorios—had, in short, joined the phalanx of Wonderful Women who have sternly resolved to eclipse masculine genius altogether, and humiliate the brutal sex to the dust.

“She is only in the garden,” added his grandmother. “Why don’t ye go out and speak to her?”

Swithin was nothing loth, and strolled out under the apple-trees, where he arrived just in time to prevent Miss Lark from

going off by the back gate. There was not much difficulty in breaking ice between them, and they began to chat with vivacity.

Now all these proceedings occupied time, for somehow it was very charming to talk to Miss Lark; and by degrees St. Cleeve informed Tabitha of his great undertaking, and of the voluminous notes he had amassed, which would require so much rearrangement and recopying by an amanuensis as to absolutely appal him. He greatly feared he should not get one careful enough for such scientific matter; whereupon Tabitha said she would be delighted to do it for him. Then blushing, and declaring suddenly that it had grown quite late, she left him and the garden for her relation's house hard by.

Swithin, no less than Tabitha, had been surprised by the disappearance of

the sun behind the hill; and the question now arose whether it would be advisable to call upon Viviette that night. There was little doubt that she knew of his coming; but more than that he could not predicate; and being entirely ignorant of whom she had around her, entirely in the dark as to her present feelings towards him, he thought it would be better to defer his visit until the next day.

Walking round to the front of the house he beheld the well-known agriculturists Hezzy Biles, Haymoss Fry, and some others of the same old school, passing the gate homeward from their work with bundles of wood at their backs. Swithin saluted them over the top rail.

“Well! do my eyes and ears—” began Hezzy; and then, balancing his faggot on end against the hedge, he came forward, the others following.

“Says I to myself as soon as I heerd his voice,” Hezzy continued (addressing Swithin as if he were a disinterested spectator and not himself), “please God I’ll pitch my nitch, and go across and speak to en.”

“I knowed in a winking ’twas some great navigator that I see a standing there,” said Haymoss. “But whe’r ’twere a sort of nabob, or a diment-digger, or a lion-hunter, I couldn’t so much as guess till I heerd en speak.”

“And what changes have come over Welland since I was last at home?” asked Swithin.

“Well, Mr. San Cleeve,” Hezzy replied, “when you’ve said that a few stripling boys and maidens have busted into blooth, and a few married women have plimmed and chimped (my lady among ’em), why, you’ve said anighst all, Mr. San Cleeve.”

The conversation thus begun was continued on divers matters till they were all enveloped in total darkness, when his old acquaintances shouldered their faggots again and proceeded on their way.

Now that he was actually within her coasts again, Swithin felt a little more strongly the influence of the past and Viviette than he had been accustomed to do for the last two or three years. During the night he felt half sorry that he had not marched off to the Great House to see her, regardless of the time of day. If she really nourished for him any particle of her old affection it had been the cruellest thing not to call. A few questions that he put concerning her to his grandmother elicited that Lady Helmsdale had no friends about her—not even her brother—and that her health had not been so good since her return from Melchester as formerly. Still,

this proved nothing as to the state of her heart, and as she had kept a dead silence since the Bishop's death it was quite possible that she would meet him with that cold repressive tone and manner which experienced women know so well how to put on when they wish to intimate to the long-lost lover that old episodes are to be taken as forgotten.

The next morning he prepared to call, if only on the ground of old acquaintance, for Swithin was too straightforward to ascertain anything indirectly. It was rather too early for this purpose when he went out from his grandmother's garden-gate, after breakfast, and he waited in the gardens. While he lingered his eye fell on Rings-Hill Speer.

It appeared dark, for a moment, against the blue sky behind it; then the fleeting cloud which shadowed it passed on, and



the face of the column brightened into such luminousness that the sky behind sank to the complexion of a dark foil.

“Surely somebody is on the column,” he said to himself, after gazing at it awhile.

Instead of going straight to the Great House he deviated through the insulating field, now sown with turnips, which surrounded the plantation on Rings-Hill. By the time that he plunged under the trees he was still more certain that somebody was on the tower. He crept up to the base with proprietary curiosity, for the spot seemed again like his own.

The path still remained much as formerly, but the nook in which the cabin had stood was covered with undergrowth. Swithin entered the door of the tower, ascended the staircase about half-way on tip-toe, and listened, for he did not wish to intrude on the top if any stranger were

there. The hollow spiral, as he knew from old experience, would bring down to his ears the slightest sound from above; and it now revealed to him the words of a dialogue in progress at the summit of the tower.

“Mother, what shall I do?” a child’s voice said. “Shall I sing?”

The mother seemed to assent, for the child began,—

“The robin has fled from the wood  
To the snug habitation of man.”

This performance apparently attracted but little attention from the child’s companion, for the young voice suggested, as a new form of entertainment, “Shall I say my prayers?”

“Yes,” replied one whom Swithin had begun to recognize.

“Who shall I pray for?”

No answer.

“Who shall I pray for?”

“Pray for father.”

“But he is gone to heaven?”

A sigh from Viviette was distinctly audible.

“You made a mistake, didn’t you, mother?” continued the little one.

“I must have. The strangest mistake a woman ever made!”

Nothing more was said, and Swithin ascended, words from above indicating to him that his footsteps were heard. In another half-minute he rose through the hatchway. A lady in black was sitting in the sun, and the boy with the flaxen hair whom he had seen yesterday was at her feet.

“Viviette!” he said.

“Swithin!—at last!” she cried.

The words died upon her lips, and from

very faintness she bent her head. For instead of rushing forward to her he had stood still; and there appeared upon his face a look which there was no mistaking.

Yes; he was shocked at her worn and faded aspect. The image he had mentally carried out with him to the Cape he had brought home again as that of the woman he was now to rejoin. But another woman sat before him, and not the original Viviette. Her cheeks had lost for ever that firm contour which had been drawn by the vigorous hand of youth, and the masses of hair that were once darkness visible had become touched here and there by a faint grey haze, like the *Via Lactea* in a midnight sky.

Yet to those who had eyes to understand as well as to see, the chastened pensiveness of her once handsome features revealed more promising material beneath than ever her youth had done. But Swithin was

hopelessly her junior. Unhappily for her he had now just arrived at an age whose canon of faith it is that the silly period of woman's life is her only period of beauty. Viviette saw it all, and knew that Time had at last brought about his revenge. She had tremblingly watched and waited without sleep, ever since Swithin had re-entered Welland, and it was for this.

Swithin came forward, and took her by the hand, which she passively allowed him to do.

“Swithin, you don't love me,” she said simply.

“O Viviette!”

“You don't love me,” she repeated.

“Don't say it!”

“Yes, but I will! you have a right not to love me. You did once. But now I am an old woman, and you are still a young man; so how can you love me? I

do not expect it. It is kind and charitable of you to come and see me here."

"I have come all the way from the Cape," he faltered, for her insistence took all power out of him to deny, in mere politeness, what she said.

"Yes; you have come from the Cape; but not for me," she answered. "It would be absurd if you had come for me. You have come because your work there is finished. . . . I like to sit here with my little boy—it is a pleasant spot. It was once something to us, was it not? but that was long ago. You scarcely knew me for the same woman, did you?"

"Knew you—yes, of course I knew you!"

"You looked as if you did not. But you must not be surprised at me. I belong to an earlier generation than you, remember."

Thus, in sheer bitterness of spirit did she inflict wounds on herself by exaggerating the difference in their years. But she had nevertheless spoken truly. Sympathize with her as he might, and as he unquestionably did, he loved her no longer. But why had she expected otherwise? "O woman," might a prophet have said to her, "great is thy faith if thou believest a junior lover's love will last five years!"

"I shall be glad to know through your grandmother how you are getting on," she said meekly. "But now I would much rather that we part. Yes; do not question me. I would rather that we part. Good-bye."

Hardly knowing what he did, he touched her hand, and obeyed. He was a scientist, and took words literally. There is something in the inexorably simple logic of

such men which partakes of the cruelty of the natural laws that are their study. He entered the tower-steps, and mechanically descended; and it was not till he got half-way down that he thought she could not mean what she had said.

Before leaving Cape Town he had made up his mind on this one point; that if she were willing to marry him, marry her he would without let or hindrance. That much he morally owed her, and was not the man to demur. And though the Swithin who had returned was not quite the Swithin who had gone away, though he could not now love her with the sort of love he had once bestowed; he believed that all her conduct had been dictated by the purest benevolence to him, by that charity which "seeketh not her own." Hence he did not flinch from a wish to deal with loving-kindness towards her—



a sentiment perhaps in the long-run more to be prized than lover's love.

Her manner had caught him unawares ; but now recovering himself he turned back determinedly. Bursting out upon the roof he clasped her in his arms, and kissed her several times.

“ Viviette, Viviette,” he said, “ I have come to marry you ! ”

She uttered a shriek—a shriek of amazed joy—such as never was heard on that tower before or since—and fell in his arms, clasping his neck.

There she lay heavily. Not to disturb her he sat down in her seat, still holding her fast. The little boy, who had stood with round conjectural eyes throughout the meeting, now came close ; and presently looking up to Swithin said,—

“ Mother has gone to sleep.”

Swithin looked down, and started. Her

tight clasp had loosened. A wave of whiteness, like that of marble which has never seen the sun, crept up from her neck, and travelled upwards and onwards over her cheek, lips, eyelids, forehead, temples, its margin banishing back the live pink till the latter had entirely disappeared.

Seeing that something was wrong, yet not understanding what, the little boy began to cry; but in his concentration Swithin hardly heard it. "Viviette—Viviette!" he said.

The child cried with still deeper grief, and, after a momentary hesitation, pushed his hand into Swithin's for protection.

"Hush, hush! my child," said Swithin distractedly. "I'll take care of you! O Viviette!" he exclaimed again, pressing her face to his.

But she did not reply.

"What can this be?" he asked himself.

He would not then answer according to his fear.

He looked up for help. Nobody appeared in sight but Tabitha Lark, who was skirting the field with a bounding tread—the single bright spot of colour and animation within the wide horizon. When he looked down again his fear deepened to certainty. It was no longer a mere surmise that help was vain. Sudden joy after despair had touched an overstrained heart too smartly. Viviette was dead. The Bishop was avenged.

THE END.

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