



EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

MY NOVEL

VOLUME XI

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BOOK ELEVENTH.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HATE AS AN AGENT IN CIVILIZED LIFE.

It is not an uncommon crotchet amongst benevolent men to maintain that wickedness is necessarily a sort of insanity, and that nobody would make a violent start out of the straight path unless stung to such disorder by a bee in his bonnet. Certainly when some very clever, well-educated person like our friend, Randal Leslie, acts upon the fallacious principle that "roguery is the best policy," it is curious to see how many points he has in common with the insane: what over-cunning, what irritable restlessness, what suspicious belief that the rest of the world are in a conspiracy against him, which it requires all his wit to baffle and turn to his own proper aggrandizement and profit. Perhaps some of my readers may have thought that I have represented Randal as unnaturally far-fetched in his schemes, too wire-drawn and subtle in his speculations; yet that is commonly the case with very refining intellects, when they choose to play the knave; it helps to disguise from themselves the ugliness of their ambition, just as a philosopher delights in the ingenuity of some metaphysical process, which ends in what plain men call "atheism," who would be infinitely shocked and offended if he were called an atheist.

Having premised thus much on behalf of the "Natural" in Randal Leslie's character, I must here fly off to say a word or two on the agency in human life exercised by a passion rarely seen without a mask in our debonair and civilized age,—I mean Hate.

In the good old days of our forefathers, when plain speaking and hard blows were in fashion, when a man had his heart at the tip of his tongue, and four feet of sharp iron dangling at his side, Hate played an honest, open part in the theatre of the world. In fact, when we read History, Hate seems to have "starred it" on the stage. But now, where is Hate? Who ever sees its face? Is it that smiling, good-tempered creature, that presses you by the hand so cordially, or that dignified figure of state that calls you its "Right Honourable friend"? Is it that bowing, grateful dependent; is it that soft-eyed Amaryllis? Ask not, guess not:

you will only know it to be hate when the poison is in your cup, or the poniard in your breast. In the Gothic age, grim Humour painted "the Dance of Death;" in our polished century, some sardonic wit should give us "the Masquerade of Hate."

Certainly, the counter-passion betrays itself with ease to our gaze. Love is rarely a hypocrite. But Hate--how detect, and how guard against it? It lurks where you least suspect it; it is created by causes that you can the least foresee; and Civilization multiplies its varieties, whilst it favours its disguise: for Civilization increases the number of contending interests, and Refinement renders more susceptible to the least irritation the cuticle of Self-Love. But Hate comes covertly forth from some self-interest we have crossed, or some self-love we have wounded; and, dullards that we are, how seldom we are aware of our offence! You may be hated by a man you have never seen in your life: you may be hated as often by one you have loaded with benefits; you may so walk as not to tread on a worm; but you must sit fast on your easy-chair till you are carried out to your bier, if you would be sure not to tread on some snake of a foe. But, then, what harm does the hate do us? Very often the harm is as unseen by the world as the hate is unrecognized by us. It may come on us, unawares, in some solitary byway of our life; strike us in our unsuspecting privacy; thwart as in some blessed hope we have never told to another; for the moment the world sees that it is Hate that strikes us, its worst power of mischief is gone.

We have a great many names for the same passion,--Envy, Jealousy, Spite, Prejudice, Rivalry; but they are so many synonyms for the one old heathen demon. When the death-giving shaft of Apollo sent the plague to some unhappy Achaean, it did not much matter to the victim whether the god were called Helios or Smintheus.

No man you ever met in the world seemed more raised above the malice of Hate than Audley Egerton: even in the hot war of politics he had scarcely a personal foe; and in private life he kept himself so aloof and apart from others that he was little known, save by the benefits the waste of his wealth conferred. That the hate of any one could reach the austere statesman on his high pinnacle of esteem,--you would have smiled at the idea! But Hate is now, as it ever has been, an actual Power amidst "the Varieties of Life;" and, in spite of bars to the door, and policemen in the street, no one can be said to sleep in safety while there wakes the eye of a single foe.

CHAPTER II.

The glory of Bond Street is no more. The title of Bond Street Lounger has faded from our lips. In vain the crowd of equipages and the blaze of shops: the renown of Bond Street was in its pavement, its pedestrians. Art thou old enough, O reader! to remember the Bond Street Lounger and his incomparable generation? For my part, I can just recall the decline of the grand era. It was on its wane when, in the ambition of boyhood, I first began to muse upon high neck cloths and Wellington boots. But the ancient /habitués/--the /magni nominis umbrae/, contemporaries of Brummell in his zenith, boon companions of George IV. in his regency--still haunted the spot. From four to six in the hot month of June, they sauntered stately to and fro, looking somewhat mournful even then, foreboding the extinction of their race. The Bond Street Lounger was rarely seen alone: he was a social animal, and walked arm in arm with his fellow-man. He did not seem born for the cares of these ruder times; not made was he for an age in which Finsbury returns members to parliament. He loved his small talk; and never since then has talk been so pleasingly small. Your true Bond Street Lounger had a very dissipated look. His youth had been spent with heroes who loved their bottle. He himself had perhaps supped with Sheridan. He was by nature a spendthrift: you saw it in the roll of his walk. Men who make money rarely saunter; men who save money rarely swagger. But saunter and swagger both united to stamp PRODIGAL on the Bond Street Lounger. And so familiar as he was with his own set, and so amusingly supercilious with the vulgar residue of mortals whose faces were strange to Bond Street! But he is gone. The world, though sadder for his loss, still strives to do its best without him; and our young men, nowadays, attend to model cottages, and incline to Tractarianism. Still the place, to an unreflecting eye, has its brilliancy and bustle; but it is a thoroughfare, not a lounge. And adown the thoroughfare, somewhat before the hour when the throng is thickest, passed two gentlemen of an appearance exceedingly out of keeping with the place.--Yet both had the air of men pretending to aristocracy,--an old-world air of respectability and stake in the country, and Church-and-Stateism. The burlier of the two was even rather a beau in his way. He had first learned to dress, indeed, when Bond Street was at its acme, and Brummell in his pride. He still retained in his garb the fashion of his youth; only what then had spoken of the town, now betrayed the life of the country. His neckcloth ample and high, and of snowy whiteness, set off to comely advantage a face smooth-shaven, and of clear florid hues; his coat of royal blue, with buttons in which you might have seen yourself "veluti in speculum", was rather jauntily buttoned across a waist that spoke of lusty middle age, free from the ambition, the

avarice, and the anxieties that fret Londoners into thread-papers; his small-clothes, of grayish drab, loose at the thigh and tight at the knee, were made by Brummell's own breeches-maker, and the gaiters to match (thrust half-way down the calf), had a manly dandyism that would have done honour to the beau-ideal of a county member. The profession of this gentleman's companion was unmistakable,--the shovel-hat, the clerical cut of the coat, the neckcloth without collar, that seemed made for its accessory the band, and something very decorous, yet very mild, in the whole mien of this personage, all spoke of one who was every inch the gentleman and the parson.

"No," said the portlier of these two persons,--"no, I can't say I like Frank's looks at all. There's certainly something on his mind. However, I suppose it will be all out this evening."

"He dines with you at your hotel, Squire? Well, you must be kind to him. We can't put old heads upon young shoulders."

"I don't object to his head being young," returned the squire; "but I wish he had a little of Randal Leslie's good sense in it. I see how it will end; I must take him back to the country; and if he wants occupation, why, he shall keep the hounds, and I'll put him into Brooksby farm."

"As for the hounds," replied the parson, "hounds necessitate horses; and I think more mischief comes to a young man of spirit from the stables than from any other place in the world. They ought to be exposed from the pulpit, those stables!" added Mr. Dale, thoughtfully; "see what they entailed upon Nimrod! But Agriculture is a healthful and noble pursuit, honoured by sacred nations, and cherished by the greatest men in classical times. For instance, the Athenians were--"

"Bother the Athenians!" cried the squire, irreverently; "you need not go so far back for an example. It is enough for a Hazeldean that his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather all farmed before him; and a devilish deal better, I take it, than any of those musty old Athenians, no offence to them. But I'll tell you one thing, Parson, a man to farm well, and live in the country, should have a wife; it is half the battle."

"As to a battle, a man who is married is pretty sure of half, though not always the better half, of it," answered the parson, who seemed peculiarly facetious that day. "Ah, Squire, I wish I could think Mrs. Hazeldean right in her conjecture!--you would have the prettiest

daughter-in-law in the three kingdoms. And I do believe that, if I could have a good talk with the young lady apart from her father, we could remove the only objection I know to the marriage. Those Popish errors--"

"Ah, very true!" cried the squire; "that Pope sticks hard in my gizzard. I could excuse her being a foreigner, and not having, I suppose, a shilling in her pocket--bless her handsome face!--but to be worshipping images in her room instead of going to the parish church, that will never do. But you think you could talk her out of the Pope, and into the family pew?"

"Why, I could have talked her father out of the Pope, only, when he had not a word to say for himself, he bolted out of the window. Youth is more ingenuous in confessing its errors."

"I own," said the squire, "that both Harry and I had a favourite notion of ours till this Italian girl got into our heads. Do you know we both took a great fancy to Randal's little sister,--pretty, blushing, English-faced girl as ever you saw. And it went to Harry's good heart to see her so neglected by that silly, fidgety mother of hers, her hair hanging about her ears; and I thought it would be a fine way to bring Randal and Frank more together, and enable me to do something for Randal himself,--a good boy with Hazeldean blood in his veins. But Violante is so handsome, that I don't wonder at the boy's choice; and then it is our fault,--we let them see so much of each other as children. However, I should be very angry if Rickeybockey had been playing sly, and running away from the Casino in order to give Frank an opportunity to carry on a clandestine intercourse with his daughter."

"I don't think that would be like Riccabocca; more like him to run away in order to deprive Frank of the best of all occasions to court Violante, if he so desired; for where could he see more of her than at the Casino?"

SQUIRE.--"That's well put. Considering he was only a foreign doctor, and, for aught we know, once went about in a caravan, he is a gentleman-like fellow, that Rickeybockey. I speak of people as I find them. But what is your notion about Frank? I see you don't think he is in love with Violante, after all. Out with it, man; speak plain."

PARSON.--"Since you so urge me, I own I do not think him in love with her; neither does my Carry, who is uncommonly shrewd in such matters."

SQUIRE.--"Your Carry, indeed!--as if she were half as shrewd as my Harry. Carry--nonsense!"

PARSON (reddening).--"I don't want to make invidious remarks; but, Mr. Hazeldean, when you sneer at my Carry, I should not be a man if I did not say that--"

SQUIRE (interrupting).--"She is a good little woman enough; but to compare her to my Harry!"

PARSON.--"I don't compare her to your Harry; I don't compare her to any woman in England, Sir. But you are losing your temper, Mr. Hazeldean!"

SQUIRE.--"!"

PARSON.--"And people are staring at you, Mr. Hazeldean. For decency's sake, compose yourself, and change the subject. We are just at the Albany. I hope that we shall not find poor Captain Higginbotham as ill as he represents himself in his letter. Ah, is it possible? No, it cannot be. Look--look!"

SQUIRE.--"Where--what--where? Don't pinch so hard. Bless me, do you see a ghost?"

PARSON.--"There! the gentleman in black!"

SQUIRE.--"Gentleman in black! What! in broad daylight! Nonsense!"

Here the parson made a spring forward, and, catching the arm of the person in question, who himself had stopped, and was gazing intently on the pair, exclaimed,

"Sir, pardon me; but is not your name Fairfield? Ah, it is Leonard,--it is--my dear, dear boy! What joy! So altered, so improved, but still the same honest face. Squire, come here--your old friend, Leonard Fairfield."

"And he wanted to persuade me," said the squire, shaking Leonard heartily by the hand, "that you were the Gentleman in Black; but, indeed, he has been in strange humours. and tantrums all the morning. Well, Master Lenny; why, you are grown quite a gentleman! The world thrives with you, eh? I suppose you are head-gardener to some grandee."

"Not that, sir," said Leonard, smiling; "but the world has thriven with me at last, though not without some rough usage at starting. Ah, Mr. Dale, you can little guess how often I have thought of you and your

discourse on Knowledge; and, what is more, how I have lived to feel the truth of your words, and to bless the lesson."

PARSON (much touched and flattered).--"I expected nothing less from you, Leonard; you were always a lad of great sense, and sound judgment. So you have thought of my little discourse on Knowledge, have you?"

SQUIRE.--"Hang knowledge! I have reason to hate the word. It burned down three ricks of mine; the finest ricks you ever set eyes on, Mr. Fairfield."

PARSON.--"That was not knowledge, Squire; that was ignorance."

SQUIRE.--"Ignorance! The deuce it was. I'll just appeal to you, Mr. Fairfield. We have been having sad riots in the shire, and the ringleader was just such another lad as you were!"

LEONARD.--"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Hazeldean. In what respect?"

SQUIRE.--"Why, he was a village genius, and always reading some cursed little tract or other; and got mighty discontented with King, Lords, and Commons, I suppose, and went about talking of the wrongs of the poor, and the crimes of the rich, till, by Jove, sir, the whole mob rose one day with pitchforks and sickles, and smash went Farmer Smart's thrashing-machines; and on the same night my ricks were on fire. We caught the rogues, and they were all tried; but the poor deluded labourers were let off with a short imprisonment. The village genius, thank Heaven, is sent packing to Botany Bay."

LEONARD.--"But did his books teach him to burn ricks and smash machines?"

PARSON.--"No; he said quite the contrary, and declared that he had no hand in those misdoings."

SQUIRE.--"But he was proved to have excited, with his wild talk, the boobies who had! 'Gad, sir, there was a hypocritical Quaker once, who said to his enemy, 'I can't shed thy blood, friend, but I will hold thy head under water till thou art drowned.' And so there is a set of demagogical fellows, who keep calling out, 'Farmer, this is an oppressor, and Squire, that is a vampire! But no violence! Don't smash their machines, don't burn their ricks! Moral force, and a curse on all tyrants!' Well, and if poor Hodge thinks moral force is all my eye, and that the recommendation is to be read backwards, in the devil's way of

reading the Lord's prayer, I should like to know which of the two ought to go to Botany Bay,--Hodge, who comes out like a man, if he thinks he is wronged, or t' other sneaking chap, who makes use of his knowledge to keep himself out of the scrape?"

PARSON.--"It may be very true; but when I saw that poor fellow at the bar, with his intelligent face, and heard his bold clear defence, and thought of all his hard struggles for knowledge, and how they had ended, because he forgot that knowledge is like fire, and must not be thrown amongst flax,--why, I could have given my right hand to save him. And, oh, Squire, do you remember his poor mother's shriek of despair when he was sentenced to transportation for life--I hear it now! And what, Leonard--what do you think had misled him? At the bottom of all the mischief was a tinker's bag. You cannot forget Sprott?"

LEONARD.--"Tinker's bag! Sprott!"

SQUIRE.---"That rascal, sir, was the hardest fellow to nab you could possibly conceive; as full of quips and quirks as an Old Bailey lawyer. But we managed to bring it home to him. Lord! his bag was choke-full of tracts against every man who had a good coat on his back; and as if that was not enough, cheek by jowl with the tracts were lucifers, contrived on a new principle, for teaching my ricks the theory of spontaneous combustion. The labourers bought the lucifers--"

PARSON.--"And the poor village genius bought the tracts."

SQUIRE.--"All headed with a motto, 'To teach the working classes that knowledge is power.' So that I was right in saying that knowledge had burnt my ricks; knowledge inflamed the village genius, the village genius inflamed fellows more ignorant than himself, and they inflamed my stackyard. However, lucifers, tracts, village genius, and Sprott are all off to Botany Bay; and the shire has gone on much the better for it. So no more of your knowledge for me, begging your pardon, Mr. Fairfield. Such uncommonly fine ricks as mine were too! I declare, Parson, you are looking as if you felt pity for Sprott; and I saw you, indeed, whispering to him as he was taken out of court."

PARSON (looking sheepish).--"Indeed, Squire, I was only asking him what had become of his donkey, an unoffending creature."

SQUIRE.--"Unoffending! Upset me amidst a thistle-bed in my own village green! I remember it. Well, what did he say had become of the donkey?"

PARSON.--"He said but one word; but that showed all the vindictiveness of his disposition. He said it with a horrid wink, that made my blood run cold. 'What's become of your poor donkey?' said I, and he answered--"

SQUIRE.--"Go on. He answered--"

PARSON.--"Sausages."

SQUIRE.--"Sausages! Like enough; and sold to the poor; and that's what the poor will come to if they listen to such revolutionizing villains.

Sausages! Donkey sausages! "(spitting)--"T is bad as eating one another; perfect cannibalism."

Leonard, who had been thrown into grave thought by the history of Sprott and the village genius, now pressing the parson's hand, asked permission to wait on him before Mr. Dale quitted London; and was about to withdraw, when the parson, gently detaining him, said, "No; don't leave me yet, Leonard,--I have so much to ask you, and to talk about. I shall be at leisure shortly. We are just now going to call on a relation of the squire's, whom you must recollect, I am sure,--Captain Higginbotham--Barnabas Higginbotham. He is very poorly."

"And I am sure he would take it kind in you to call too," said the squire, with great good-nature.

LEONARD.--"Nay, sir, would not that be a great liberty?"

SQUIRE.--"Liberty! To ask a poor sick gentleman how he is? Nonsense. And I say, Sir, perhaps, as no doubt you have been living in town, and know more of newfangled notions than I do,--perhaps you can tell us whether or not it is all humbug,--that new way of doctoring people."

LEONARD.--"What new way, sir. There are so many."

SQUIRE.--"Are there? Folks in London do look uncommonly sickly. But my poor cousin (he was never a Solomon) has got hold, he says, of a homely--homely--What's the word, Parson?"

PARSON. "Homoeopathist."

SQUIRE.--"That's it. You see the captain went to live with one Sharpe Currie, a relation who had a great deal of money, and very little liver; --made the one, and left much of the other in Ingee, you understand. The captain had expectations of the money. Very natural, I dare say; but

Lord, sir, what do you think has happened? Sharpe Currie has done him. Would not die, Sir; got back his liver, and the captain has lost his own. Strangest thing you ever heard. And then the ungrateful old Nabob has dismissed the captain, saying, 'He can't bear to have invalids about him;' and is going to marry, and I have no doubt will have children by the dozen!"

PARSON.--"It was in Germany, at one of the Spas, that Mr. Currie recovered; and as he had the selfish inhumanity to make the captain go through a course of waters simultaneously with himself, it has so chanced that the same waters that cured Mr. Currie's liver have destroyed Captain Higginbotham's. An English homoeopathic physician, then staying at the Spa, has attended the captain hither, and declares that he will restore him by infinitesimal doses of the same chemical properties that were found in the waters which diseased him. Can there be anything in such a theory?"

LEONARD.--"I once knew a very able, though eccentric homoeopathist, and I am inclined to believe there may be something in the system. My friend went to Germany; it may possibly be the same person who attends the captain. May I ask his name?"

SQUIRE.--"Cousin Barnabas does not mention it. You may ask it of himself, for here we are at his chambers. I say, Parson" (whispering slyly), "if a small dose of what hurt the captain is to cure him, don't you think the proper thing would be a--legacy? Ha! ha!"

PARSON (trying not to laugh).--"Hush, Squire. Poor human nature! We must be merciful to its infirmities. Come in, Leonard."

Leonard, interested in his doubt whether he might thus chance again upon Dr. Morgan, obeyed the invitation, and with his two companions followed the woman, who "did for the captain and his rooms," across the small lobby, into the presence of the sufferer.

CHAPTER III.

Whatever the disposition towards merriment at his cousin's expense entertained by the squire, it vanished instantly at the sight of the captain's doleful visage and emaciated figure.

"Very good in you to come to town to see me,--very good in you, cousin, and in you, too, Mr. Dale. How very well you are both looking! I'm a sad wreck. You might count every bone in my body."

"Hazeldean air and roast beef will soon set you up, my boy," said the squire, kindly. "You were a great goose to leave them, and these comfortable rooms of yours in the Albany."

"They are comfortable, though not showy," said the captain, with tears in his eyes. "I had done my best to make them so. New carpets, this very chair--(morocco!), that Japan cat (holds toast and muffins)--just when--just when"--(the tears here broke forth, and the captain fairly whimpered)--"just when that ungrateful, bad-hearted man wrote me word 'he was--was dying and lone in the world;' and--and--to think what I've gone through for him;--and to treat me so! Cousin William, he has grown as hale as yourself, and--and--"

"Cheer up, cheer up!" cried the compassionate squire. "It is a very hard case, I allow. But you see, as the old proverb says, 'T is ill waiting for a dead man's shoes;' and in future--I don't mean offence--but I think if you would calculate less on the livers of your relations, it would be all the better for your own. Excuse me!"

"Cousin William," replied the poor captain, "I am sure I never calculated; but still, if you had seen that deceitful man's good-for-nothing face--as yellow as a guinea--and have gone through all I've gone through, you would have felt cut to the heart, as I do. I can't bear ingratitude. I never could. But let it pass. Will that gentleman take a chair?"

PARSON.--"Mr. Fairfield has kindly called with us, because he knows something of this system of homeopathy which you have adopted, and may, perhaps, know the practitioner. What is the name of your doctor?"

CAPTAIN (looking at his watch).--"That reminds me" (swallowing a globule). "A great relief these little pills--after the physic I've taken to please that malignant man. He always tried his doctor's stuff upon me. But there's another world, and a juster!"

With that pious conclusion the captain again began to weep.

"Touched," muttered the squire, with his forefinger on his forehead. "You seem to have a good--tidy sort of a nurse here, Cousin Barnabas. I hope she 's pleasant, and lively, and don't let you take on so."

"Hist!--don't talk of her. All mercenary; every bit of her fawning!
Would you believe it? I give her ten shillings a week, besides all that
goes down of my pats of butter and rolls, and I overheard the jade saying
to the laundress that 'I could not last long; and she 'd--EXPECTATIONS!
Ah, Mr. Dale, when one thinks of the sinfulness there is in this life!
But I'll not think of it. No, I'll not. Let us change the subject. You
were asking my doctor's name. It is--"

Here the woman with "expectations" threw open the door, and suddenly
announced "DR. MORGAN."

CHAPTER IV.

The parson started, and so did Leonard.

The homoeopathist did not at first notice either. With an unobservant
bow to the visitors, he went straight to the patient, and asked, "How go
the symptoms?"

Therewith the captain commenced, in a tone of voice like a schoolboy
reciting the catalogue of the ships in Homer. He had been evidently
conning the symptoms, and learning them by heart. Nor was there a single
nook or corner in his anatomical organization, so far as the captain was
acquainted with that structure, but what some symptom or other was
dragged therefrom, and exposed to day. The squire listened with horror
to the morbid inventory, muttering at each dread interval, "Bless me!
Lord bless me! What, more still! Death would be a very happy release!"
Meanwhile the doctor endured the recital with exemplary patience, noting
down in the leaves of his pocketbook what appeared to him the salient
points in this fortress of disease to which he had laid siege, and then,
drawing forth a minute paper said,

"Capital,--nothing can be better. This powder must be dissolved in eight
tablespoonfuls of water; one spoonful every two hours."

"Tablespoonful?"

"Tablespoonful."

"'Nothing can be better,' did you say, sir?" repeated the squire, who in

his astonishment at that assertion applied to the captain's description of his sufferings, had hitherto hung fire,--"nothing can be better?"

"For the diagnosis, sir!" replied Dr. Morgan.

"For the dogs' noses, very possibly," quoth the squire; "but for the inside of Cousin Higginbotham, I should think nothing could be worse."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Dr. Morgan. "It is not the captain who speaks here,--it is his liver. Liver, sir, though a noble, is an imaginative organ, and indulges in the most extraordinary fictions. Seat of poetry and love and jealousy--the liver. Never believe what it says. You have no idea what a liar it is! But--ahem--ahem. Cott--I think I've seen you before, sir. Surely your name's Hazeldean?"

"William Hazeldean, at your service, Doctor. But where have you seen me?"

"On the hustings at Lansmere. You were speaking on behalf of your distinguished brother, Mr. Egerton."

"Hang it!" cried the squire: "I think it must have been my liver that spoke there! for I promised the electors that that half-brother of mine would stick by the land, and I never told a bigger lie in my life!"

Here the patient, reminded of his other visitors, and afraid he was going to be bored with the enumeration of the squire's wrongs, and probably the whole history of his duel with Captain Dashmore, turned with a languid wave of his hand, and said, "Doctor, another friend of mine, the Rev. Mr. Dale, and a gentleman who is acquainted with homoeopathy."

"Dale? What, more old friends!" cried the doctor, rising; and the parson came somewhat reluctantly from the window nook, to which he had retired. The parson and the homoeopathist shook hands.

"We have met before on a very mournful occasion," said the doctor, with feeling.

The parson held his finger to his lips, and glanced towards Leonard. The doctor stared at the lad, but he did not recognize in the person before him the gaunt, care-worn boy whom he had placed with Mr. Prickett, until Leonard smiled and spoke. And the smile and the voice sufficed.

"Cott! and it is the poy!" cried Dr. Morgan; and he actually caught hold

of Leonard, and gave him an affectionate Welch hug. Indeed, his agitation at these several surprises became so great that he stopped short, drew forth a globule--"Aconite,--good against nervous shocks!" and swallowed it incontinently.

"Gad," said the squire, rather astonished, "'t is the first doctor I ever saw swallow his own medicine! There must be something in it."

The captain now, highly disgusted that so much attention was withdrawn from his own case, asked in a querulous voice, "And as to diet? What shall I have for dinner?"

"A friend!" said the doctor, wiping his eyes.

"Zounds!" cried the squire, retreating, "do you mean to say, that the British laws (to be sure they are very much changed of late) allow you to diet your patients upon their fellow-men? Why, Parson, this is worse than the donkey sausages."

"Sir," said Dr. Morgan, gravely, "I mean to say, that it matters little what we eat in comparison with care as to whom we eat with. It is better to exceed a little with a friend than to observe the strictest regimen, and eat alone. Talk and laughter help the digestion, and are indispensable in affections of the liver. I have no doubt, sir, that it was my patient's agreeable society that tended to restore to health his dyspeptic relative, Mr. Sharpe Currie."

The captain groaned aloud.

"And, therefore, if one of you gentlemen will stay and dine with Mr. Higginbotham, it will greatly assist the effects of his medicine."

The captain turned an imploring eye, first towards his cousin, then towards the parson.

"I 'm engaged to dine with my son--very sorry," said the squire. "But Dale, here--"

"If he will be so kind," put in the captain, "we might cheer the evening with a game at whist,--double dummy." Now, poor Mr. Dale had set his heart on dining with an old college friend, and having no stupid, prosy double dummy, in which one cannot have the pleasure of scolding one's partner, but a regular orthodox rubber, with the pleasing prospect of scolding all the three other performers. But as his quiet life forbade

him to be a hero in great things, the parson had made up his mind to be a hero in small ones. Therefore, though with rather a rueful face, he accepted the captain's invitation, and promised to return at six o'clock to dine. Meanwhile he must hurry off to the other end of the town, and excuse himself from the pre-engagement he had already formed. He now gave his card, with the address of a quiet family hotel thereon, to Leonard, and not looking quite so charmed with Dr. Morgan as he was before that unwelcome prescription, he took his leave. The squire too, having to see a new churn, and execute various commissions for his Harry, went his way (not, however, till Dr. Morgan had assured him that, in a few weeks, the captain might safely remove to Hazeldean); and Leonard was about to follow, when Morgan hooked his arm in his old /protege/, and said, "But I must have some talk with you; and you have to tell me all about the little orphan girl."

Leonard could not resist the pleasure of talking about Helen; and he got into the carriage, which was waiting at the door for the homoeopathist.

"I am going in the country a few miles to see a patient," said the doctor; "so we shall have time for undisturbed consultation. I have so often wondered what had become of you. Not hearing from Prickett, I wrote to him, and received from his heir an answer as dry as a bone. Poor fellow, I found that he had neglected his globules and quitted the globe. Alas, 'pulvis et umbra sumus!' I could learn no tidings of you. Prickett's successor declared he knew nothing about you. I hoped the best; for I always fancied you were one who would fall on your legs,-- bilious-nervous temperament; such are the men who succeed in their undertakings, especially if they take a spoonful of chamomilla whenever they are over-excited. So now for your history and the little girl's,-- pretty little thing,--never saw a more susceptible constitution, nor one more suited to pulsatilla."

Leonard briefly related his own struggles and success, and informed the good doctor how they had at last discovered the nobleman in whom poor Captain Digby had confided, and whose care of the orphan had justified the confidence.

Dr. Morgan opened his eyes at hearing the name of Lord L'Estrange. "I remember him very well," said he, "when I practised murder as an allopathist at Lansmere. But to think that wild boy, so full of whim and life and spirit, should become staid enough for a guardian to that dear little child, with her timid eyes and pulsatilla sensibilities. Well, wonders never cease! And he has befriended you too, you say. Ah, he knew your family."

"So he says. Do you think, sir, that he ever knew--ever saw--my mother?"

"Eh! your mother?--Nora?" exclaimed the doctor, quickly; and, as if struck by some sudden thought, his brows met, and he remained silent and musing a few moments; then, observing Leonard's eyes fixed on him earnestly, he replied to the question,

"No doubt he saw her; she was brought up at Lady Lansmere's. Did he not tell you so?"

"No." A vague suspicion here darted through Leonard's mind, but as suddenly vanished. His father! Impossible. His father must have deliberately wronged the dead mother. And was Harley L'Estrange a man capable of such wrong? And had he been Harley's son, would not Harley have guessed it at once, and so guessing, have owned and claimed him? Besides, Lord L'Estrange looked so young,--old enough to be Leonard's father!--he could not entertain the idea. He roused himself and said, falteringly,

"You told me you did not know by what name I should call my father."

"And I told you the truth, to the best of my belief."

"By your honour, sir?"

"By my honour, I do not know it."

There was now a long silence. The carriage had long left London, and was on a high road somewhat lonelier, and more free from houses than most of those which form the entrances to the huge city. Leonard gazed wistfully from the window, and the objects that met his eyes gradually seemed to appeal to his memory. Yes! it was the road by which he had first approached the metropolis, hand in hand with Helen--and hope so busy at his poet's heart. He sighed deeply. He thought he would willingly have resigned all he had won--independence, fame, all--to feel again the clasp of that tender hand, again to be the sole protector of that gentle life.

The doctor's voice broke on his reverie. "I am going to see a very interesting patient,--coats to his stomach quite worn out, sir,--man of great learning, with a very inflamed cerebellum. I can't do him much good, and he does me a great deal of harm."

"How harm?" asked Leonard, with an effort at some rejoinder.

"Hits me on the heart, and makes my eyes water; very pathetic case,-- grand creature, who has thrown himself away. Found him given over by the allopathists, and in a high state of delirium tremens, restored him for a time, took a great liking to him,--could not help it,--swallowed a great many globules to harden myself against him, would not do, brought him over to England with the other patients, who all pay me well (except Captain Higginbotham). But this poor fellow pays me nothing,--costs me a great deal in time and turnpikes, and board and lodging. Thank Heaven, I'm a single man, and can afford it! My poy, I would let all the other patients go to the allopathists if I could but save this poor, big, penniless, princely fellow. But what can one do with a stomach that has not a rag of its coats left? Stop" (the doctor pulled the check-string). "This is the stile. I get out here and go across the fields."

That stile, those fields--with what distinctness Leonard remembered them. Ah, where was Helen? Could she ever, ever again be, his child-angel?

"I will go with you, if you permit," said he to the good doctor. "And while you pay your visit, I will saunter by a little brook that I think must run by your way."

"The Brent--you know that brook? Ah, you should hear my poor patient talk of it, and of the hours he has spent angling in it,--you would not know whether to laugh or cry. The first day he was brought down to the place, he wanted to go out and try once more, he said, for his old deluding demon,--a one-eyed perch."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Leonard, "are you speaking of John Burley?"

"To be sure, that is his name,--John Burley."

"Oh, has it come to this? Cure him, save him, if it be in human power. For the last two years I have sought his trace everywhere, and in vain, the moment I had money of my own, a home of my own. Poor, erring, glorious Burley! Take me to him. Did you say there was no hope?"

"I did not say that," replied the doctor. "But art can only assist Nature; and though Nature is ever at work to repair the injuries we do to her, yet, when the coats of a stomach are all gone, she gets puzzled, and so do I. You must tell me another time how you came to know Burley, for here we are at the house, and I see him at the window looking out for me."

The doctor opened the garden gate of the quiet cottage to which poor Burley had fled from the pure presence of Leonard's child-angel. And with heavy step, and heavy heart, Leonard mournfully followed, to behold the wrecks of him whose wit had glorified orgy, and "set the table in a roar." Alas, poor Yorick!

CHAPTER V.

Audley Egerton stands on his hearth alone. During the short interval that has elapsed since we last saw him, events had occurred memorable in English history, wherewith we have nought to do in a narrative studiously avoiding all party politics even when treating of politicians. The new ministers had stated the general programme of their policy, and introduced one measure in especial that had lifted them at once to the dizzy height of popular power. But it became clear that this measure could not be carried without a fresh appeal to the people. A dissolution of parliament, as Audley's sagacious experience had foreseen, was inevitable. And Audley Egerton had no chance of return for his own seat, for the great commercial city identified with his name. Oh, sad, but not rare, instance of the mutabilities of that same popular favour now enjoyed by his successors! The great commoner, the weighty speaker, the expert man of business, the statesman who had seemed a type of the practical steady sense for which our middle class is renowned,—he who, not three years since, might have had his honoured choice of the largest popular constituencies in the kingdom,—he, Audley Egerton, knew not one single town (free from the influences of private property or interest) in which the obscurest candidate, who bawled out for the new liberal measure, would not have beaten him hollow. Where one popular hustings, on which that grave sonorous voice, that had stilled so often the roar of faction, would not be drowned amidst the hoots of the scornful mob?

True, what were called the close boroughs still existed; true, many a chief of his party would have been too proud of the honour of claiming Audley Egerton for his nominee. But the ex-minister's haughty soul shrunk from this contrast to his past position. And to fight against the popular measure, as member of one of the seats most denounced by the people,—he felt it was a post in the grand army of parties below his dignity to occupy, and foreign to his peculiar mind, which required the sense of consequence and station. And if, in a few months, those seats were swept away—were annihilated from the rolls of parliament—where was he? Moreover, Egerton, emancipated from the trammels that had bound his

will while his party was in office, desired, in the turn of events, to be nominee of no man,--desired to stand at least freely and singly on the ground of his own services, be guided by his own penetration; no law for action but his strong sense and his stout English heart. Therefore he had declined all offers from those who could still bestow seats in parliament. Seats that he could purchase with hard gold were yet open to him. And the L5,000 he had borrowed from Levy were yet untouched.

To this lone public man, public life, as we have seen, was the all in all. But now more than ever it was vital to his very wants. Around him yawned ruin. He knew that it was in Levy's power at any moment to foreclose on his mortgaged lands; to pour in the bonds and the bills which lay within those rosewood receptacles that lined the fatal lair of the sleek usurer; to seize on the very house in which now moved all the pomp of a retinue that vied with the valetaille of dukes; to advertise for public auction, under execution, "the costly effects of the Right Hon. Audley Egerton." But, consummate in his knowledge of the world, Egerton felt assured that Levy would not adopt these measures against him while he could still tower in the van of political war,--while he could still see before him the full chance of restoration to power, perhaps to power still higher than before, perhaps to power the highest of all beneath the throne. That Levy, whose hate he divined, though he did not conjecture all its causes, had hitherto delayed even a visit, even a menace, seemed to him to show that Levy still thought him one "to be helped," or, at least, one too powerful to crush. To secure his position in parliament unshackled, unfallen, if but for another year,--new combinations of party might arise, new reactions take place, in public opinion! And, with his hand pressed to his heart, the stern firm man muttered, "If not, I ask but to die in my harness, and that men may not know that I am a pauper until all that I need from my country is a grave."

Scarce had these words died upon his lips ere two quick knocks in succession resounded at the street door. In another moment Harley entered, and, at the same time, the servant in attendance approached Audley, and announced Baron Levy.

"Beg the baron to wait, unless he would prefer to name his own hour to call again," answered Egerton, with the slightest possible change of colour. "You can say I am now with Lord L'Estrange."

"I had hoped you had done forever with that deluder of youth," said Harley, as soon as the groom of the chambers had withdrawn. "I remember that you saw too much of him in the gay time, ere wild oats are sown; but

now surely you can never need a loan; and if so is not Harley L'Estrange by your side?"

EGERTON.--"My dear Harley! doubtless he but comes to talk to me of some borough. He has much to do with those delicate negotiations."

HARLEY.--"And I have come on the same business. I claim the priority. I not only hear in the world, but I see by the papers, that Josiah Jenkins, Esq., known to fame as an orator who leaves out his h's, and young Lord Willoughby Whiggolin, who is just made a Lord of the Admiralty, because his health is too delicate for the army, are certain to come in for the city which you and your present colleague will as certainly vacate. That is true, is it not?"

EGERTON.--"My old Committee now vote for Jenkins and Whiggolin; and I suppose there will not be even a contest. Go on."

"So my father and I are agreed that you must condescend, for the sake of old friendship, to be once more member for Lansmere."

"Harley," exclaimed Egerton, changing countenance far more than he had done at the announcement of Levy's portentous visit, "Harley, no, no!"

"No! But why? Wherefore such emotion?" asked L'Estrange, in surprise.

Audley was silent.

HARLEY.--"I suggested the idea to two or three of the late ministers; they all concur in advising you to accede. In the first place, if declining to stand for the place which tempted you from Lansmere, what more natural than that you should fall back on that earlier representation? In the second place, Lansmere is neither a rotten borough to be bought, nor a close borough, under one man's nomination. It is a tolerably large constituency. My father, it is true, has considerable interest in it, but only what is called the legitimate influence of property. At all events, it is more secure than a contest for a larger town, more dignified than a seat for a smaller. Hesitating still? Even my mother entreats me to say how she desires you to renew that connection."

"Harley," again exclaimed Egerton; and fixing upon his friend's earnest face eyes which, when softened by emotion, were strangely beautiful in their expression,--"Harley, if you could but read my heart at this moment, you would--you would--" His voice faltered, and he fairly bent

his proud head upon Harley's shoulder; grasping the hand he had caught nervously, clingly, "Oh, Harley, if I ever lose your love, your friendship, nothing else is left to me in the world."

"Audley, my dear, dear Audley, is it you who speak to me thus? You, my school friend, my life's confidant,--you?"

"I am grown very weak and foolish," said Egerton, trying to smile. "I do not know myself. I, too, whom you have so often called 'Stoic,' and likened to the Iron Man in the poem which you used to read by the riverside at Eton."

"But even then, my Audley, I knew that a warm human heart (do what you would to keep it down) beat strong under the iron ribs. And I often marvel now, to think you have gone through life so free from the wilder passions. Happier so!"

Egerton, who had turned his face from his friend's gaze, remained silent for a few moments; and he then sought to divert the conversation, and roused himself to ask Harley how he had succeeded in his views upon Beatrice, and his watch on the count.

"With regard to Peschiera," answered Harley, "I think we must have overrated the danger we apprehended, and that his wagers were but an idle boast. He has remained quiet enough, and seems devoted to play. His sister has shut her doors both on myself and my young associate during the last few days. I almost fear that in spite of very sage warnings of mine, she must have turned his poet's head, and that either he has met with some scornful rebuff to incautious admiration or that, he himself has grown aware of peril, and declines to face it; for he is very much embarrassed when I speak to him respecting her. But if the count is not formidable, why, his sister is not needed; and I hope yet to get justice for my Italian friend through the ordinary channels. I have secured an ally in a young Austrian prince, who is now in London, and who has promised to back, with all his influence, a memorial I shall transmit to Vienna.--/a propos/, my dear Audley, now that you have a little breathing-time, you must fix an hour for me to present to you my young poet, the son of her sister. At moments the expression of his face is so like hers."

"Ay, ay," answered Egerton, quickly, "I will see him as you wish, but later. I have not yet that breathing-time you speak of; but you say he has prospered; and, with your friendship, he is secure from fortune. I rejoice to think so."

"And your own /protege/, this Vandal Leslie, whom you forbid me to dislike--hard task!--what has he decided?"

"To adhere to my fate. Harley, if it please Heaven that I do not live to return to power, and provide adequately for that young man, do not forget that he clung to me in my fall."

"If he still cling to you faithfully, I will never forget it. I will forget only all that now makes me doubt him. But you talk of not living, Audley! Pooh! your frame is that of a predestined octogenarian."

"Nay," answered Audley, "I was but uttering one of those vague generalities which are common upon all mortal lips. And now farewell,-- I must see this baron."

"Not yet, until you have promised to consent to my proposal, and be once more member for Lansmere. Tut! don't shake your head. I cannot be denied. I claim your promise in right of our friendship, and shall be seriously hurt if you even pause to reflect on it."

"Well, well, I know not how to refuse you, Harley; but you have not been to Lansmere yourself since--since that sad event. You must not revive the old wound,--you must not go; and--and, I own it, Harley, the remembrance of it pains even me. I would rather not go to Lansmere."

"Ah, my friend, this is an excess of sympathy, and I cannot listen to it. I begin even to blame my own weakness, and to feel that we have no right to make ourselves the soft slaves of the past."

"You do appear to me of late to have changed," cried Egerton, suddenly, and with a brightening aspect. "Do tell me that you are happy in the contemplation of your new ties,--that I shall live to see you once more restored to your former self."

"All I can answer, Audley," said L'Estrange, with a thoughtful brow, "is, that you are right in one thing,--I am changed; and I am struggling to gain strength for duty and for honour. Adieu! I shall tell my father that you accede to our wishes."

CHAPTER VI.

When Harley was gone, Egerton sunk back on his chair, as if in extreme physical or mental exhaustion, all the lines of his countenance relaxed and jaded.

"To go back to that place--there--there--where--Courage, courage! what is another pang?"

He rose with an effort, and folding his arms tightly across his breast, paced slowly to and fro the large, mournful, solitary room. Gradually his countenance assumed its usual cold and austere composure,--the secret eye, the guarded lip, the haughty, collected front. The man of the world was himself once more.

"Now to gain time, and to baffle the usurer," murmured Egerton, with that low tone of easy scorn, which bespoke consciousness of superior power and the familiar mastery over hostile natures. He rang the bell: the servant entered.

"Is Baron Levy still waiting?"

"Yes, sir."

"Admit him." Levy entered.

"I beg your pardon, Levy," said the ex-minister, "for having so long detained you. I am now at your commands."

"My dear fellow," returned the baron, "no apologies between friends so old as we are; and I fear that my business is not so agreeable as to make you impatient to discuss it."

EGERTON (with perfect composure).--"I am to conclude, then, that you wish to bring our accounts to a close. Whenever you will, Levy."

THE BARON (disconcerted and surprised).--"Peste! /mon cher/, you take things coolly. But if our accounts are closed, I fear you will have but little to live upon."

EGERTON.--"I can continue to live on the salary of a Cabinet Minister."

BARON.--"Possibly; but you are no longer a Cabinet Minister."

EGERTON.--"You have never found me deceived--in a political prediction."

Within twelve months (should life be spared to me) I shall be in office again. If the same to you, I would rather wait till then formally and amicably to resign to you my lands and this house. If you grant that reprieve, our connection can thus close without the eclat and noise which may be invidious to you, as it would be disagreeable to me. But if that delay be inconvenient, I will appoint a lawyer to examine your accounts, and adjust my liabilities."

THE BARON (soliloquizing).--"I don't like this. A lawyer! That may be awkward."

EGERTON (observing the baron, with a curl on his lip). "Well, Levy, how shall it be?"

THE BARON.--"You know, my dear fellow, it is not my character to be hard on any one, least of all upon an old friend. And if you really think there is a chance of your return to office, which you apprehend that an /esclandre/ as to your affairs at present might damage, why, let us see if we can conciliate matters. But, first, /mon cher/, in order to become a minister, you must at least have a seat in parliament; and pardon me the question, how the deuce are you to find one?"

EGERTON.--"It is found."

THE BARON.--"Ah, I forgot the L5,000 you last borrowed."

EGERTON.--"NO; I reserve that sum for another purpose."

THE BARON (with a forced laugh).--"Perhaps to defend yourself against the actions you apprehend from me?"

EGERTON.--"You are mistaken. But to soothe your suspicions I will tell you plainly, that finding any sum I might have insured on my life would be liable to debts preincurred, and (as you will be my sole creditor) might thus at my death pass back to you; and doubting whether, indeed, any office would accept my insurance, I appropriate that sum to the relief of my conscience. I intend to bestow it, while yet in life, upon my late wife's kinsman, Randal Leslie. And it is solely the wish to do what I consider an act of justice, that has prevailed with me to accept a favour from the hands of Harley L'Estrange, and to become again the member for Lansmere."

THE BARON.--"Ha!--Lansmere! You will stand for Lansmere?"

EGERTON (wincing).--"I propose to do so."

THE BARON.--"I believe you will be opposed, subjected to even a sharp contest. Perhaps you may lose your election."

EGERTON.--"If so, I resign myself, and you can foreclose on my estates."

THE BARON (his brow clearing).--"Look you, Egerton, I shall be too happy to do you a favour."

EGERTON (with stateliness).--"Favour! No, Baron Levy, I ask from you no favour. Dismiss all thought of rendering me one. It is but a consideration of business on both sides. If you think it better that we shall at once settle our accounts, my lawyer shall investigate them. If you agree to the delay I request, my lawyer shall give you no trouble; and all that I have, except hope and character, pass to your hands without a struggle."

THE BARON.--"Inflexible and ungracious, favour or not--put it as you will--I accede, provided, first, that you allow me to draw up a fresh deed, which will accomplish your part of the compact; and secondly, that we saddle the proposed delay with the condition that you do not lose your election."

EGERTON.--"Agreed. Have you anything further to say?"

THE BARON.--"Nothing, except that, if you require more money, I am still at your service."

EGERTON.--"I thank you. No; I shall take the occasion of my retirement from office to reduce my establishment. I have calculated already, and provided for the expenditure I need, up to the date I have specified, and I shall have no occasion to touch the L5,000 that I still retain."

"Your young friend, Mr. Leslie, ought to be very grateful to you," said the baron, rising. "I have met him in the world,--a lad of much promise and talent. You should try and get him also into parliament."

EGERTON (thoughtfully).--"You are a good judge of the practical abilities and merits of men, as regards worldly success. Do you really think Randal Leslie calculated for public life--for a parliamentary career?"

THE BARON.--"Indeed I do."

EGERTON (speaking more to himself than Levy).---"Parliament without fortune,--'t is a sharp trial; still he is prudent, abstemious, energetic, persevering; and at the onset, under my auspices and advice, he might establish a position beyond his years."

THE BARON. "It strikes me that we might possibly get him into the next parliament; or, as that is not likely to last long, at all events, into the parliament to follow,--not for one of the boroughs which will be swept away, but for a permanent seat, and without expense."

EGERTON.--"Ay,--and how?"

THE BARON.---"Give me a few days to consider. An idea has occurred to me. I will call again if I find it practicable. Good-day to you, Egerton, and success to your election for Lansmere."

CHAPTER VII.

Peschiera had not been so inactive as he had appeared to Harley and the reader. On the contrary, he had prepared the way for his ultimate design, with all the craft and the unscrupulous resolution which belonged to his nature. His object was to compel Riccabocca into assenting to the count's marriage with Violante, or, failing that, to ruin all chance of his kinsman's restoration. Quietly and secretly he had sought out, amongst the most needy and unprincipled of his own countrymen, those whom he could suborn to depose to Riccabocca's participation in plots and conspiracies against the Austrian dominion. These his former connection with the Carbonari enabled him to track to their refuge in London; and his knowledge of the characters he had to deal with fitted him well for the villanous task he undertook. He had, therefore, already selected out of these desperadoes a sufficient number either to serve as witnesses against his kinsman, or to aid him in any more audacious scheme which circumstance might suggest to his adoption. Meanwhile, he had (as Harley had suspected he would) set spies upon Randal's movements; and the day before that young traitor confided to him Violante's retreat, he had at least got scent of her father's.

The discovery that Violante was under a roof so honoured, and seemingly so safe, as Lord Lansmere's, did not discourage this bold and desperate adventurer. We have seen him set forth to reconnoitre the house at Knightsbridge. He had examined it well, and discovered the quarter which

he judged favourable to a coup-de-main, should that become necessary.

Lord Lansmere's house and grounds were surrounded by a wall, the entrance being to the high-road, and by a porter's lodge. At the rear there lay fields crossed by a lane or byroad. To these fields a small door in the wall, which was used by the gardeners in passing to and from their work, gave communication. This door was usually kept locked; but the lock was of the rude and simple description common to such entrances, and easily opened by a skeleton key. So far there was no obstacle which Peschiera's experience in conspiracy and gallantry did not disdain as trivial. But the count was not disposed to abrupt and violent means in the first instance. He had a confidence in his personal gifts, in his address, in his previous triumphs over the sex, which made him naturally desire to hazard the effect of a personal interview; and on this he resolved with his wonted audacity. Randal's description of Violante's personal appearance, and such suggestions as to her character and the motives most likely to influence her actions as that young lynx-eyed observer could bestow, were all that the count required of present aid from his accomplice.

Meanwhile we return to Violante herself. We see her now seated in the gardens at Knightsbridge, side by side with Helen. The place was retired, and out of sight from the windows of the house.

VIOLANTE.--"But why will you not tell me more of that early time? You are less communicative even than Leonard."

HELEN (looking down, and hesitatingly).--"Indeed there is nothing to tell you that you do not know; and it is so long since, and things are so changed now."

The tone of the last words was mournful, and the words ended with a sigh.

VIOLANTE (with enthusiasm).--"How I envy you that past which you treat so lightly! To have been something, even in childhood, to the formation of a noble nature; to have borne on those slight shoulders half the load of a man's grand labour; and now to see Genius moving calm in its clear career; and to say inly, 'Of that genius I am a part!'"

HELEN (sadly and humbly).--"A part! Oh, no! A part? I don't understand you."

VIOLANTE.--"Take the child Beatrice from Dante's life, and should we have a Dante? What is a poet's genius but the voice of its emotions? All

things in life and in Nature influence genius; but what influences it the most are its own sorrows and affections."

Helen looks softly into Violante's eloquent face, and draws nearer to her in tender silence.

VIOLANTE (suddenly).--"Yes, Helen, yes,--I know by my own heart how to read yours. Such memories are ineffaceable. Few guess what strange self-weavers of our own destinies we women are in our veriest childhood!" She sunk her voice into a whisper: "How could Leonard fail to be dear to you,--dear as you to him,--dearer than all others?"

HELEN (shrinking back, and greatly disturbed).--"Hush, hush! you must not speak to me thus; it is wicked,--I cannot bear it. I would not have it be so; it must not be,--it cannot!"

She clasped her hands over her eyes for a moment, and then lifted her face, and the face was very sad, but very calm.

VIOLANTE (twining her arm round Helen's waist).--"How have I wounded you,--how offended? Forgive me, but why is this wicked? Why must it not be? Is it because he is below you in birth?"

HELEN.--"No, no,--I never thought of that. And what am I? Don't ask me,--I cannot answer. You are wrong, quite wrong as to me. I can only look on Leonard as--as a brother. But--but, you can speak to him more freely than I can. I would not have him waste his heart on me, nor yet think me unkind and distant, as I seem. I know not what I say. But--but--break to him--indirectly--gently--that duty in both forbids us both to--to be more than friends--than--"

"Helen, Helen!" cried Violante, in her warm, generous passion, "your heart betrays you in every word you say. You weep; lean on me, whisper to me; why--why is this? Do you fear that your guardian would not consent? He not consent? He who--"

HELEN.--"Cease--cease--cease!"

VIOLANTE.--"What! You can fear Harley--Lord L'Estrange? Fie; you do not know him."

HELEN (rising suddenly).--"Violante, hold; I am engaged to another."

Violante rose also, and stood still, as if turned to stone; pale as

death, till the blood came, at first slowly, then with suddenness from her heart, and one deep glow suffused her whole countenance. She caught Helen's hand firmly, and said in a hollow voice,

"Another! Engaged to another! One word, Helen,--not to him--not to--Harley--to--"

"I cannot say,--I must not. I have promised," cried poor Helen, and as Violante let fall her hand, she hurried away. Violante sat down mechanically; she felt as if stunned by a mortal blow. She closed her eyes and breathed hard. A deadly faintness seized her; and when it passed away, it seemed to her as if she were no longer the same being, nor the world around her the same world,--as if she were but one sense of intense, hopeless misery, and as if the universe were but one inanimate void. So strangely immaterial are we really--we human beings, with flesh and blood--that if you suddenly abstract from us but single, impalpable, airy thought, which our souls have cherished, you seem to curdle the air, to extinguish the sun, to snap every link that connects us to matter, and to benumb everything into death, except woe.

And this warm, young, southern nature but a moment before was so full of joy and life, and vigorous, lofty hope. It never till now had known its own intensity and depth. The virgin had never lifted the veil from her own soul of woman.

What, till then, had Harley L'Estrange been to Violante? An ideal, a dream of some imagined excellence, a type of poetry in the midst of the common world. It had not been Harley the man,--it had been Harley the Phantom. She had never said to herself, "He is identified with my love, my hopes, my home, my future." How could she? Of such he himself had never spoken; an internal voice, indeed, had vaguely, yet irresistibly, whispered to her that, despite his light words, his feelings towards her were grave and deep. O false voice! how it had deceived her! Her quick convictions seized the all that Helen had left unsaid. And now suddenly she felt what it is to love, and what it is to despair. So she sat, crushed and solitary, neither murmuring nor weeping, only now and then passing her hand across her brow, as if to clear away some cloud that would not be dispersed; or heaving a deep sigh, as if to throw off some load that no time henceforth could remove. There are certain moments in life in which we say to ourselves, "All is over; no matter what else changes, that which I have made my all is gone evermore--evermore!" And our own thought rings back in our ears, "Evermore--evermore!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As Violante thus sat, a stranger, passing stealthily through the trees, stood between herself and the evening sun. She saw him not. He paused a moment, and then spoke low, in her native tongue, addressing her by the name which she had borne in Italy. He spoke as a relation, and excused his intrusion: "For," said he, "I come to suggest to the daughter the means by which she can restore to her father his country and his honours."

At the word "father" Violante roused herself, and all her love for that father rushed back upon her with double force. It does so ever,--we love most our parents at the moment when some tie less holy is abruptly broken; and when the conscience says, "There, at least, is a love that has never deceived thee!"

She saw before her a man of mild aspect and princely form. Peschiera (for it was he) had banished from his dress, as from his countenance, all that betrayed the worldly levity of his character. He was acting a part, and he dressed and looked it.

"My father!" she said, quickly, and in Italian. "What of him? And who are you, signor? I know you not." Peschiera smiled benignly, and replied in a tone in which great respect was softened by a kind of parental tenderness,--"Suffer me to explain, and listen to me while I speak." Then, quietly seating himself on the bench beside her, he looked into her eyes, and resumed,--

"Doubtless you have heard of the Count di Peschiera?"

VIOLANTE.--"I heard that name, as a child, when in Italy. And when she with whom I then dwelt (my father's aunt) fell ill and died, I was told that my home in Italy was gone, that it had passed to the Count di Peschiera,--my father's foe!"

PESCHIERA.--"And your father, since then, has taught you to hate this fancied foe?"

VIOLANTE.--"Nay, my father did but forbid me ever to breathe his name."

PESCHIERA.--"Alas! what years of suffering and exile might have been saved your father, had he but been more just to his early friend and

kinsman,--nay, had he but less cruelly concealed the secret of his retreat. Fair child, I am that Giulio Franzini, that Count di Peschiera. I am the man you have been told to regard as your father's foe. I am the man on whom the Austrian Emperor bestowed his lands. And now judge if I am, in truth, the foe. I have come hither to seek your father, in order to dispossess myself of my sovereign's gift. I have come but with one desire,--to restore Alphonso to his native land, and to surrender the heritage that was forced upon me."

VIOLANTE.--"My father, my dear father! His grand heart will have room once more. Oh, this is noble enmity, true revenge! I understand it, signor, and so will my father, for such would have been his revenge on you. You have seen him?"

PESCHIERA.--"No, not yet. I would not see him till I had seen yourself; for you, in truth, are the arbiter of his destinies, as of mine."

VIOLANTE.--"I, Count? I--arbiter of my father's destinies? Is it possible?"

PESCHIERA (with a look of compassionate admiration, and in a tone yet more emphatically parental).--"How lovely is that innocent joy! But do not indulge it yet. Perhaps it is a sacrifice which is asked from you,--a sacrifice too hard to bear. Do not interrupt me. Listen still, and you will see why I could not speak to your father until I had obtained an interview with yourself. See why a word from you may continue still to banish me from his presence. You know, doubtless, that your father was one of the chiefs of a party that sought to free Northern Italy from the Austrians. I myself was at the onset a warm participator in that scheme. In a sudden moment I discovered that some of its more active projectors had coupled with a patriotic enterprise plots of a dark nature, and that the conspiracy itself was about to be betrayed to the government. I wished to consult with your father; but he was at a distance. I learned that his life was condemned. Not an hour was to be lost. I took a bold resolve, that has exposed me to his suspicions and to my country's wrath. But my main idea was to save him, my early friend, from death, and my country from fruitless massacre.

"I withdrew from the intended revolt. I sought at once the head of the Austrian government in Italy, and made terms for the lives of Alphonso and of the other more illustrious chiefs, which otherwise would have been forfeited. I obtained permission to undertake myself the charge of securing my kinsman in order to place him in safety, and to conduct him to a foreign land, in an exile that would cease when the danger was

dispelled. But unhappily he deemed that I only sought to destroy him. He fled from my friendly pursuit. The soldiers with me were attacked by an intermeddling Englishman; your father escaped from Italy, concealing his retreat; and the character of his flight counteracted my efforts to obtain his pardon. The government conferred on me half his revenues, holding the other half at its pleasure. I accepted the offer in order to save his whole heritage from confiscation. That I did not convey to him what I pined to do,—namely, the information that I held but in trust what was bestowed by the government, and the full explanation of what seemed blamable in my conduct,—was necessarily owing to the secrecy he maintained. I could not discover his refuge; but I never ceased to plead for his recall. This year only I have partially succeeded. He can be restored to his heritage and rank, on one proviso,—a guarantee for his loyalty. That guarantee the government has named: it is the alliance of his only child with one whom the government can trust. It was the interest of all the Italian nobility that the representation of a House so great falling to a female should not pass away wholly from the direct line,—in a word, that you should ally yourself with a kinsman. But one kinsman, and he the next in blood, presented himself. In short, Alphonso regains all that he lost on the day in which his daughter gives her hand to Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera. Ah," continued the count, mournfully, "you shriek, you recoil. He thus submitted to your choice is indeed unworthy of you. You are scarce in the spring of life, he is in its waning autumn. Youth loves youth. He does not aspire to your love. All that he can say is, love is not the only joy of the heart,—it is joy to raise from ruin a beloved father; joy to restore, to a land poor in all but memories, a chief in whom it reverences a line of heroes. These are the joys I offer to you,—you, a daughter, and an Italian maid. Still silent? Oh, speak to me!"

Certainly this Count Peschiera knew well how woman is to be wooed and won; and never was woman more sensitive to those high appeals which most move all true earnest womanhood than was the young Violante. Fortune favoured him in the moment chosen. Harley was wrenched away from her hopes, and love a word erased from her language. In the void of the world, her father's image alone stood clear and visible. And she who from infancy had so pined to serve that father, who at first learned to dream of Harley as that father's friend! She could restore to him all for which the exile sighed; and by a sacrifice of self,—self-sacrifice, ever in itself such a temptation to the noble! Still, in the midst of the confusion and disturbance of her mind, the idea of marriage with another seemed so terrible and revolting, that she could not at once conceive it; and still that instinct of openness and honour, which pervaded all her character, warned even her inexperience that there was

something wrong in this clandestine appeal to herself.

Again the count besought her to speak, and with an effort she said, irresolutely,

"If it be as you say, it is not for me to answer you; it is for my father."

"Nay," replied Peschiera. "Pardon, if I contradict you. Do you know so little of your father as to suppose that he will suffer his interest to dictate to his pride? He would refuse, perhaps, even to receive my visit, to hear my explanations; but certainly he would refuse to buy back his inheritance by the sacrifice of his daughter to one whom he has deemed his foe, and whom the mere disparity of years would incline the world to say he had made the barter of his personal ambition. But if I could go to him sanctioned by you; if I could say, 'Your daughter overlooks what the father might deem an obstacle,--she has consented to accept my hand of her own free choice, she unites her happiness, and blends her prayers with mine,'--then, indeed, I could not fail of success; and Italy would pardon my errors, and bless your name. Ah, Signorina, do not think of me save as an instrument towards the fulfilment of duties so high and sacred! think but of your ancestors, your father, your native land, and reject not the proud occasion to prove how you revere them all!"

Violante's heart was touched at the right chord. Her head rose, the colour came back to her pale cheek, she turned the glorious beauty of her countenance towards the wily tempter. She was about to answer and to seal her fate, when at that instant Harley's voice was heard at a little distance, and Nero came bounding towards her, and thrust himself, with rough familiarity, between her and Peschiera. The count drew back, and Violante, whose eyes were still fixed on his face, started at the change that passed there. One quick gleam of rage sufficed in an instant to light up the sinister secrets of his nature,--it was the face of the baffled gladiator. He had time but for few words.

"I must not be seen here," he muttered; "but to-morrow, in these gardens, about this hour. I implore you, for the sake of your father,--his hopes, fortunes, his very life,--to guard the secret of this interview,--to meet me again. Adieu!"

He vanished amidst the trees, and was gone,--noiselessly, mysteriously, as he had come.

CHAPTER IX.

The last words of Peschiera were still ringing in Violante's ears when Harley appeared in sight, and the sound of his voice dispelled the vague and dreamy stupor which had crept over her senses. At that voice there returned the consciousness of a mighty loss, the sting of an intolerable anguish. To meet Harley there, and thus, seemed impossible. She turned abruptly away, and hurried towards the horse. Harley called to her by name, but she would not answer, and only quickened her steps. He paused a moment in surprise, and then hastened after her.

"Under what strange taboo am I placed?" said he, gayly, as he laid his hand on her shrinking arm. "I inquire for Helen,--she is ill, and cannot see me. I come to sun myself in your presence, and you fly me as if gods and men had set their mark on my brow. Child! child! what is this? You are weeping?"

"Do not stay me now,--do not speak to me," answered Violante, through her stifling sobs, as she broke from his hand and made towards the house.

"Have you a grief, and under the shelter of my father's roof,--a grief that you will not tell to me? Cruel!" cried Harley, with inexpressible tenderness of reproach in his soft tones.

Violante could not trust herself to reply. Ashamed of her self-betrayal, softened yet more by his pleading voice, she could have prayed to the earth to swallow her. At length, checking her tears by an heroic effort, she said, almost calmly, "Noble friend, forgive me. I have no grief, believe me, which--which I can tell to you. I was but thinking of my poor father when you came up; alarming myself about him, it may be, with vain, superstitious fears; and so--even a slight surprise--your abrupt appearance has sufficed to make me thus weak and foolish; but I wish to see my father!--to go home--home!"

"Your father is well, believe me, and pleased that you are here. No danger threatens him; and you, here, are safe." "I safe--and from what?"

Harley mused irresolute. He inclined to confide to her the danger which her father had concealed; but had he the right to do so against her father's will?

"Give me," he said, "time to reflect, and to obtain permission to intrust you with a secret which, in my judgment, you should know. Meanwhile, this much I may say, that rather than you should incur the danger that I believe he exaggerates, your father would have given you a protector--even in Randal Leslie."

Violante started.

"But," resumed Harley, with a calm, in which a certain deep mournfulness was apparent, unconsciously to himself, "but I trust you are reserved for a fairer fate, and a nobler spouse. I have vowed to live henceforth in the common workday world. But for you, bright child, for you, I am a dreamer still!"

Violante turned her eyes for one instant towards the melancholy speaker. The look thrilled to his heart. He bowed his face involuntarily. When he looked up, she had left his side. He did not this time attempt to follow her, but moved away and plunged amidst the leafless trees.

An hour afterwards he re-entered the house, and again sought to see Helen. She had now recovered sufficiently to give him the interview he requested.

He approached her with a grave and serious gentleness. "My dear Helen," said he, "you have consented to be my wife, my life's mild companion; let it be soon--soon--for I need you. I need all the strength of that holy tie. Helen, let me press you to fix the time."

"I owe you too much," answered Helen, looking down, "to have any will but yours. But your mother," she added, perhaps clinging to the idea of some reprieve,--"your mother has not yet--"

"My mother--true. I will speak first to her. You shall receive from my family all honour due to your gentle virtues. Helen, by the way, have you mentioned to Violante the bond between us?"

"No; that is, I fear I may have unguardedly betrayed it, against Lady Lansmere's commands too--but--but--"

"So, Lady Lansmere forbade you to name it to Violante? This should not be. I will answer for her permission to revoke that interdict. It is due to Violante and to you. Tell your young friend all. Ah, Helen, if I am at times cold or wayward, bear with me--bear with me; for you love me, do you not?"

CHAPTER X.

That same evening Randal heard from Levy (at whose house he stayed late) of that self-introduction to Violante which (thanks to his skeleton key) Peschiera had contrived to effect; and the count seemed more than sanguine,--he seemed assured as to the full and speedy success of his matrimonial enterprise. "Therefore," said Levy, "I trust I may very soon congratulate you on the acquisition of your family estates."

"Strange!" answered Randal, "strange that my fortunes seem so bound up with the fate of a foreigner like Beatrice di Negra and her connection with Frank Hazeldean." He looked up at the clock as he spoke, and added,

"Frank by this time has told his father of his engagement."

"And you feel sure that the squire cannot be coaxed into consent?"

"No; but I feel sure that the squire will be so choleric at the first intelligence, that Frank will not have the self-control necessary for coaxing; and, perhaps, before the squire can relent upon this point, he may, by some accident, learn his grievances on another, which would exasperate him still more."

"Ay, I understand,--the post-obit?" Randal nodded.

"And what then?" asked Levy.

"The next of kin to the lands of Hazeldean may have his day."

The baron smiled.

"You have good prospects in that direction, Leslie; look now to another. I spoke to you of the borough of Lansmere. Your patron, Audley Egerton, intends to stand for it."

Randal's heart had of late been so set upon other and more avaricious schemes, that a seat in parliament had sunk into a secondary object; nevertheless his ambitious and all-grasping nature felt a bitter pang, when he heard that Egerton thus interposed between himself and any chance of advancement.

"So," he muttered sullenly,--"so this man, who pretends to be my benefactor, squanders away the wealth of my forefathers, throws me penniless on the world; and, while still encouraging me to exertion and public life, robs me himself of--"

"No!" interrupted Levy, "not robs you; we may prevent that. The Lansmere interest is not so strong in the borough as Dick Avenel's."

"But I cannot stand against Egerton."

"Assuredly not,--you may stand with him."

"How?"

"Dick Avenel will never suffer Egerton to come in; and though he cannot, perhaps, carry two of his own politics, he can split his votes upon you."

Randal's eyes flashed. He saw at a glance that if Avenel did not overrate the relative strength of parties, his seat could be secured.

"But," he said, "Egerton has not spoken to me on such a subject; nor can you expect that he would propose to me to stand with him, if he foresaw the chance of being ousted by the very candidate he himself introduced."

"Neither he nor his party will anticipate that possibility. If he ask you, agree to stand,--leave the rest to me."

"You must hate Egerton bitterly," said Randal; "for I am not vain enough to think that you thus scheme but from pure love to me."

"The motives of men are intricate and complicated," answered Levy, with unusual seriousness. "It suffices to the wise to profit by the actions, and leave the motives in shade."

There was silence for some minutes. Then the two drew closer towards each other, and began to discuss details in their joint designs.

Randal walked home slowly. It was a cold moonlit night. Young idlers of his own years and rank passed him by on their way from the haunts of social pleasure. They were yet in the first fair holiday of life.

Life's holiday had gone from him forever. Graver men, in the various callings of masculine labour--professions, trade, the State--passed him also. Their steps might be sober, and their faces careworn; but no step

had the furtive stealth of his, no face the same contracted, sinister, suspicious gloom. Only once, in a lonely thoroughfare, and on the opposite side of the way, fell a footfall, and glanced an eye, that seemed to betray a soul in sympathy with Randal Leslie's.

And Randal, who had heeded none of the other passengers by the way, as if instinctively, took note of this one. His nerves crisped at the noiseless slide of that form, as it stalked on from lamp to lamp, keeping pace with his own. He felt a sort of awe, as if he had beheld the wraith of himself; and even as he glanced suspiciously at the stranger, the stranger glanced at him. He was inexpressibly relieved when the figure turned down another street and vanished.

That man was a felon, as yet undetected. Between him and his kind there stood but a thought,—a veil air-spun, but impassable, as the veil of the Image at Sais.

And thus moved and thus looked Randal Leslie, a thing of dark and secret mischief, within the pale of the law, but equally removed from man by the vague consciousness that at his heart lay that which the eyes of man would abhor and loathe. Solitary amidst the vast city, and on through the machinery of Civilization, went the still spirit of Intellectual Evil.

CHAPTER XI.

Early the next morning Randal received two notes, one from Frank, written in great agitation, begging Randal to see and propitiate his father, whom he feared he had grievously offended; and then running off, rather incoherently, into protestations that his honour as well as his affections were engaged irrevocably to Beatrice, and that her, at least, he could never abandon.

And the second note was from the squire himself—short, and far less cordial than usual—requesting Mr. Leslie to call on him.

Randal dressed in haste, and went first to Limmer's hotel. He found the parson with Mr. Hazelden, and endeavouring in vain to soothe him. The squire had not slept all night, and his appearance was almost haggard.

"Oho! Mr. young Leslie," said he, throwing himself back in his chair as

Randal entered, "I thought you were a friend,--I thought you were Frank's adviser. Explain, sir! explain!"

"Gently, my dear Mr. Hazeldean," said the parson. "You do but surprise and alarm Mr. Leslie. Tell him more distinctly what he has to explain."

SQUIRE.--"Did you or did you not tell me or Mrs. Hazeldean that Frank was in love with Violante Rickeybockey?"

RANDAL (as in amaze).--"I! Never, sir! I feared, on the contrary, that he was somewhat enamoured of a very different person. I hinted at that possibility. I could not do more, for I did not know how far Frank's affections were seriously engaged. And indeed, sir, Mrs. Hazeldean, though not encouraging the idea that your son could marry a foreigner and a Roman Catholic, did not appear to consider such objections insuperable, if Frank's happiness were really at stake."

Here the poor squire gave way to a burst of passion, that involved in one tempest Frank, Randal, Harry herself, and the whole race of foreigners, Roman Catholics, and women. While the squire was still incapable of hearing reason, the parson, taking aside Randal, convinced himself that the whole affair, so far as Randal was concerned, had its origin in a very natural mistake; and that while that young gentleman had been hinting at Beatrice, Mrs. Hazeldean had been thinking of Violante. With considerable difficulty he succeeded in conveying this explanation to the squire, and somewhat appeasing his wrath against Randal. And the Dissimulator, seizing his occasion, then expressed so much grief and astonishment at learning that matters had gone as far as the parson informed him,--that Frank had actually proposed to Beatrice, been accepted, and engaged himself, before even communicating with his father; he declared so earnestly, that he could never conjecture such evil, that he had had Frank's positive promise to take no step without the sanction of his parents; he professed such sympathy with the squire's wounded feelings, and such regret at Frank's involvement, that Mr. Hazeldean at last yielded up his honest heart to his consoler, and griping Randal's hand, said, "Well, well, I wronged you; beg your pardon. What now is to be done?"

"Why, you cannot consent to this marriage,--impossible!" replied Randal; "and we must hope, therefore, to influence Frank by his sense of duty."

"That's it," said the squire; "for I'll not give way. Pretty pass things have come to, indeed! A widow, too, I hear. Artful jade! thought, no doubt, to catch a Hazeldean of Hazeldean. My estates go to an outlandish

Papistical set of mongrel brats! No, no, never!"

"But," said the parson, mildly, "perhaps we may be unjustly prejudiced against this lady. We should have consented to Violante; why not to her? She is of good family?"

"Certainly," said Randal.

"And good character?"

Randal shook his head, and sighed. The squire caught him roughly by the arm--"Answer the parson!" cried he, vehemently.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot speak disrespectfully of the character of a woman,--who may, too, become Frank's wife; and the world is ill-natured and not to be believed. But you can judge for yourself, my dear Mr. Hazeldean. Ask your brother whether Madame di Negra is one whom he would advise his nephew to marry."

"My brother!" exclaimed the squire, furiously. "Consult my distant brother on the affairs of my own son?"

"He is a man of the world," put in Randal.

"And of feeling and honour," said the parson; "and, perhaps, through him, we may be enabled to enlighten Frank, and save him from what appears to be the snare of an artful woman."

"Meanwhile," said Randal, "I will seek Frank, and do my best with him. Let me go now,--I will return in an hour or so."

"I will accompany you," said the parson.

"Nay, pardon me, but I think we two young men can talk more openly without a third person, even so wise and kind as you."

"Let Randal go," growled the squire. And Randal went. He spent some time with Frank, and the reader will easily divine how that time was employed. As he left Frank's lodgings, he found himself suddenly seized by the squire himself.

"I was too impatient to stay at home and listen to the parson's prosing," said Mr. Hazeldean, nervously. "I have shaken Dale off. Tell me what has passed. Oh, don't fear,--I'm a man, and can bear the worst."

Randal drew the squire's arm within his, and led him into the adjacent park.

"My dear sir," said he, sorrowfully, "this is very confidential what I am about to say. I must repeat it to you, because, without such confidence, I see not how to advise you on the proper course to take. But if I betray Frank, it is for his good, and to his own father;--only do not tell him. He would never forgive me; it would forever destroy my influence over him."

"Go on, go on," gasped the squire; "speak out. I'll never tell the ungrateful boy that I learned his secrets from another."

"Then," said Randal, "the secret of his entanglement with Madame di Negra is simply this: he found her in debt--nay, on the point of being arrested--"

"Debt! arrested! Jezebel!"

"And in paying the debt himself, and saving her from arrest, he conferred on her the obligation which no woman of honour could accept save from an affianced husband. Poor Frank!--if sadly taken in, still we must pity and forgive him!"

Suddenly, to Randal's great surprise, the squire's whole face brightened up.

"I see, I see!" he exclaimed, slapping his thigh. "I have it, I have it! 'T is an affair of money! I can buy her off. If she took money from him--the mercenary, painted baggage I--why, then, she'll take it from me. I don't care what it costs--half my fortune--all! I'd be content never to see Hazeldean Hall again, if I could save my son, my own son, from disgrace and misery; for miserable he will be, when he knows he has broken my heart and his mother's. And for a creature like that! My boy, a thousand hearty thanks to you. Where does the wench live? I'll go to her at once." And as he spoke, the squire actually pulled out his pocketbook, and began turning over and counting the bank-notes in it.

Randal at first tried to combat this bold resolution on the part of the squire; but Mr. Hazeldean had seized on it with all the obstinacy of his straightforward English mind. He cut Randal's persuasive eloquence off in the midst.

"Don't waste your breath! I've settled it; and if you don't tell me where she lives, 't is easily found out, I suppose."

Randal mused a moment. "After all," thought he, "why not? He will be sure so to speak as to enlist her pride against himself, and to irritate Frank to the utmost. Let him go."

Accordingly he gave the information required; and, insisting with great earnestness on the squire's promise not to mention to Madame di Negra his knowledge of Frank's pecuniary aid (for that would betray Randal as the informant); and satisfying himself as he best might with the squire's prompt assurance, "that he knew how to settle matters, without saying why or wherefore, as long as he opened his purse wide enough," he accompanied Mr. Hazeldean back into the streets, and there left him,--fixing an hour in the evening for an interview at Limmer's, and hinting that it would be best to have that interview without the presence of the parson.

"Excellent good man," said Randal, "but not with sufficient knowledge of the world for affairs of this kind, which you understand so well."

"I should think so," quoth the squire, who had quite recovered his good-humour. "And the parson is as soft as buttermilk. We must be firm here,--firm, sir." And the squire struck the end of his stick on the pavement, nodded to Randal, and went on to May Fair as sturdily and as confidently as if to purchase a prize cow at a cattle-show.

CHAPTER XII.

"Bring the light nearer," said John Burley,--"nearer still."

Leonard obeyed, and placed the candle on a little table by the sick man's bedside.

Burley's mind was partially wandering; but there was method in his madness. Horace Walpole said that "his stomach would survive all the rest of him." That which in Burley survived the last was his quaint, wild genius. He looked wistfully at the still flame of the candle: "It lives ever in the air!" said he.

"What lives ever?"

Burley's voice swelled, "Light!" He turned from Leonard, and again contemplated the little flame. "In the fixed star, in the Will-o'-the-wisp, in the great sun that illumines half a world, or the farthing rushlight by which the ragged student strains his eyes,--still the same flower of the elements! Light in the universe, thought in the soul--Ay, ay, go on with the simile. My head swims. Extinguish the light! You cannot; fool, it vanishes from your eye, but it is still in the space. Worlds must perish, suns shrivel up, matter and spirit both fall into nothingness, before the combinations whose union makes that little flame which the breath of a babe can restore to darkness, shall lose the power to form themselves into light once more. Lose the power!--no, the necessity: it is the one Must in creation. Ay, ay, very dark riddles grow clear now,--now when I could not cast up an addition sum in the baker's bill! What wise man denied that two and two made four? Do they not make four? I can't answer him. But I could answer a question that some wise men have contrived to make much knottier." He smiled softly, and turned his face for some minutes to the wall.

This was the second night on which Leonard had watched by his bedside, and Burley's state had grown rapidly worse. He could not last many days, perhaps many hours. But he had evinced an emotion beyond mere delight at seeing Leonard again. He had since then been calmer, more himself. "I feared I might have ruined you by my bad example," he said, with a touch of humour that became pathos as he added, "That idea preyed on me."

"No, no; you did me great good."

"Say that,--say it often," said Burley, earnestly; "it makes my heart feel so light."

He had listened to Leonard's story with deep interest, and was fond of talking to him of little Helen. He detected the secret at the young man's heart, and cheered the hopes that lay there, amidst fears and sorrows. Burley never talked seriously of his repentance; it was not in his nature to talk seriously of the things which he felt solemnly. But his high animal spirits were quenched with the animal power that fed them. Now, we go out of our sensual existence only when we are no longer enthralled by the Present, in which the senses have their realm. The sensual being vanishes when we are in the Past or the Future. The Present was gone from Burley; he could no more be its slave and its king.

It was most touching to see how the inner character of this man unfolded itself, as the leaves of the outer character fell off and withered,--a character no one would have guessed in him, an inherent refinement that

was almost womanly; and he had all a woman's abnegation of self. He took the cares lavished on him so meekly. As the features of the old man return in the stillness of death to the aspect of youth,--the lines effaced, the wrinkles gone,--so, in seeing Burley now, you saw what he had been in his spring of promise. But he himself saw only what he had failed to be,--powers squandered, life wasted. "I once beheld," he said, "a ship in a storm. It was a cloudy, fitful day, and I could see the ship with all its masts fighting hard for life and for death. Then came night, dark as pitch, and I could only guess that the ship fought on. Towards the dawn the stars grew visible, and once more I saw the ship: it was a wreck,--it went down just as the stars shone forth."

When he had made that allusion to himself, he sat very still for some time, then he spread out his wasted hands, and gazed on them, and on his shrunken limbs. "Good," said he, laughing low; "these hands were too large and rude for handling the delicate webs of my own mechanism, and these strong limbs ran away with me. If I had been a sickly, puny fellow, perhaps my mind would have had fair play. There was too much of brute body here! Look at this hand now! You can see the light through it! Good, good!"

Now, that evening, until he had retired to bed, Burley had been unusually cheerful, and had talked with much of his old eloquence, if with little of his old humour. Amongst other matters, he had spoken with considerable interest of some poems and other papers in manuscript which had been left in the house by a former lodger, and which, the reader may remember, Mrs. Goodyer had urged him in vain to read, in his last visit to her cottage. But then he had her husband Jacob to chat with, and the spirit bottle to finish, and the wild craving for excitement plucked his thoughts back to his London revels. Now poor Jacob was dead, and it was not brandy that the sick man drank from the widow's cuse; and London lay afar amidst its fogs, like a world resolved back into nebula. So, to please his hostess and distract his own solitary thoughts, he had condescended (just before Leonard found him out) to peruse the memorials of a life obscure to the world, and new to his own experience of coarse joys and woes. "I have been making a romance, to amuse myself, from their contents," said he. "They maybe of use to you, brother author. I have told Mrs. Goodyer to place them in your room. Amongst those papers is a sort of journal,--a woman's journal; it moved me greatly. A man gets into another world, strange to him as the orb of Sirius, if he can transport himself into the centre of a woman's heart, and see the life there, so wholly unlike our own. Things of moment to us, to it so trivial; things trifling to us, to it so vast. There was this journal, in its dates reminding me of stormy events in my own existence, and grand

doings in the world's. And those dates there, chronicling but the mysterious, unrevealed record of some obscure, loving heart! And in that chronicle, O Sir Poet, there was as much genius, vigour of thought, vitality of being, poured and wasted, as ever kind friend will say was lavished on the rude outer world by big John Burley! Genius, genius! are we all alike, then, save when we leash ourselves to some matter-of-fact material, and float over the roaring seas on a wooden plank or a herring tub?" And after he had uttered that cry of a secret anguish, John Burley had begun to show symptoms of growing fever and disturbed brain; and when they had got him into bed, he lay there muttering to himself, until, towards midnight, he had asked Leonard to bring the light nearer to him.

So now he again was quiet, with his face turned towards the wall; and Leonard stood by the bedside sorrowfully, and Mrs. Goodyer, who did not heed Burley's talk, and thought only of his physical state, was dipping cloths into iced water to apply to his forehead. But as she approached with these, and addressed him soothingly, Burley raised himself on his arm, and waved aside the bandages. "I do not need them," said he, in a collected voice. "I am better now. I and that pleasant light understand one another, and I believe all it tells me. Pooh, pooh, I do not rave." He looked so smilingly and so kindly into her face, that the poor woman, who loved him as her own son, fairly burst into tears. He drew her towards him, and kissed her forehead.

"Peace, old fool," said he, fondly. "You shall tell anglers hereafter how John Burley came to fish for the one-eyed perch which he never caught; and how, when he gave it up at the last, his baits all gone, and the line broken amongst the weeds, you comforted the baffled man. There are many good fellows yet in the world who will like to know that poor Burley did not die on a dunghill. Kiss me. Come, boy, you too. Now, God bless you, I should like to sleep." His cheeks were wet with the tears of both his listeners, and there was a moisture in his own eyes, which, nevertheless, beamed bright through the moisture.

He laid himself down again, and the old woman would have withdrawn the light. He moved uneasily. "Not that," he murmured,--"light to the last!" and putting forth his wan hand, he drew aside the curtain so that the light might fall full on his face.

[Every one remembers that Goethe's last words are said to have been, "More Light;" and perhaps what has occurred in the text may be supposed a plagiarism from those words. But, in fact, nothing is more common than the craving and demand for light a little before

death. Let any consult his own sad experience in the last moments of those whose gradual close he has watched and tended. What more frequent than a prayer to open the shutters and let in the sun? What complaint more repeated and more touching than "that it is growing dark"? I once knew a sufferer, who did not then seem in immediate danger, suddenly order the sick room to be lit up as if for a gala. When this was told to the physician, he said gravely, "No worse sign."]

In a few minutes he was asleep, breathing calmly and regularly as an infant.

The old woman wiped her eyes, and drew Leonard softly into the adjoining room, in which a bed had been made up for him. He had not left the house since he had entered it with Dr. Morgan. "You are young, sir," said she, with kindness, "and the young want sleep. Lie down a bit: I will call you when he wakes."

"No, I could not sleep," said Leonard. "I will watch for you."

The old woman shook her head. "I must see the last of him, sir; but I know he will be angry when his eyes open on me, for he has grown very thoughtful of others."

"Ah, if he had but been, as thoughtful of himself!" murmured Leonard; and he seated himself by the table, on which, as he leaned his elbow, he dislodged some papers placed there. They fell to the ground with a dumb, moaning, sighing sound.--

"What is that?" said he, starting.

The old woman picked up the manuscripts and smoothed them carefully.

"Ah, sir, he bade me place these papers here. He thought they might keep you from fretting about him, in case you would sit up and wake. And he had a thought of me, too; for I have so pined to find out the poor young lady, who left them years ago. She was almost as dear to me as he is; dearer perhaps until now--when--when I am about to lose him!"

Leonard turned from the papers, without a glance at their contents: they had no interest for him at such a moment. The hostess went on,

"Perhaps she is gone to heaven before him; she did not look like one long for this world. She left us so suddenly. Many things of hers besides

these papers are still, here; but I keep them aired and dusted, and strew lavender over them, in case she ever come for them again. You never heard tell of her, did you, sir?" she added, with great simplicity, and dropping a half courtesy.

"Of her--of whom?"

"Did not Mr. John tell you her name--dear, dear; Mrs. Bertram."

Leonard started; the very name so impressed upon his memory by Harley L'Estrange!

"Bertram!" he repeated. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, sir! And many years after she had left us, and we had heard no more of her, there came a packet addressed to her here, from over sea, sir. We took it in, and kept it, and John would break the seal, to know if it would tell us anything about her; but it was all in a foreign language like,--we could not read a word."

"Have you the packet? Pray show it to me. It may be of the greatest value. To-morrow will do--I cannot think of that just now. Poor Burley!"

Leonard's manner indicated that he wished to talk no more, and to be alone. So Mrs. Goodyer left him, and stole back to Burley's room on tiptoe:

The young man remained in deep revery for some moments. "Light," he murmured. "How often 'Light' is the last word of those round whom the shades are gathering!" He moved, and straight on his view through the cottage lattice there streamed light indeed,--not the miserable ray lit by a human hand, but the still and holy effulgence of a moonlit heaven. It lay broad upon the humble floors, pierced across the threshold of the death chamber, and halted clear amidst its shadows.

Leonard stood motionless, his eye following the silvery silent splendour.

"And," he said inly--"and does this large erring nature, marred by its genial faults, this soul which should have filled a land, as yon orb the room, with a light that linked earth to heaven--does it pass away into the dark, and leave not a ray behind? Nay, if the elements of light are ever in the space, and when the flame goes out, return to the vital air, so thought once kindled lives forever around and about us, a part of our

breathing atmosphere. Many a thinker, many a poet, may yet illumine the world, from the thoughts which yon genius, that will have no name, gave forth to wander through air, and recombine again in some new form of light."

Thus he went on in vague speculations, seeking, as youth enamoured of fame seeks too fondly, to prove that mind never works, however erratically, in vain, and to retain yet, as an influence upon earth, the soul about to soar far beyond the atmosphere where the elements that make fame abide. Not thus had the dying man interpreted the endurance of light and thought.

Suddenly, in the midst of his reverie, a loud cry broke on his ear. He shuddered as he heard, and hastened forebodingly into the adjoining room. The old woman was kneeling by the bedside, and chafing Burley's hand, eagerly looking into his face. A glance sufficed to Leonard. All was over. Burley had died in sleep,--calmly, and without a groan.

The eyes were half open, with that look of inexpressible softness which death sometimes leaves; and still they were turned towards the light; and the light burned clear.

Leonard closed tenderly the heavy lids; and as he covered the face, the lips smiled a serene farewell.

CHAPTER XIII.

We have seen Squire Hazeldean (proud of the contents of his pocketbook, and his knowledge of the mercenary nature of foreign women) set off on his visit to Beatrice di Negra. Randal thus left, musing lone in the crowded streets, resolved with astute complacency the probable results of Mr. Hazeldean's bluff negotiation; and convincing himself that one of his vistas towards Fortune was becoming more clear and clear, he turned, with the restless activity of some founder of destined cities in a new settlement, to lop the boughs that cumbered and obscured the others. For truly, like a man in a vast Columbian forest, opening entangled space, now with the ready axe, now with the patient train that kindles the slower fire, this child of civilized life went toiling on against surrounding obstacles, resolute to destroy, but ever scheming to construct. And now Randal has reached Levy's dainty business-room, and is buried deep in discussion how to secure to himself, at the expense of

his patron, the representation of Lansmere, and how to complete the contract which shall reannex to his forlorn inheritance some fragments of its ancient wealth.

Meanwhile, Chance fought on his side in the boudoir of May Fair. The squire had found the marchesa at home, briefly introduced himself and his business, told her she was mistaken if she had fancied she had taken in a rich heir in his son; that, thank Heaven, he could leave his estates to his ploughman, should he so please, but that he was willing to do things liberally; and whatever she thought Frank was worth, he was very ready to pay for.

At another time Beatrice would perhaps have laughed at this strange address; or she might, in some prouder moment, have fired up with all a patrician's resentment and a woman's pride; but now her spirit was crushed, her nerves shattered: the sense of her degraded position, of her dependence on her brother, combined with her supreme unhappiness at the loss of those dreams with which Leonard had for a while charmed her wearied waking life,—all came upon her. She listened; pale and speechless; and the poor squire thought he was quietly advancing towards a favourable result, when she suddenly burst into a passion of hysterical tears; and just at that moment Frank himself entered the room. At the sight of his father, of Beatrice's grief, his sense of filial duty gave way. He was maddened by irritation, by the insult offered to the woman he loved, which a few trembling words from her explained to him,—maddened yet more by the fear that the insult had lost her to him; warm words ensued between son and father, to close with the peremptory command and vehement threat of the last.

"Come away this instant, sir! Come with me, or before the day is over, I strike you out of my will!"

The son's answer was not to his father; he threw himself at Beatrice's feet.

"Forgive him; forgive us both—"

"What! you prefer that stranger to me,—to the inheritance of Hazeldean!" cried the squire, stamping his foot.

"Leave your estates to whom you will; all that I care for in life is here!"

The squire stood still a moment or so, gazing on his son with a strange

bewildered marvel at the strength of that mystic passion, which none not labouring under its fearful charm can comprehend, which creates the sudden idol that no reason justifies, and sacrifices to its fatal shrine alike the Past and the Future. Not trusting himself to speak, the father drew his hand across his eyes, and dashed away the bitter tear that sprang from a swelling and indignant heart; then he uttered an inarticulate sound, and, finding his voice gone, moved away to the door, and left the house.

He walked through the streets, bearing his head very erect, as a proud man does when deeply wounded, and striving to shake off some affection that he deems a weakness; and his trembling nervous fingers fumbled at the button of his coat, trying to tighten the garment across his chest, as if to confirm a resolution that still sought to struggle out of the revolting heart.

Thus he went on, and the reader, perhaps, will wonder whither; and the wonder may not lessen when he finds the squire come to a dead pause in Grosvenor Square, and at the portico of his "distant brother's" stately house.

At the squire's brief inquiry whether Mr. Egerton was at home, the porter summoned the groom of the chambers; and the groom of the chambers, seeing a stranger, doubted whether his master was not engaged, but would take in the stranger's card and see.

"Ay, ay," muttered the squire, "this is true relationship!--my child prefers a stranger to me; why should I complain that I am a stranger in a brother's house? Sir," added the squire aloud, and very meekly--"sir, please to say to your master that I am William Hazeldean."

The servant bowed low, and without another word conducted the visitor into the statesman's library, and announcing Mr. Hazeldean, closed the door.

Audley was seated at his desk, the grim iron boxes still at his feet, but they were now closed and locked. And the ex-minister was no longer looking over official documents; letters spread open before him of far different nature; in his hand there lay a long lock of fair silken hair, on which his eyes were fixed sadly and intently. He started at the sound of his visitor's name, and the tread of the squire's stalwart footstep; and mechanically thrust into his bosom the relic of younger and warmer years, keeping his hand to his heart, which beat loud with disease under the light pressure of that golden hair.

The two brothers stood on the great man's lonely hearth, facing each other in silence, and noting unconsciously the change made in each during the long years in which they had never met.

The squire, with his portly size, his hardy sunburned cheeks, the partial baldness of his unfurrowed open forehead, looked his full age,--deep into middle life. Unmistakably he seemed the pater familias, the husband and the father, the man of social domestic ties. But about Audley (really some few years junior to the squire), despite the lines of care on his handsome face, there still lingered the grace of youth. Men of cities retain youth longer than those of the country,--a remark which Buffon has not failed to make and to account for. Neither did Egerton betray the air of the married man; for ineffable solitariness seemed stamped upon one whose private life had long been so stern a solitude. No ray from the focus of Home played round that reserved, unjoyous, melancholy brow. In a word, Audley looked still the man for whom some young female heart might fondly sigh; and not the less because of the cold eye and compressed lip, which challenged interest even while seeming to repel it.

Audley was the first to speak, and to put forth the right hand, which he stole slowly from its place at his breast, on which the lock of hair still stirred to and fro at the heave of the labouring heart. "William," said he, with his rich deep voice, "this is kind. You are come to see me, now that men say that I am fallen. The minister you censured is no more; and you see again the brother."

The squire was softened at once by this address. He shook heartily the hand tendered to him; and then, turning away his head, with an honest conviction that Audley ascribed to him a credit which he did not deserve, he said, "No, no, Audley; I am more selfish than you think me. I have come--I have come to ask your advice,--no, not exactly that--your opinion. But you are busy?"

"Sit down, William. Old days were coining over me when you entered; days earlier still return now,--days, too, that leave no shadow when their suns are set."

The proud man seemed to think he had said too much. His practical nature rebuked the poetic sentiment and phrase. He re-collected himself, and added, more coldly, "You would ask my opinion? What on? Some public matter--some parliamentary bill that may affect your property?"

"Am I such a mean miser as that? Property--property? what does property

matter, when a man is struck down at his own hearth? Property, indeed!
But you have no child--happy brother!"

"Ay, ay; as you say, I am a happy man; childless! Has your son
displeased you? I have heard him well spoken of, too."

"Don't talk of him. Whether his conduct be good or ill is my affair,"
resumed the poor father, with a testy voice--jealous alike of Audley's
praise or blame of his rebellious son. Then he rose a moment, and made
a strong gulp, as if for air; and laying his broad brown hand on his
brother's shoulder, said, "Randal Leslie tells me you are wise,--a
consummate man of the world. No doubt you are so. And Parson Dale tells
me that he is sure you have warm feelings,--which I take to be a strange
thing for one who has lived so long in London, and has no wife and no
child, a widower, and a member of parliament,--for a commercial city,
too. Never smile; it is no smiling matter with me. You know a foreign
woman, called Negra or Negro; not a blackymoor, though, by any means,--at
least on the outside of her. Is she such a woman as a plain country
gentleman would like his only son to marry--ay or no?"

"No, indeed," answered Audley, gravely; "and I trust your son will commit
no action so rash. Shall I see him, or her? Speak, my dear William.
What would you have me do?"

"Nothing; you have said enough," replied the squire, gloomily; and his
head sank on his breast.

Audley took his hand, and pressed it fraternally. "William," said the
statesman, "we have been long estranged; but I do not forget that when we
last met, at--at Lord Lansmere's house, and when I took you aside, and
said, 'William, if I lose this election, I must resign all chance of
public life; my affairs are embarrassed. I would not accept money from
you,--I would seek a profession, and you can help me there,' you divined
my meaning, and said, 'Take orders; the Hazeldean living is just vacant.
I will get some one to hold it till you are ordained.' I do not forget
that. Would that I had thought earlier of so serene an escape from all
that then tormented me! My lot might have been far happier."

The squire eyed Audley with a surprise that broke forth from his more
absorbing emotions. "Happier! Why, all things have prospered with you;
and you are rich enough now; and--you shake your head. Brother, is it
possible! do you want money? Pooh, not accept money from your mother's
son!--stuff!" Out came the squire's pocketbook. Audley put it gently
aside.

"Nay," said he, "I have enough for myself; but since you seek and speak with me thus affectionately, I will ask you one favour. Should I die before I can provide for my wife's kinsman, Randal Leslie, as I could wish, will you see to his fortunes, so far as you can, without injury to others,--to your own son?"

"My son! He is provided for. He has the Casino estate--much good may it do him! You have touched on the very matter that brought me here. This boy, Randal Leslie, seems a praiseworthy lad, and has Hazeldean blood in his veins. You have taken him up because he is connected with your late wife. Why should I not take him up, too, when his grandmother was a Hazeldean? My main object in calling was to ask what you mean to do for him; for if you do not mean to provide for him, why, I will, as in duty bound. So your request comes at the right time; I think of altering my will. I can put him into the entail, besides a handsome legacy. You are sure he is a good lad,--and it will please you too, Audley!"

"But not at the expense of your son. And stay, William: as to this foolish marriage with Madame di Negra,--who told you Frank meant to take such a step?"

"He told me himself; but it is no matter. Randal and I both did all we could to dissuade him; and Randal advised me to come to you."

"He has acted generously, then, our kinsman Randal--I am glad to hear it," said Audley, his brow somewhat clearing. "I have no influence with this lady; but, at least, I can counsel her. Do not consider the marriage fixed because a young man desires it. Youth is ever hot and rash."

"Your youth never was," retorted the squire, bluntly.

"You married well enough, I'm sure. I will say one thing for you: you have been, to my taste, a bad politician--beg pardon--but you were always a gentleman. You would never have disgraced your family and married a--"

"Hush!" interrupted Egerton, gently. "Do not make matters worse than they are. Madame di Negra is of high birth in her own country; and if scandal--"

"Scandal!" cried the squire, shrinking, and turning pale. "Are you speaking of the wife of a Hazeldean? At least she shall never sit by the hearth at which now sits his mother; and whatever I may do for Frank, her

children shall not succeed. No mongrel cross-breed shall kennel in English Hazeldean. Much obliged to you, Audley, for your good feeling; glad to have seen you; and hark ye, you startled me by that shake of your head, when I spoke of your wealth; and from what you say about Randal's prospects, I guess that you London gentlemen are not so thrifty as we are. You shall let me speak. I say again, that I have some thousands quite at your service. And though you are not a Hazeldean, still you are my mother's son; and now that I am about to alter my will, I can as well scratch in the name of Egerton as that of Leslie. Cheer up, cheer up: you are younger than I am, and you have no child; so you will live longer than I shall."

"My dear brother," answered Audley, "believe me, I shall never live to want your aid. And as to Leslie, add to the L5,000 I mean to give him an equal sum in your will, and I shall feel that he has received justice."

Observing that the squire, though he listened attentively, made no ready answer, Audley turned the subject again to Frank; and with the adroitness of a man of the world, backed by cordial sympathy in his brother's distress, he pleaded so well Frank's lame cause, urged so gently the wisdom of patience and delay, and the appeal to filial feeling rather than recourse to paternal threats, that the squire grew mollified in spite of himself, and left his brother's house a much less angry and less doleful man.

Mr. Hazeldean was still in the Square, when he came upon Randal himself, who was walking with a dark-whiskered, showy gentleman, towards Egerton's house. Randal and the gentleman exchanged a hasty whisper, and the former then exclaimed,

"What, Mr. Hazeldean, have you just left your brother's house? Is it possible?"

"Why, you advised me to go there, and I did. I scarcely knew what I was about. I am very glad I did go. Hang politics! hang the landed interest! what do I care for either now?"

"Foiled with Madame di Negra?" asked Randal, drawing the squire aside.

"Never speak of her again!" cried the squire, fiercely. "And as to that ungrateful boy--but I don't mean to behave harshly to him,--he shall have money enough to keep her if he likes, keep her from coming to me, keep him, too, from counting on my death, and borrowing post-obits on the Casino--for he'll be doing that next--no, I hope I wrong him there; I

have been too good a father for him to count on my death already. After all," continued the squire, beginning to relax, "as Audley says, the marriage is not yet made; and if the woman has taken him in, he is young, and his heart is warm. Make yourself easy, my boy. I don't forget how kindly you took his part; and before I do anything rash, I'll at least consult with his poor mother."

Randal gnawed his pale lip, and a momentary cloud of disappointment passed over his face.

"True, sir," said he, gently; "true, you must not be rash. Indeed, I was thinking of you and poor dear Frank at the very moment I met you. It occurred to me whether we might not make Frank's very embarrassments a reason to induce Madame di Negra to refuse him; and I was on my way to Mr. Egerton, in order to ask his opinion, in company with the gentleman yonder."

"Gentleman yonder. Why should he thrust his long nose into my family affairs? Who the devil is he?"

"Don't ask, sir. Pray let me act."

But the squire continued to eye askant the dark-whiskered personage thus interposed between himself and his son, and who waited patiently a few yards in the rear, carelessly readjusting the camellia in his button-hole.

"He looks very outlandish. Is he a foreigner too?" asked the squire at last.

"No, not exactly. However, he knows all about Frank's embarrassments; and--"

"Embarrassments! what, the debt he paid for that woman? How did he raise the money?"

"I don't know," answered Randal; "and that is the reason I asked Baron Levy to accompany me to Egerton's, that he might explain in private what I have no reason--"

"Baron Levy!" interrupted the squire. "Levy, Levy--I have heard of a Levy who has nearly ruined my neighbour Thornhill,--a money-lender. Zounds! is that the man who knows my son's affairs? I'll soon learn, sir."

Randal caught hold of the squire's arm: "Stop, stop; if you really insist upon learning more about Frank's debts, you must not appeal to Baron Levy directly, and as Frank's father: he will not answer you. But if I present you to him as a mere acquaintance of mine, and turn the conversation, as if carelessly, upon Frank, why, since, in the London world, such matters are never kept secret, except from the parents of young men, I have no doubt he will talk out openly."

"Manage it as you will," said the squire.

Randal took Mr. Hazelden's arm, and joined Levy--"A friend of mine from the country, Baron." Levy bowed profoundly, and the three walked slowly on.

"By the by," said Randal, pressing significantly upon Levy's arm, "my friend has come to town upon the somewhat unpleasant business of settling the debts of another,--a young man of fashion,--a relation of his own. No one, sir (turning to the squire), could so ably assist you in such arrangements as could Baron Levy."

BARON (modestly, and with a moralizing air).--"I have some experience in such matters, and I hold it a duty to assist the parents and relations of young men who, from want of reflection, often ruin themselves for life. I hope the young gentleman in question is not in the hands of the Jews?"

RANDAL.--"Christians are as fond of good interest for their money as ever the Jews can be."

BARON.--"Granted, but they have not always so much money to lend. The first thing, sir" (addressing the squire),--"the first thing for you to do is to buy up such of your relation's bills and notes of hand as may be in the market. No doubt we can get them a bargain, unless the young man is heir to some property that may soon be his in the course of nature."

RANDAL.--"Not soon--Heaven forbid! His father is still a young man,--a fine healthy man," leaning heavily on Levy's arm; "and as to post-obits--"

BARON.--"Post-obits on sound security cost more to buy up, however healthy the obstructing relative may be."

RANDAL.--"I should hope that there are not many sons who can calculate, in cold blood, on the death of their fathers."

BARON.--"Ha, ha! He is young, our friend Randal; eh, sir?"

RANDAL.--"Well, I am not more scrupulous than others, I dare say; and I have often been pinched hard for money, but I would go barefoot rather than give security upon a father's grave! I can imagine nothing more likely to destroy natural feeling, nor to instil ingratitude and treachery into the whole character, than to press the hand of a parent, and calculate when that hand may be dust; than to sit down with strangers and reduce his life to the measure of an insurance-table; than to feel difficulties gathering round one, and mutter in fashionable slang, 'But it will be all well if the governor would but die.' And he who has accustomed himself to the relief of post-obits must gradually harden his mind to all this."

The squire groaned heavily; and had Randal proceeded another sentence in the same strain, the squire would have wept outright. "But," continued Randal, altering the tone of his voice, "I think that our young friend, of whom we were talking just now, Levy, before this gentleman joined us, has the same opinions as myself on this head. He may accept bills, but he would never sign post-obits."

BARON (who, with the apt docility of a managed charger to the touch of a rider's hand, had comprehended and complied with each quick sign of Randal's).--"Pooh! the young fellow we are talking of? Nonsense. He would not be so foolish as to give five times the percentage he otherwise might. Not sign post-obits! Of course he has signed one."

RANDAL.--"Hist! you mistake, you mistake!"

SQUIRE (leaving Randal's arm and seizing Levy's).--"Were you speaking of Frank Hazeldean?"

BARON.--"My dear sir, excuse me, I never mention names before strangers."

SQUIRE.--"Strangers again! Man, I am the boy's father Speak out, sir," and his hand closed on Levy's arm with the strength of an iron vice.

BARON.--"Gently; you hurt me, sir: but I excuse your feelings. Randal, you are to blame for leading me into this indiscretion; but I beg to assure Mr. Hazeldean, that though his son has been a little extravagant--"

RANDAL.--"Owing chiefly to the arts of an abandoned woman."

BARON.--"Of an abandoned woman;--still he has shown more prudence than you would suppose; and this very post-obit is a proof of it. A simple act of that kind has enabled him to pay off bills that were running on till they would have ruined even the Hazeldean estate; whereas a charge on the reversion of the Casino--"

SQUIRE.--"He has done it then? He has signed a postobit?"

RANDAL.--"No, no, Levy must be wrong."

BARON.--"My dear Leslie, a man of Mr. Hazeldean's time of life cannot have your romantic boyish notions. He must allow that Frank has acted in this like a lad of sense--very good head for business has my young friend Frank! And the best thing Mr. Hazeldean can do is quietly to buy up the post-obit, and thus he will place his son henceforth in his power."

SQUIRE.--"Can I see the deed with my own eyes?"

BARON.--"Certainly, or how could you be induced to buy it up? But on one condition; you must not betray me to your son. And, indeed, take my advice, and don't say a word to him on the matter."

SQUIRE.--"Let me see it, let me see it with my own eyes! His mother else will never believe it--nor will I."

BARON.--"I can call on you this evening."

SQUIRE.--"Now, now!"

BARON.--"You can spare me, Randal; and you yourself can open to Mr. Egerton the other affair respecting Lansmere. No time should be lost, lest L'Estrange suggest a candidate."

RANDAL (whispering).--"Never mind me. This is more important." (Aloud)
--"Go with Mr. Hazeldean. My dear kind friend" (to the squire), "do not let this vex you so much. After all, it is what nine young men out of ten would do in the same circumstances. And it is best you should know it; you may save Frank from further ruin, and prevent, perhaps, this very marriage."

"We will see," exclaimed the squire, hastily. "Now, Mr. Levy, come."

Levy and the squire walked on, not arm in arm, but side by side. Randal

proceeded to Egerton's house.

"I am glad to see you, Leslie," said the ex-minister. "What is it I have heard? My nephew, Frank Hazeldean, proposes to marry Madame di Negra against his father's consent? How could you suffer him to entertain an idea so wild? And how never confide it to me?"

RANDAL.--"My dear Mr. Egerton, it is only to-day that I was informed of Frank's engagement. I have already seen him, and expostulated in vain; till then, though I knew your nephew admired Madame di Negra, I could never suppose he harboured a serious intention."

EGERTON.--"I must believe you, Randal. I will myself see Madame di Negra, though I have no power, and no right, to dictate to her. I have but little time for all such private business. The dissolution of parliament is so close at hand."

RANDAL (looking down).--"It is on that subject that I wished to speak to you, sir. You think of standing for Lansmere. Well, Baron Levy has suggested to me an idea that I could not, of course, even countenance, till I had spoken to you. It seems that he has some acquaintance with the state of parties in that borough. He is informed that it is not only as easy to bring in two of our side as to carry one, but that it would make your election still more safe not to fight single-handed against two opponents; that if canvassing for yourself alone, you could not carry a sufficient number of plumper votes; that split votes would go from you to one or other of the two adversaries; that, in a word, it is necessary to pair you with a colleague. If it really be so, you of course will learn best from your own Committee; but should they concur in the opinion Baron Levy has formed, do I presume too much on your kindness to deem it possible that you might allow me to be the second candidate on your side? I should not say this, but that Levy told me you had some wish to see me in parliament, amongst the supporters of your policy. And what other opportunity can occur? Here the cost of carrying two would be scarcely more than that of carrying one. And Levy says the party would subscribe for my election; you, of course, would refuse all such aid for your own; and indeed, with your great name, and Lord Lansmere's interest, there can be little beyond the strict legal expenses."

As Randal spoke thus at length, he watched anxiously his patron's reserved, unrevealing countenance.

EGERTON (dryly).--"I will consider. You may safely leave in my hands any matter connected with your ambition and advancement. I have before told

you I hold it a duty to do all in my power for the kinsman of my late wife, for one whose career I undertook to forward, for one whom honour has compelled to share in my own political reverses."

Here Egerton rang the bell for his hat and gloves, and walking into the hall, paused at the street door. There beckoning to Randal, he said, slowly, "You seem intimate with Baron Levy; I caution you against him, --a dangerous acquaintance, first to the purse, next to the honour."

RANDAL.--"I know it, sir; and am surprised myself at the acquaintance that has grown up between us. Perhaps its cause is in his respect for yourself."

EGERTON.--"Tut."

RANDAL.--"Whatever it be, he contrives to obtain a singular hold over one's mind, even where, as in my case, he has no evident interest to serve. How is this? It puzzles me!"

EGERTON.--"For his interest, it is most secured where he suffers it to be least evident; for his hold over the mind, it is easily accounted for. He ever appeals to two temptations, strong with all men,--Avarice and Ambition. Good-day."

RANDAL.--"Are you going to Madame di Negra's? Shall I not accompany you? Perhaps I may be able to back your own remonstrances."

EGERTON.--"No, I shall not require you."

RANDAL.--"I trust I shall hear the result of your interview? I feel so much interested in it. Poor Frank!"

Audley nodded. "Of course, of course."

CHAPTER XIV.

On entering the drawing-room of Madame di Negra, the peculiar charm which the severe Audley Egerton had been ever reputed to possess with women would have sensibly struck one who had hitherto seen him chiefly in his relations with men in the business-like affairs of life. It was a charm in strong contrast to the ordinary manners of those who are emphatically

called "Ladies' men." No artificial smile, no conventional, hollow blandness, no frivolous gossip, no varnish either of ungenial gayety or affected grace. The charm was in a simplicity that unbent more into kindness than it did with men. Audley's nature, whatever its faults and defects, was essentially masculine; and it was the sense of masculine power that gave to his voice a music when addressing the gentler sex, and to his manner a sort of indulgent tenderness that appeared equally void of insincerity and presumption.

Frank had been gone about half-an-hour, and Madame di Negra was scarcely recovered from the agitation into which she had been thrown by the affront from the father and the pleading of the son.

Egerton took her passive hand cordially, and seated himself by her side.

"My dear marchesa," I said he, "are we then likely to be near connections? And can you seriously contemplate marriage with my young nephew, Frank Hazeldean? You turn away. Ah, my fair friend, there are but two inducements to a free woman to sign away her liberty at the altar. I say a free woman, for widows are free, and girls are not. These inducements are, first, worldly position; secondly, love. Which of these motives can urge Madame di Negra to marry Mr. Frank Hazeldean?"

"There are other motives than those you speak of,—the need of protection, the sense of solitude, the curse of dependence, gratitude for honourable affection. But you men never know women!"

"I grant that you are right there,—we never do; neither do women ever know men. And yet each sex contrives to dupe and to fool the other! Listen to me. I have little acquaintance with my nephew, but I allow he is a handsome young gentleman, with whom a handsome young lady in her teens might fall in love in a ball-room. But you, who have known the higher order of our species, you who have received the homage of men, whose thoughts and mind leave the small talk of drawing-room triflers so poor and bald, you cannot look me in the face and say that it is any passion resembling love which you feel for my nephew. And as to position, it is right that I should inform you that if he marry you he will have none. He may risk his inheritance. You will receive no countenance from his parents. You will be poor, but not free. You will not gain the independence you seek for. The sight of a vacant, discontented face in that opposite chair will be worse than solitude. And as to grateful affection," added the man of the world, "it is a polite synonym for tranquil indifference."

"Mr. Egerton," said Beatrice, "people say you are made of bronze. Did you ever feel the want of a home?"

"I answer you frankly," replied the statesman, "if I had not felt it, do you think I should have been, and that I should be to the last, the joyless drudge of public life? Bronze though you call my nature, it would have melted away long since like wax in the fire, if I had sat idly down and dreamed of a home!"

"But we women," answered Beatrice, with pathos, "have no public life, and we do idly sit down and dream. Oh," she continued, after a short pause, and clasping her hands firmly together, "you think me worldly, grasping, ambitious; how different my fate had been had I known a home!--known one whom I could love and venerate; known one whose smiles would have developed the good that was once within me, and the fear of whose rebuking or sorrowful eye would have corrected what is evil."

"Yet," answered Audley, "nearly all women in the great world have had that choice once in their lives, and nearly all have thrown it away. How few of your rank really think of home when they marry! how few ask to venerate as well as to love! and how many, of every rank, when the home has been really gained, have wilfully lost its shelter,--some in neglectful weariness, some from a momentary doubt, distrust, caprice, a wild fancy, a passionate fit, a trifle, a straw, a dream! True, you women are ever dreamers. Commonsense, common earth, is above or below your comprehension."

Both now are silent. Audley first roused himself with a quick, writhing movement. "We two," said he, smiling half sadly, half cynically,--"we two must not longer waste time in talking sentiment. We know both too well what life, as it has been made for us by our faults or our misfortunes, truly is. And once again, I entreat you to pause before you yield to the foolish suit of my foolish nephew. Rely on it, you will either command a higher offer for your prudence to accept; or, if you needs must sacrifice rank and fortune, you, with your beauty and your romantic heart, will see one who, at least for a fair holiday season (if human love allows no more), can repay you for the sacrifice. Frank Hazeldean never can."

Beatrice turned away to conceal the tears that rushed to her eyes.

"Think over this well," said Audley, in the softest tones of his mellow voice. "Do you remember that when you first came to England, I told you that neither wedlock nor love had any lures for me? We grew friends upon

that rude avowal, and therefore I now speak to you like some sage of old, wise because standing apart and aloof from all the affections and ties that mislead our wisdom. Nothing but real love--how rare it is; has one human heart in a million ever known it?--nothing but real love can repay us for the loss of freedom, the cares and fears of poverty, the cold pity of the world that we both despise and respect. And all these, and much more, follow the step you would inconsiderately take, an imprudent marriage."

"Audley Egerton," said Beatrice, lifting her dark, moistened eyes, "you grant that real love does compensate for an imprudent marriage. You speak as if you had known such love--you! Can it be possible?"

"Real love--I thought that I knew it once. Looking back with remorse, I should doubt it now but for one curse that only real love, when lost, has the power to leave evermore behind it."

"What is that?"

"A void here," answered Egerton, striking his heart. "Desolation!--Adieu!"

He rose and left the room.

"Is it," murmured Egerton, as he pursued his way through the streets--"is it that, as we approach death, all the first fair feelings of young life come back to us mysteriously? Thus I have heard, or read, that in some country of old, children scattering flowers preceded a funeral bier."

CHAPTER XV.

And so Leonard stood beside his friend's mortal clay, and watched, in the ineffable smile of death, the last gleam which the soul had left there; and so, after a time, he crept back to the adjoining room with a step as noiseless as if he had feared to disturb the dead. Wearied as he was with watching, he had no thought of sleep. He sat himself down by the little table, and leaned his face on his hand, musing sorrowfully. Thus time passed. He heard the clock from below strike the hours. In the house of death the sound of a clock becomes so solemn. The soul that we miss has gone so far beyond the reach of time! A cold, superstitious awe gradually stole over the young man. He shivered, and lifted his eyes

with a start, half scornful, half defying. The moon was gone; the gray, comfortless dawn gleamed through the casement, and carried its raw, chilling light through the open doorway into the death-room. And there, near the extinguished fire, Leonard saw the solitary woman, weeping low; and watching still. He returned to say a word of comfort; she pressed his hand, but waved him away. He understood. She did not wish for other comfort than her quiet relief of tears. Again, he returned to his own chamber, and his eye this time fell upon the papers which he had hitherto disregarded. What made his heart stand still, and the blood then rush so quickly through his veins? Why did he seize upon those papers with so tremulous a hand, then lay them down, pause, as if to nerve himself, and look so eagerly again? He recognized the handwriting,--those fair, clear characters, so peculiar in their woman-like delicacy and grace, the same as in the wild, pathetic poems, the sight of which had made an era in his boyhood. From these pages the image of the mysterious Nora rose once more before him. He felt that he was with a mother. He went back, and closed the door gently, as if with a jealous piety, to exclude each ruder shadow from the world of spirits, and be alone with that mournful ghost. For a thought written in warm, sunny life, and then suddenly rising up to us, when the hand that traced and the heart that cherished it are dust, is verily as a ghost. It is a likeness struck off of the fond human being, and surviving it. Far more truthful than bust or portrait, it bids us see the tear flow, and the pulse beat. What ghost can the churchyard yield to us like the writing of the dead?

The bulk of the papers had been once lightly sewn to each other; they had come undone, perhaps in Burley's rude hands, but their order was easily apparent. Leonard soon saw that they formed a kind of journal,--not, indeed, a regular diary, nor always relating to the things of the day. There were gaps in time--no attempt at successive narrative; sometimes, instead of prose, a hasty burst of verse, gushing evidently from the heart; sometimes all narrative was left untold, and yet, as it were, epitomized by a single burning line--a single exclamation--of woe or joy! Everywhere you saw records of a nature exquisitely susceptible; and, where genius appeared, it was so artless, that you did not call it genius, but emotion. At the onset the writer did not speak of herself in the first person. The manuscript opened with descriptions and short dialogues, carried on by persons to whose names only initial letters were assigned, all written in a style of simple innocent freshness, and breathing of purity and happiness, like a dawn of spring. Two young persons, humbly born, a youth and a girl, the last still in childhood, each chiefly self-taught, are wandering on Sabbath evenings among green dewy fields, near the busy town, in which labour awhile is still. Few words pass between them. You see at once, though the writer does not

mean to convey it, how far beyond the scope of her male companion flies the heavenward imagination of the girl. It is he who questions, it is she who answers; and soon there steals upon you, as you read, the conviction that the youth loves the girl, and loves in vain. All in this writing, though terse, is so truthful! Leonard, in the youth, already recognizes the rude imperfect scholar, the village bard, Mark Fairfield. Then there is a gap in description; but there are short weighty sentences, which show deep ening thought, increasing years, in the writer. And though the innocence remains, the happiness begins to be less vivid on the page.

Now, insensibly, Leonard finds that there is a new phase in the writer's existence. Scenes no longer of humble, workday rural life surround her, and a fairer and more dazzling image succeeds to the companion of the Sabbath eves. This image Nora evidently loves to paint,--it is akin to her own genius; it captivates her fancy; it is an image that she (inborn artist, and conscious of her art) feels to belong to a brighter and higher school of the Beautiful. And yet the virgin's heart is not awakened,--no trace of the heart yet there! The new image thus introduced is one of her own years, perhaps; nay, it may be younger still, for it is a boy that is described, with his profuse fair curls, and eyes new to grief, and confronting the sun as a young eagle's; with veins so full of the wine of life, that they overflow into every joyous whim; with nerves quiveringly alive to the desire of glory; with the frank generous nature, rash in its laughing scorn of the world, which it has not tried. Who was this boy? it perplexed Leonard. He feared to guess. Soon, less told than implied, you saw that this companionship, however it chanced, brings fear and pain on the writer. Again (as before, with Mark Fairfield), there is love on the one side and not on the other; with her there is affectionate, almost sisterly, interest, admiration, gratitude, but a something of pride or of terror that keeps back love.

Here Leonard's interest grew intense. Were there touches by which conjecture grew certainty; and he recognized, through the lapse of years, the boy-lover in his own generous benefactor?

Fragments of dialogue now began to reveal the suit of an ardent, impassioned nature, and the simple wonder and strange alarm of a listener who pitied but could not sympathize. Some great worldly distinction of rank between the two became visible,--that distinction seemed to arm the virtue and steel the affections of the lowlier born. Then a few sentences, half blotted out with tears, told of wounded and humbled feelings,--some one invested with authority, as if the suitor's parent,

had interfered, questioned, reproached, counselled. And it was evident that the suit was not one that dishonoured; it wooed to flight, but still to marriage.

And now these sentences grew briefer still, as with the decision of a strong resolve. And to these there followed a passage so exquisite, that Leonard wept unconsciously as he read. It was the description of a visit spent at home previous to some sorrowful departure. He caught the glimpse of a proud and vain, but a tender wistful mother, of a father's fonder but less thoughtful love. And then came a quiet soothing scene between the girl and her first village lover, ending thus: "So she put M.'s hand into her sister's, and said, 'You loved me through the fancy, love her with the heart,' and left them comprehending each other, and betrothed."

Leonard sighed. He understood now how Mark Fairfield saw, in the homely features of his unlettered wife, the reflection of the sister's soul and face.

A few words told the final parting,--words that were a picture. The long friendless highway, stretching on--on--towards the remorseless city, and the doors of home opening on the desolate thoroughfare, and the old pollard-tree beside the threshold, with the ravens wheeling round it and calling to their young. He too had watched that threshold from the same desolate thoroughfare. He too had heard the cry of the ravens. Then came some pages covered with snatches of melancholy verse, or some reflections of dreamy gloom.

The writer was in London, in the house of some high-born patroness,--that friendless shadow of a friend which the jargon of society calls "companion." And she was looking on the bright storm of the world as through prison bars. Poor bird, afar from the greenwood, she had need of song,--it was her last link with freedom and nature. The patroness seems to share in her apprehensions of the boy suitor, whose wild rash prayers the fugitive had resisted; but to fear lest the suitor should be degraded, not the one whom he pursues,--fear an alliance ill-suited to a high-born heir. And this kind of fear stings the writer's pride, and she grows harsh in her judgment of him who thus causes but pain where he proffers love. Then there is a reference to some applicant for her hand, who is pressed upon her choice; and she is told that it is her duty so to choose, and thus deliver a noble family from a dread that endures so long as her hand is free. And of this fear, and of this applicant, there breaks out a petulant yet pathetic scorn. After this the narrative, to judge by the dates, pauses for days and weeks, as if the writer had grown

wearily and listlessly,--suddenly to reopen in a new strain, eloquent with hopes and with fears never known before. The first person was abruptly assumed,--it was the living "I" that now breathed and moved along the lines. How was this? The woman was no more a shadow and a secret unknown to herself. She had assumed the intense and vivid sense of individual being; and love spoke loud in the awakened human heart.

A personage not seen till then appeared on the page. And ever afterwards this personage was only named as "He," as if the one and sole representative of all the myriads that walk the earth. The first notice of this prominent character on the scene showed the restless, agitated effect produced on the writer's imagination. He was invested with a romance probably not his own. He was described in contrast to the brilliant boy whose suit she had feared, pitied, and now sought to shun, --described with a grave and serious, but gentle mien, a voice that imposed respect, an eye and lip that showed collected dignity of will. Alas? the writer betrayed herself, and the charm was in the contrast, not to the character of the earlier lover, but her own. And now, leaving Leonard to explore and guess his way through the gaps and chasms of the narrative, it is time to place before the reader what the narrative alone will not reveal to Leonard.

CHAPTER XVI.

Nora Avenel had fled from the boyish love of Harley L'Estrange, recommended by Lady Lansmere to a valetudinarian relative of her own, Lady Jane Horton, as companion. But Lady Lansmere could not believe it possible that the lowborn girl could long sustain her generous pride, and reject the ardent suit of one who could offer to her the prospective coronet of a countess. She continually urged upon Lady Jane the necessity of marrying Nora to some one of rank less disproportioned to her own, and empowered that lady to assure any such wooer of a dowry far beyond Nora's station. Lady Jane looked around, and saw in the outskirts of her limited social ring a young solicitor, a peer's natural son, who was on terms of more than business-like intimacy with the fashionable clients whose distresses made the origin of his wealth. The young man was handsome, well-dressed, and bland. Lady Jane invited him to her house; and, seeing him struck with the rare loveliness of Nora, whispered the hint of the dowry. The fashionable solicitor, who afterwards ripened into Baron Levy, did not need that hint; for, though then poor, he relied on himself for fortune, and, unlike Randal, he had warm blood in his

veins. But Lady Jane's suggestions made him sanguine of success; and when he formally proposed, and was as formally refused, his self-love was bitterly wounded. Vanity in Levy was a powerful passion; and with the vain, hatred is strong, revenge is rankling. Levy retired, concealing his rage; nor did he himself know how vindictive that rage, when it cooled into malignancy, could become, until the arch-fiend OPPORTUNITY prompted its indulgence and suggested its design.

Lady Jane was at first very angry with Nora for the rejection of a suitor whom she had presented as eligible. But the pathetic grace of this wonderful girl had crept into her heart, and softened it even against family prejudice; and she gradually owned to herself that Nora was worthy of some one better than Mr. Levy.

Now, Harley had ever believed that Nora returned his love, and that nothing but her own sense of gratitude to his parents, her own instincts of delicacy, made her deaf to his prayers. To do him justice, wild and headstrong as he then was, his suit would have ceased at once had he really deemed it persecution. Nor was his error unnatural; for his conversation, till it had revealed his own heart, could not fail to have dazzled and delighted the child of genius; and her frank eyes would have shown the delight. How, at his age, could he see the distinction between the Poetess and the Woman? The poetess was charmed with rare promise in a soul of which the very errors were the extravagances of richness and beauty. But the woman--no! the woman required some nature not yet undeveloped, and all at turbulent, if brilliant, strife with its own noble elements, but a nature formed and full-grown. Harley was a boy, and Nora was one of those women who must find or fancy an Ideal that commands and almost awes them into love.

Harley discovered, not without difficulty, Nora's new residence. He presented himself at Lady Jane's, and she, with grave rebuke, forbade him the house. He found it impossible to obtain an interview with Nora. He wrote, but he felt sure that his letters never reached her, since they were unanswered. His young heart swelled with rage. He dropped threats, which alarmed all the fears of Lady Lansmere, and even the prudent apprehensions of his friend, Audley Egerton. At the request of the mother, and equally at the wish of the son, Audley consented to visit at Lady Jane's, and make acquaintance with Nora.

"I have such confidence in you," said Lady Lansmere, "that if you once know the girl, your advice will be sure to have weight with her. You will show her how wicked it would be to let Harley break our hearts and degrade his station."

"I have such confidence in you," said young Harley, "that if you once know my Nora, you will no longer side with my mother. You will recognize the nobility which nature only can create, you will own that Nora is worthy a rank more lofty than mine; and my mother so believes in your wisdom, that, if you plead in my cause, you will convince even her."

Audley listened to both with his intelligent, half-incredulous smile; and wholly of the same opinion as Lady Lansmere, and sincerely anxious to save Harley from an indiscretion that his own notions led him to regard as fatal, he resolved to examine this boasted pearl, and to find out its flaws. Audley Egerton was then in the prime of his earnest, resolute, ambitious youth. The stateliness of his natural manners had then a suavity and polish which, even in later and busier life, it never wholly lost; since, in spite of the briefer words and the colder looks by which care and power mark the official man, the minister had ever enjoyed that personal popularity which the indefinable, external something, that wins and pleases, can alone confer. But he had even then, as ever, that felicitous reserve which Rochefoucauld has called the "mystery of the body,"--that thin yet guardian veil which reveals but the strong outlines of character, and excites so much of interest by provoking so much of conjecture. To the man who is born with this reserve, which is wholly distinct from shyness, the world gives credit for qualities and talents beyond those that it perceives; and such characters are attractive to others in proportion as these last are gifted with the imagination which loves to divine the unknown.

At the first interview, the impression which this man produced upon Nora Avenel was profound and strange. She had heard of him before as the one whom Harley most loved and looked up to; and she recognized at once in his mien, his aspect, his words, the very tone of his deep tranquil voice, the power to which woman, whatever her intellect, never attains; and to which, therefore, she imputes a nobility not always genuine,--namely, the power of deliberate purpose and self-collected, serene ambition. The effect that Nora produced on Egerton was not less sudden. He was startled by a beauty of face and form that belonged to that rarest order, which we never behold but once or twice in our lives.

He was yet more amazed to discover that the aristocracy of mind could bestow a grace that no aristocracy of birth could surpass. He was prepared for a simple, blushing village girl, and involuntarily he bowed low his proud front at the first sight of that delicate bloom, and that exquisite gentleness which is woman's surest passport to the respect of man. Neither in the first, nor the second, nor the third interview, nor,

indeed, till after many interviews, could he summon up courage to commence his mission, and allude to Harley. And when he did so at last his words faltered. But Nora's words were clear to him. He saw that Harley was not loved; and a joy, which he felt as guilty, darted through his whole frame. From that interview Audley returned home greatly agitated, and at war with himself. Often, in the course of this story, has it been hinted that, under all Egerton's external coldness and measured self-control, lay a nature capable of strong and stubborn passions. Those passions broke forth then. He felt that love had already entered into the heart, which the trust of his friend should have sufficed to guard.

"I will go there no more," said he, abruptly, to Harley.

"But why?"

"The girl does not love you. Cease then to think of her."

Harley disbelieved him, and grew indignant. But Audley had every worldly motive to assist his sense of honour. He was poor, though with the reputation of wealth, deeply involved in debt, resolved to rise in life, tenacious of his position in the world's esteem. Against a host of counteracting influences, love fought single-handed. Audley's was a strong nature; but, alas! in strong natures, if resistance to temptation is of granite, so the passions that they admit are of fire.

Trite is the remark that the destinies of our lives often date from the impulses of unguarded moments. It was so with this man, to an ordinary eye so cautious and so deliberate. Harley one day came to him in great grief; he had heard that Nora was ill: he implored Audley to go once more and ascertain. Audley went. Lady Jane Horton, who was suffering under a disease which not long afterwards proved fatal, was too ill to receive him. He was shown into the room set apart as Nora's. While waiting for her entrance, he turned mechanically over the leaves of an album, which Nora, suddenly summoned away to attend Lady Jane, had left behind her on the table. He saw the sketch of his own features; he read words inscribed below it,--words of such artless tenderness, and such unhoping sorrow, words written by one who had been accustomed to regard her genius as her sole confidant, under Heaven; to pour out to it, as the solitary poet-heart is impelled to do, thoughts, feelings, the confession of mystic sighs, which it would never breathe to a living ear, and, save at such moments, scarcely acknowledge to itself. Audley saw that he was beloved, and the revelation, with a sudden light, consumed all the barriers between himself and his own love. And at that moment Nora

entered. She saw him bending over the book. She uttered a cry, sprang forward, and then sank down, covering her face with her hands. But Audley was at her feet. He forgot his friend, his trust; he forgot ambition, he forgot the world. It was his own cause that he pleaded,--his own love that burst forth from his lips. And when the two that day parted, they were betrothed each to each. Alas for them, and alas for Harley! And now this man, who had hitherto valued himself as the very type of gentleman, whom all his young contemporaries had so regarded and so revered, had to press the hand of a confiding friend, and bid adieu to truth. He had to amuse, to delay, to mislead his boy-rival,--to say that he was already subduing Nora's hesitating doubts, and that with a little time, she could be induced to consent to forget Harley's rank, and his parent's pride, and become his wife. And Harley believed in Egerton, without one suspicion on the mirror of his loyal soul.

Meanwhile, Audley, impatient of his own position,--impatient, as strong minds ever are, to hasten what they have once resolved, to terminate a suspense that every interview with Harley tortured alike by jealousy and shame, to pass out of the reach of scruples, and to say to himself, "Right--or wrong, there is no looking back; the deed is done,"--Audley, thus hurried on by the impetus of his own power of will, pressed for speedy and secret nuptials,--secret, till his fortunes, then wavering, were more assured, his career fairly commenced. This was not his strongest motive, though it was one. He shrank from the discovery of his wrong to his friend, desired to delay the self-humiliation of such announcement, until, as he persuaded himself, Harley's boyish passion was over, had yielded to the new allurements that would naturally beset his way. Stifling his conscience, Audley sought to convince himself that the day would soon come when Harley could hear with indifference that Nora Avenel was another's. "The dream of an hour, at his age," murmured the elder friend; "but at mine the passion of a life!" He did not speak of these latter motives for concealment to Nora. He felt that to own the extent of his treason to a friend would lower him in her eyes. He spoke therefore but slightly of Harley, treated the boy's suit as a thing past and gone. He dwelt only on reasons that compelled self-sacrifice on his side or hers. She did not hesitate which to choose. And so, where Nora loved, so submissively did she believe in the superiority of the lover, that she would not pause to hear a murmur from her own loftier nature, or question the propriety of what he deemed wise and good.

Abandoning prudence in this arch affair of life, Audley still preserved his customary caution in minor details. And this indeed was characteristic of him throughout all his career, heedless in large things, wary in small. He would not trust Lady Jane Horton with his

secret, still less Lady Lansmere. He simply represented to the former that Nora was no longer safe from Harley's determined pursuit under Lady Jane's roof, and that she had better elude the boy's knowledge of her movements, and go quietly away for a while, to lodge with some connection of her own.

And so, with Lady Jane's acquiescence, Nora went first to the house of a very distant kinswoman of her mother's, and afterwards to one that Egerton took as their bridal home, under the name of Bertram. He arranged all that might render their marriage most free from the chance of premature discovery. But it so happened on the very morning of their bridal, that one of the witnesses he selected (a confidential servant of his own) was seized with apoplexy. Considering, in haste, where to find a substitute, Egerton thought of Levy, his own private solicitor, his own fashionable money-lender, a man with whom he was then as intimate as a fine gentleman is with the lawyer of his own age, who knows all his affairs, and has helped, from pure friendship, to make them as bad as they are! Levy was thus suddenly summoned. Egerton, who was in great haste, did not at first communicate to him the name of the intended bride; but he said enough of the imprudence of the marriage, and his reasons for secrecy, to bring on himself the strongest remonstrances; for Levy had always reckoned on Egerton's making a wealthy marriage,--leaving to Egerton the wife, and hoping to appropriate to himself the wealth, all in the natural course of business. Egerton did not listen to him, but hurried him on towards the place at which the ceremony was to be performed; and Levy actually saw the bride before he had learned her name. The usurer masked his raging emotions, and fulfilled his part in the rites. His smile, when he congratulated the bride, might have shot cold into her heart; but her eyes were cast on the earth, seeing there but a shadow from heaven, and her heart was blindly sheltering itself in the bosom to which it was given evermore. She did not perceive the smile of hate that barbed the words of joy. Nora never thought it necessary later to tell Egerton that Levy had been a refused suitor. Indeed, with the exquisite tact of love, she saw that such a confidence, the idea of such a rival, would have wounded the pride of her high-bred, well-born husband.

And now, while Harley L'Estrange, frantic with the news that Nora had left Lady Jane's roof, and purposely misled into wrong directions, was seeking to trace her refuge in vain, now Egerton, in an assumed name, in a remote quarter, far from the clubs, in which his word was oracular, far from the pursuits, whether of pastime or toil, that had hitherto engrossed his active mind, gave himself up, with wonder at his own surrender, to the only vision of fairyland that ever weighs down the

watchful eyelids of hard ambition. The world for a while shut out, he missed it not. He knew not of it. He looked into two loving eyes that haunted him ever after, through a stern and arid existence, and said murmuringly, "Why, this, then, is real happiness!" Often, often, in the solitude of other years, to repeat to himself the same words, save that for is, he then murmured was! And Nora, with her grand, full heart, all her luxuriant wealth of fancy and of thought, child of light and of song, did she then never discover that there was something comparatively narrow and sterile in the nature to which she had linked her fate? Not there could ever be sympathy in feelings, brilliant and shifting as the tints of the rainbow. When Audley pressed her heart to his own, could he comprehend one finer throb of its beating? Was all the iron of his mind worth one grain of the gold she had cast away in Harley's love?

Did Nora already discover this? Surely no. Genius feels no want, no repining, while the heart is contented. Genius in her paused and slumbered: it had been as the ministrant of solitude: it was needed no more. If a woman loves deeply some one below her own grade in the mental and spiritual orders, how often we see that she unconsciously quits her own rank, comes meekly down to the level of the beloved, is afraid lest he should deem her the superior,—she who would not even be the equal. Nora knew no more that she had genius; she only knew that she had love.

And so here, the journal which Leonard was reading changed its tone, sinking into that quiet happiness which is but quiet because it is so deep. This interlude in the life of a man like Audley Egerton could never have been long; many circumstances conspired to abridge it. His affairs were in great disorder; they were all under Levy's management. Demands that had before slumbered, or been mildly urged, grew menacing and clamorous. Harley, too, returned to London from his futile researches, and looked out for Audley. Audley was forced to leave his secret Eden, and reappear in the common world; and thenceforward it was only by stealth that he came to his bridal home,—a visitor, no more the inmate. But more loud and fierce grew the demands of his creditors, now when Egerton had most need of all which respectability and position and belief of pecuniary independence can do to raise the man who has encumbered his arms, and crippled his steps towards fortune. He was threatened with writs, with prison. Levy said "that to borrow more would be but larger ruin," shrugged his shoulders, and even recommended a voluntary retreat to the King's Bench. "No place so good for frightening one's creditors into compounding their claims; but why," added Levy, with covert sneer, "why not go to young L'Estrange, a boy made to be borrowed from!"

Levy, who had known from Lady Jane of Harley's pursuit of Nora, had learned already how to avenge himself on Egerton. Audley could not apply to the friend he had betrayed. And as to other friends, no man in town had a greater number. And no man in town knew better that he should lose them all if he were once known to be in want of their money. Mortified, harassed, tortured, shunning Harley, yet ever sought by him, fearful of each knock at his door, Audley Egerton escaped to the mortgaged remnant of his paternal estate, on which there was a gloomy manor-house, long uninhabited, and there applied a mind, afterwards renowned for its quick comprehension of business, to the investigation of his affairs, with a view to save some wreck from the flood that swelled momentarily around him.

And now--to condense as much as possible a record that runs darkly on into pain and sorrow--now Levy began to practise his vindictive arts; and the arts gradually prevailed. On pretence of assisting Egerton in the arrangement of his affairs, which he secretly contrived, however, still more to complicate, he came down frequently to Egerton Hall for a few hours, arriving by the mail, and watching the effect which Nora's almost daily letters produced on the bridegroom, irritated by the practical cares of life. He was thus constantly at hand to instil into the mind of the ambitious man a regret for the imprudence of hasty passion, or to embitter the remorse which Audley felt for his treachery to L'Estrange. Thus ever bringing before the mind of the harassed debtor images at war with love, and with the poetry of life, he disattuned it (so to speak) for the reception of Nora's letters, all musical as they were with such thoughts as the most delicate fancy inspires to the most earnest love. Egerton was one of those men who never confide their affairs frankly to women. Nora, when she thus wrote, was wholly in the dark as to the extent of his stern prosaic distress. And so--and so--Levy always near--type of the prose of life in its most cynic form--so by degrees all that redundant affluence of affection, with its gushes of grief for his absence, prayers for his return, sweet reproach if a post failed to bring back an answer to the woman's yearning sighs,--all this grew, to the sensible, positive man of real life, like sickly romantic exaggeration. The bright arrows shot too high into heaven to hit the mark set so near to the earth. Ah, common fate of all superior natures! What treasure, and how wildly wasted! "By-the-by," said Levy, one morning, as he was about to take leave of Audley and return to town,--"by-the-by, I shall be this evening in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Egerton."

EGERTON.--"Say Mrs. Bertram!"

LEVY.--"Ay; will she not be in want of some pecuniary supplies?"

EGERTON. "My wife!--Not yet. I must first be wholly ruined before she can want; and if I were so, do you think I should not be by her side?"

LEVY.--"I beg pardon, my dear fellow; your pride of gentleman is so susceptible that it is hard for a lawyer not to wound it unawares. Your wife, then, does not know the exact state of your affairs?"

EGERTON.--"Of course not. Who would confide to a woman things in which she could do nothing, except to tease one the more?"

LEVY.--"True, and a poetess too! I have prevented your finishing your answer to Mrs. Bertram's last letter. Can I take it--it may save a day's delay--that is, if you do not object to my calling on her this evening."

EGERTON (sitting down to his unfinished letter).--"Object! no."

LEVY (looking at his watch).--"Be quick, or I shall lose the coach."

EGERTON (sealing the letter).--"There. And I should be obliged to you if you would call; and without alarming her as to my circumstances, you can just say that you know I am much harassed about important affairs at present, and so soothe the effects of my very short answers--"

LEVY.--"To those doubly-crossed, very long letters,--I will."

"Poor Nora," said Egerton, sighing, "she will think this answer brief and churlish enough. Explain my excuses kindly, so that they will serve for the future. I really have no time and no heart for sentiment. The little I ever had is well-nigh worried out of me. Still I love her fondly and deeply."

LEVY.--"You must have done so. I never thought it in you to sacrifice the world to a woman."

EGERTON.--"Nor I either; but," added the strong man, conscious of that power which rules the world infinitely more than knowledge, conscious of tranquil courage, "but I have not sacrificed the world yet. This right arm shall bear up her and myself too."

LEVY.--"Well said! but in the mean while, for heaven's sake, don't attempt to go to London, nor to leave this place; for, in that case, I know you will be arrested, and then adieu to all hopes of parliament, --of a career."

Audley's haughty countenance darkened; as the dog, in his bravest mode, turns dismayed from the stone plucked from the mire, so, when Ambition rears itself to defy mankind, whisper "disgrace and a jail,"--and, lo, crestfallen, it slinks away! That evening Levy called on Nora, and ingratiating himself into her favour by praise of Egerton, with indirect humble apologetic allusions to his own former presumption, he prepared the way to renewed visits; she was so lonely, and she so loved to see one who was fresh from seeing Audley, one who would talk to her of him! By degrees the friendly respectful visitor thus stole into her confidence; and then, with all his panegyrics on Audley's superior powers and gifts, he began to dwell upon the young husband's worldly aspirations, and care for his career; dwell on them so as vaguely to alarm Nora,--to imply that, dear as she was, she was still but second to Ambition. His way thus prepared, he next began to insinuate his respectful pity at her equivocal position, dropped hints of gossip and slander, feared that the marriage might be owned too late to preserve reputation. And then what would be the feelings of the proud Egerton if his wife were excluded from that world whose opinion he so prized? Insensibly thus he led her on to express (though timidly) her own fear, her own natural desire, in her letters to Audley. When could the marriage be proclaimed? Proclaimed! Audley felt that to proclaim such a marriage at such a moment would be to fling away his last cast for fame and fortune. And Harley, too,--Harley still so uncured of his frantic love! Levy was sure to be at hand when letters like these arrived.

And now Levy went further still in his determination to alienate these two hearts. He contrived, by means of his various agents, to circulate through Nora's neighbourhood the very slanders at which he had hinted. He contrived that she should be insulted when she went abroad, outraged at home by the sneers of her own servant, and tremble with shame at her own shadow upon her abandoned bridal hearth.

Just in the midst of this intolerable anguish, Levy reappeared. His crowning hour was ripe. He intimated his knowledge of the humiliations Nora had undergone, expressed his deep compassion, offered to intercede with Egerton "to do her justice." He used ambiguous phrases, that shocked her ear and tortured her heart, and thus provoked her on to demand him to explain; and then, throwing her into a wild state of indefinite alarm, in which he obtained her solemn promise not to divulge to Audley what he was about to communicate, he said, with villanous hypocrisy of reluctant shame, "that her marriage was not strictly legal; that the forms required by the law had not been complied with, that Audley, unintentionally or purposely, had left himself free to disown the rite and desert the bride." While Nora stood stunned and speechless at a

falsehood which, with lawyer-like show, he contrived to make truth-like to her inexperience, he hurried rapidly on, to re-awake on her mind the impression of Audley's pride, ambition, and respect for worldly position. "These are your obstacles," said he; "but I think I may induce him to repair the wrong, and right you at last." Righted at last--oh, infamy!

Then Nora's anger burst forth. She believe such a stain on Audley's honour!

"But where was the honour when he betrayed his friend? Did you not know that he was entrusted by Lord L'Estrange to plead for him. How did he fulfil the trust?"

"Plead for L'Estrange!" Nora had not been exactly aware of this,--in the sudden love preceding those sudden nuptials, so little touching Harley (beyond Audley's first timid allusions to his suit, and her calm and cold reply) had been spoken by either.

Levy resumed. He dwelt fully on the trust and the breach of it, and then said: "In Egerton's world, man holds it far more dishonour to betray a man than to dupe a woman; and if Egerton could do the one, why doubt that he would do the other? But do not look at me with those indignant eyes. Put himself to the test; write to him to say that the suspicions amidst which you live have become intolerable, that they infect even yourself, despite your reason, that the secrecy of your nuptials, his prolonged absence, his brief refusal, on unsatisfactory grounds, to proclaim your tie, all distract you with a terrible doubt. Ask him, at least (if he will not yet declare your marriage), to satisfy you that the rites were legal."

"I will go to him," cried Nora, impetuously.

"Go to him!--in his own house! What a scene, what a scandal! Could he ever forgive you?"

"At least, then, I will implore him to come here. I can not write such horrible words; I cannot! I cannot! Go, go!" Levy left her, and hastened to two or three of Audley's most pressing creditors,--men, in fact, who went entirely by Levy's own advice. He bade them instantly surround Audley's country residence with bailiffs. Before Egerton could reach Nora, he would thus be lodged in a jail. These preparations made, Levy himself went down to Audley, and arrived, as usual, an hour or two before the delivery of the post.

And Nora's letter came; and never was Audley's grave brow more dark than when he read it. Still, with his usual decision, he resolved to obey her wish,--rang the bell, and ordered his servant to put up a change of dress, and send for post-horses.

Levy then took him aside, and led him to the window. "Look under yon trees. Do you see those men? They are bailiffs. This is the true reason why I come to you to-day. You cannot leave this house."

Egerton recoiled. "And this frantic, foolish letter at such a time!" he muttered, striking the open page, full of love in the midst of terror, with his clenched hand. O Woman, Woman! if thy heart be deep, and its chords tender, beware how thou lovest the man with whom all that plucks him from the hard cares of the workday world is frenzy or a folly! He will break thy heart, he will shatter its chords, he will trample out from its delicate framework every sound that now makes musical the common air, and swells into unison with the harps of angels.

"She has before written to me," continued Audley, pacing the room with angry, disordered strides, "asking me when our marriage can be proclaimed, and I thought my replies would have satisfied any reasonable woman. But now, now this is worse, immeasurably worse,--she actually doubts my honour! I, who have made such sacrifices,--actually doubts whether I, Audley Egerton, an English gentleman, could have been base enough to--"

"What?" interrupted Levy, "to deceive your friend L'Estrange? Did not she know that?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Egerton, turning white.

"Don't be angry,--all's fair in love as in war; and L'Estrange will live yet to thank you for saving him from such a misalliance. But you are seriously angry: pray, forgive me."

With some difficulty and much fawning, the usurer appeased the storm he had raised in Audley's conscience. And he then heard, as if with surprise, the true purport of Nora's letter.

"It is beneath me to answer, much less to satisfy, such a doubt," said Audley. "I could have seen her, and a look of reproach would have sufficed; but to put my hand to paper, and condescend to write, 'I am not a villain, and I will give you the proofs that I am not'--never!"

"You are quite right; but let us see if we cannot reconcile matters between your pride and her feelings. Write simply this: 'All that you ask me to say or to explain, I have instructed Levy, as my solicitor, to say and explain for me; and you may believe him as you would myself.'"

"Well, the poor fool, she deserves to be punished; and I suppose that answer will punish her more than a lengthier rebuke.--My mind is so distracted, I cannot judge of these trumpery woman-fears and whims; there, I have written as you suggest. Give her all the proof she needs, and tell her that in six months at furthest, come what will, she shall bear the name of Egerton, as henceforth she must share his fate."

"Why say six months?"

"Parliament must be dissolved, and there must be a general election before then. I shall either obtain a seat, be secure from a jail, have won field for my energies, or--"

"Or what?"

"I shall renounce ambition altogether, ask my brother to assist me towards whatever debts remain when all my property is fairly sold--they cannot be much. He has a living in his gift; the incumbent is old, and, I hear, very ill. I can take orders."

"Sink into a country parson!"

"And learn content. I have tasted it already. She was then by my side. Explain all to her. This letter, I fear, is too unkind--But to doubt me thus!"

Levy hastily placed the letter in his pocketbook; and, for fear it should be withdrawn, took his leave.

And of that letter he made such use, that the day after he had given it to Nora, she had left the house, the neighbourhood; fled, and not a trace! Of all the agonies in life, that which is most poignant and harrowing, that which for the time most annihilates reason, and leaves our whole organization one lacerated, mangled heart, is the conviction that we have been deceived where we placed all the trust of love. The moment the anchor snaps, the storm comes on, the stars vanish behind the cloud.

When Levy returned, filled with the infamous hope which had stimulated

his revenge,—the hope that if he could succeed in changing into scorn and indignation Nora's love for Audley, he might succeed also in replacing that broken and degraded idol,—his amaze and dismay were great on hearing of her departure. For several days he sought her traces in vain. He went to Lady Jane Horton's,—Nora had not been there. He trembled to go back to Egerton. Surely Nora would have written to her husband, and in spite of her promise, revealed his own falsehood; but as days passed, and not a clew was found, he had no option but to repair to Egerton Hall, taking care that the bailiffs still surrounded it. Audley had received no line from Nora. The young husband was surprised, perplexed, uneasy, but had no suspicion of the truth.

At length Levy was forced to break to Audley the intelligence of Nora's flight. He gave his own colour to it. Doubtless she had gone to seek her own relations, and, by their advice, take steps to make her marriage publicly known. This idea changed Audley's first shock into deep and stern resentment. His mind so little comprehended Nora's, and was ever so disposed to what is called the common-sense view of things, that he saw no other mode to account for her flight and her silence. Odious to Egerton as such a proceeding would be, he was far too proud to take any steps to guard against it. "Let her do her worst," said he, coldly, masking emotion with his usual self-command; "it will be but a nine days' wonder to the world, a fiercer rush of my creditors on their hunted prey"

"And a challenge from Lord L'Estrange."

"So be it," answered Egerton, suddenly placing his hand at his heart.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"A strange sensation here. My father died of a complaint of the heart, and I myself was once told to guard, through life, against excess of emotion. I smiled at such a warning then. Let us sit down to business."

But when Levy had gone, and solitude reclosed round that Man of the Iron Mask, there grew upon him more and more the sense of a mighty loss. Nora's sweet loving face started from the shadows of the forlorn walls. Her docile, yielding temper, her generous, self-immolating spirit, came back to his memory, to refute the idea that wronged her. His love, that had been suspended for awhile by busy cares, but which, if without much refining sentiment, was still the master passion of his soul, flowed back into all his thoughts,—circumfused the very atmosphere with a fearful, softening charm. He escaped under cover of the night from the watch of

the bailiffs. He arrived in London. He himself sought everywhere he could think of for his missing bride. Lady Jane Horton was confined to her bed, dying fast, incapable even to receive and reply to his letter. He secretly sent down to Lansmere to ascertain if Nora had gone to her parents. She was not there. The Avenels believed her still with Lady Jane Horton.

He now grew most seriously alarmed; and in the midst of that alarm, Levy secretly contrived that he should be arrested for debt; but he was not detained in confinement many days. Before the disgrace got wind, the writs were discharged, Levy baffled. He was free. Lord L'Estrange had learned from Audley's servant what Audley would have concealed from him out of all the world. And the generous boy, who, besides the munificent allowance he received from the earl, was heir to an independent and considerable fortune of his own, when he should attain his majority, hastened to borrow the money and discharge all the obligations of his friend. The benefit was conferred before Audley knew of it, or could prevent. Then a new emotion, and perhaps scarce less stinging than the loss of Nora, tortured the man who had smiled at the warning of science; and the strange sensation at the heart was felt again and again.

And Harley, too, was still in search of Nora,--would talk of nothing but her, and looked so haggard and grief-worn. The bloom of the boy's youth was gone. Could Audley then have said, "She you seek is another's; your love is razed out of your life; and, for consolation, learn that your friend has betrayed you"? Could Audley say this? He did not dare. Which of the two suffered the most?

And these two friends, of characters so different, were so singularly attached to each other,--inseparable at school, thrown together in the world, with a wealth of frank confidences between them, accumulated since childhood. And now, in the midst of all his own anxious sorrow, Harley still thought and planned for Egerton. And self-accusing remorse, and all the sense of painful gratitude, deepened Audley's affection for Harley into a devotion as to a superior, while softening it into a reverential pity that yearned to relieve, to atone; but how,--oh, how?

A general election was now at hand, still no news of Nora. Levy kept aloof from Audley, pursuing his own silent search. A seat for the borough of Lansmere was pressed upon Audley, not only by Harley, but his parents, especially by the countess, who tacitly ascribed to Audley's wise counsels Nora's mysterious disappearance.

Egerton at first resisted the thought of a new obligation to his injured

friend; but he burned to have it, some day, in his power to repay at least his pecuniary debt: the sense of that debt humbled him more than all else. Parliamentary success might at last obtain for him some lucrative situation abroad, and thus enable him gradually to remove this load from his heart and his honour. No other chance of repayment appeared open to him. He accepted the offer, and went down to Lansmere. His brother, lately married, was asked to meet him; and there also was Miss Leslie the heiress, whom Lady Lansmere secretly hoped her son Harley would admire, but who had long since, no less secretly, given her heart to the unconscious Egerton.

Meanwhile, the miserable Nora--deceived by the arts and representations of Levy, acting on the natural impulse of a heart so susceptible to shame, flying from a home which she deemed dishonoured, flying from a lover whose power over her she knew to be so great that she dreaded lest he might reconcile her to dishonour itself--had no thought save to hide herself forever from Audley's eye. She would not go to her relations, to Lady Jane; that were to give the clew, and invite the pursuit. An Italian lady of high rank had visited at Lady Jane's,--taken a great fancy to Nora; and the lady's husband, having been obliged to precede her return to Italy, had suggested the notion of engaging some companion; the lady had spoken of this to Nora and to Lady Jane Horton, who had urged Nora to accept the offer, elude Harley's pursuit, and go abroad for a time. Nora then had refused; for she then had seen Audley Egerton.

To this Italian lady she now went, and the offer was renewed with the most winning kindness, and grasped at in the passion of despair. But the Italian had accepted invitations to English country-houses before she finally departed for the Continent. Meanwhile Nora took refuge in a quiet lodging in a sequestered suburb, which an English servant in the employment of the fair foreigner recommended. Thus had she first come to the cottage in which Burley died. Shortly afterwards she left England with her new companion, unknown to all,--to Lady Jane as to her parents.

All this time the poor girl was under a moral delirium, a confused fever, haunted by dreams from which she sought to fly. Sound physiologists agree that madness is rarest amongst persons of the finest imagination. But those persons are, of all others, liable to a temporary state of mind in which judgment sleeps,--imagination alone prevails with a dire and awful tyranny. A single idea gains ascendancy, expels all others, presents itself everywhere with an intolerable blinding glare. Nora was at that time under the dread one idea, to fly from shame!

But when the seas rolled, and the dreary leagues interposed between her

and her lover; when new images presented themselves; when the fever slaked, and reason returned,—doubt broke upon the previous despair. Had she not been too credulous, too hasty? Fool, fool! Audley have been so poor a traitor! How guilty was she, if she had wronged him! And in the midst of this revulsion of feeling, there stirred within her another life. She was destined to become a mother. At that thought her high nature bowed; the last struggle of pride gave way; she would return to England, see Audley, learn from his lips the truth, and even if the truth were what she had been taught to believe, plead not for herself, but for the false one's child.

Some delay occurred in the then warlike state of affairs on the Continent before she could put this purpose into execution; and on her journey back, various obstructions lengthened the way. But she returned at last, and resought the suburban cottage in which she had last lodged before quitting England. At night, she went to Audley's London house; there was only a woman in charge of it. Mr. Egerton was absent, electioneering somewhere; Mr. Levy, his lawyer, called every day for any letters to be forwarded to him. Nora shrank from seeing Levy, shrank from writing even a letter that would pass through his hands. If she had been deceived, it had been by him, and wilfully. But parliament was already dissolved; the election would soon be over. Mr. Egerton was expected to return to town within a week. Nora went back to Mrs. Goodyer's and resolved to wait, devouring her own heart in silence. But the newspapers might inform her where Audley really was; the newspapers were sent for and connd daily.

And one morning this paragraph met her eye:--

The Earl and Countess of Lansmere are receiving a distinguished party at their country seat. Among the guests is Miss Leslie, whose wealth and beauty have excited such sensation in the fashionable world. To the disappointment of numerous aspirants amongst our aristocracy, we hear that this lady has, however, made her distinguished choice in Mr. Audley Egerton. That gentleman is now a candidate for the borough of Lansmere, as a supporter of the Government; his success is considered certain, and, according to the report of a large circle of friends, few new members will prove so valuable an addition to the ministerial ranks. A great career may indeed be predicted for a young man so esteemed for talent and character, aided by a fortune so immense as that which he will shortly receive with the hand of the accomplished heiress.

Again the anchor snapped, again the storm descended, again the stars vanished. Nora was now once more under the dominion of a single thought,

as she had been when she fled from her bridal home. Then, it was to escape from her lover,--now, it was to see him. As the victim stretched on the rack implores to be led at once to death, so there are moments when the annihilation of hope seems more merciful than the torment of suspense.

CHAPTER XVII.

When the scenes in some long diorama pass solemnly before us, there is sometimes one solitary object, contrasting, perhaps, the view of stately cities or the march of a mighty river, that halts on the eye for a moment, and then glides away, leaving on the mind a strange, comfortless, undefined impression.

Why was the object presented to us? In itself it seemed comparatively insignificant. It may have been but a broken column, a lonely pool with a star-beam on its quiet surface,--yet it awes us. We remember it when phantasmal pictures of bright Damascus, or of colossal pyramids, of bazaars in Stamboul, or lengthened caravans that defile slow amidst the sands of Araby, have sated the wondering gaze. Why were we detained in the shadowy procession by a thing that would have been so commonplace had it not been so lone? Some latent interest must attach to it. Was it there that a vision of woe had lifted the wild hair of a Prophet; there where some Hagar had stilled the wail of her child on her indignant breast? We would fain call back the pageantry procession, fain see again the solitary thing that seemed so little worth the hand of the artist, and ask, "Why art thou here, and wherefore dost thou haunt us?"

Rise up,--rise up once more, by the broad great thoroughfare that stretches onward and onward to the remorseless London! Rise up, rise up, O solitary tree with the green leaves on thy bough, and the deep rents in thy heart; and the ravens, dark birds of omen and sorrow, that build their nest amidst the leaves of the bough, and drop with noiseless plumes down through the hollow rents of the heart, or are heard, it may be in the growing shadows of twilight, calling out to their young.

Under the old pollard-tree, by the side of John Avenel's house, there cowered, breathless and listening, John Avenel's daughter Nora. Now, when that fatal newspaper paragraph, which lied so like truth, met her eyes, she obeyed the first impulse of her passionate heart,--she tore the wedding ring from her finger, she enclosed it, with the paragraph itself,

in a letter to Audley,--a letter that she designed to convey scorn and pride--alas! it expressed only jealousy and love. She could not rest till she had put this letter into the post with her own hand, addressed to, Audley at Lord Lansmere's. Scarce had it left her ere she repented. What had she done,--resigned the birth-right of the child she was so soon to bring into the world, resigned her last hope in her lover's honour, given up her life of life--and from belief in what?--a report in a newspaper! No, no; she would go herself to Lansmere; to her father's home,--she could contrive to see Audley before that letter reached his hand. The thought was scarcely conceived before obeyed. She found a vacant place in a coach that started from London some hours before the mail, and went within a few miles of Lansmere; those last miles she travelled on foot. Exhausted, fainting, she gained at last the sight of home, and there halted, for in the little garden in front she saw her parents seated. She heard the murmur of their voices, and suddenly she remembered her altered shape, her terrible secret. How answer the question,

"Daughter, where and who is thy husband?" Her heart failed her; she crept under the old pollard-tree, to gather up resolve, to watch, and to listen. She saw the rigid face of the thrifty, prudent mother, with the deep lines that told of the cares of an anxious life, and the chafe of excitable temper and warm affections against the restraint of decorous sanctimony and resolute pride. The dear stern face never seemed to her more dear and more stern. She saw the comely, easy, indolent, good-humoured father; not then the poor, paralytic sufferer, who could yet recognize Nora's eyes under the lids of Leonard, but stalwart and jovial,--first bat in the Cricket Club, first voice in the Glee Society, the most popular canvasser of the Lansmere Constitutional True Blue Party, and the pride and idol of the Calvinistical prim wife; never from those pinched lips of hers had come forth even one pious rebuke to the careless, social man. As he sat, one hand in his vest, his profile turned to the road, the light smoke curling playfully up from the pipe, over which lips, accustomed to bland smile and hearty laughter, closed as if reluctant to be closed at all, he was the very model of the respectable retired trader in easy circumstances, and released from the toil of making money while life could yet enjoy the delight of spending it.

"Well, old woman," said John Avenel, "I must be off presently to see to those three shaky voters in Fish Lane; they will have done their work soon, and I shall catch 'em at home. They do say as how we may have an opposition; and I know that old Smikes has gone to Lonnon in search of a candidate. We can't have the Lansmere Constitutional Blues beat by a

Lonnoner! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you will be home before Jane and her husband Mark come? How ever she could marry a common carpenter!"

"Yes," said John, "he is a carpenter; but he has a vote, and that strengthens the family interest. If Dick was not gone to Amerikay, there would be three on us. But Mark is a real good Blue! A Lonnoner, indeed! a Yellow from Lonnon beat my Lord and the Blues! Ha, ha!"

"But, John, this Mr. Egerton is a Lonnoner!"

"You don't understand things, talking such nonsense. Mr. Egerton is the Blue candidate, and the Blues are the Country Party; therefore how can he be a Lonnoner? An uncommon clever, well-grown, handsome young man, eh! and my young Lord's particular friend."

Mrs. Avenel sighed.

"What are you sighing and shaking your head for?"

"I was thinking of our poor, dear, dear Nora!"

"God bless her!" cried John, heartily.

There was a rustle under the boughs of the old hollow-hearted pollard-tree.

"Ha, ha! Hark! I said that so loud that I have startled the ravens!"

"How he did love her!" said Mrs. Avenel, thoughtfully. "I am sure he did; and no wonder, for she looks every inch a lady; and why should not she be my lady, after all?"

"He? Who? Oh, that foolish fancy of yours about my young Lord? A prudent woman like you!--stuff! I am glad my little beauty is gone to Lonnon, out of harm's way."

"John, John, John! No harm could ever come to my Nora. She 's too pure and too good, and has too proper a pride in her, to--"

"To listen to any young lords, I hope," said John; "though," he added, after a pause, "she might well be a lady too. My Lord, the young one, took me by the hand so kindly the other day, and said, 'Have not you

heard from her--I mean Miss Avenel--lately?' and those bright eyes of his were as full of tears as--as--as yours are now."

"Well, John, well; go on."

"That is all. My Lady came up, and took me away to talk about the election; and just as I was going, she whispered, 'Don't let my wild boy talk to you about that sweet girl of yours. We must both see that she does not come to disgrace.' 'Disgrace!' that word made me very angry for the moment. But my Lady has such a way with her that she soon put me right again. Yet, I do think Nora must have loved my young Lord, only she was too good to show it. What do you say?" And the father's voice was thoughtful.

"I hope she'll never love any man till she's married to him; it is not proper, John," said Mrs. Avenel, somewhat starchly, though very mildly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed John, chucking his prim wife under the chin, "you did not say that to me when I stole your first kiss under that very pollard-tree--no house near it then!"

"Hush, John, hush!" and the prim wife blushed like a girl.

"Pooh," continued John, merrily, "I don't see why we plain folk should pretend to be more saintly and prudish-like than our betters. There's that handsome Miss Leslie, who is to marry Mr. Egerton--easy enough to see how much she is in love with him,--could not keep her eyes off from him even in church, old girl! Ha, ha! What the deuce is the matter with the ravens?"

"They'll be a comely couple, John. And I hear tell she has a power of money. When is the marriage to be?"

"Oh, they say as soon as the election is over. A fine wedding we shall have of it! I dare say my young Lord will be bridesman. We'll send for our little Nora to see the gay doings!"

Out from the boughs of the old tree came the shriek of a lost spirit,--one of those strange, appalling sounds of human agony which, once heard, are never forgotten. It is as the wail of Hope, when SHE, too, rushes forth from the Coffin of Woes, and vanishes into viewless space; it is the dread cry of Reason parting from clay, and of Soul, that would wrench itself from life! For a moment all was still--and then a dull, dumb, heavy fall!

The parents gazed on each other, speechless: they stole close to the pales, and looked over. Under the boughs, at the gnarled roots of the oak, they saw--gray and indistinct--a prostrate form. John opened the gate, and went round; the mother crept to the road-side, and there stood still.

"Oh, wife, wife!" cried John Avenel, from under the green boughs, "it is our child Nora! Our child! our child!"

And, as he spoke, out from the green boughs started the dark ravens, wheeling round and round, and calling to their young!

And when they had laid her on the bed, Mrs. Avenel whispered John to withdraw for a moment; and with set lips but trembling hands began to unlace the dress, under the pressure of which Nora's heart heaved convulsively. And John went out of the room bewildered, and sat himself down on the landing-place, and wondered whether he was awake or sleeping; and a cold numbness crept over one side of him, and his head felt very heavy, with a loud, booming noise in his ears. Suddenly his wife stood by his side, and said, in a very low voice,

"John, run for Mr. Morgan,--make haste. But mind--don't speak to any one on the way. Quick, quick!"

"Is she dying?"

"I don't know. Why not die before?" said Mrs. Avenel, between her teeth; "but Mr. Morgan is a discreet, friendly man."

"A true Blue!" muttered poor John, as if his mind wandered; and rising with difficulty, he stared at his wife a moment, shook his head, and was gone.

An hour or two later, a little, covered, taxed cart stopped at Mr. Avenel's cottage, out of which stepped a young man with pale face and spare form, dressed in the Sunday suit of a rustic craftsman; then a homely, but pleasant, honest face bent down to him, smilingly; and two arms emerging from under covert of a red cloak extended an infant, which the young man took tenderly. The baby was cross and very sickly; it began to cry. The father hushed, and rocked, and tossed it, with the air of one to whom such a charge was familiar.

"He'll be good when we get in, Mark," said the young woman, as she

extracted from the depths of the cart a large basket containing poultry and home-made bread.

"Don't forget the flowers that the squire's gardener gave us," said Mark the Poet.

Without aid from her husband, the wife took down basket and nosegay, settled her cloak, smoothed her gown, and said, "Very odd! they don't seem to expect us, Mark. How still the house is! Go and knock; they can't ha' gone to bed yet."

Mark knocked at the door--no answer. A light passed rapidly across the windows on the upper floor, but still no one came to his summons. Mark knocked again. A gentleman dressed in clerical costume, now coming from Lansinere Park, on the opposite side of the road, paused at the sound of Mark's second and more impatient knock, and said civilly,

"Are you not the young folks my friend John Avenel told me this morning he expected to visit him?"

"Yes, please, Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Fairfield, dropping her courtesy.

"You remember me! and this is my dear good man!"

"What! Mark the Poet?" said the curate of Lansmere, with a smile. "Come to write squibs for the election?"

"Squibs, sir!" cried Mark, indignantly.

"Burns wrote squibs," said the curate, mildly.

Mark made no answer, but again knocked at the door.

This time, a man, whose face, even seen by the starlight, was much flushed, presented himself at the threshold.

"Mr. Morgan!" exclaimed the curate, in benevolent alarm; no illness here, I hope?"

"Cott! it is you, Mr. Dale!--Come in, come in; I want a word with you. But who the teuce are these people?"

"Sir," said Mark, pushing through the doorway, "my name is Fairfield, and my wife is Mr. Avenel's daughter!"

"Oh, Jane--and her baby too!--Cood! cood! Come in; but be quiet, can't you? Still, still--still as death!"

The party entered, the door closed; the moon rose, and shone calmly on the pale silent house, on the sleeping flowers of the little garden, on the old pollard with its hollow core. The horse in the taxed cart dozed unheeded; the light still at times flitted across the upper windows.

These were the only signs of life, except when a bat, now and then attracted by the light that passed across the windows, brushed against the panes, and then, dipping downwards, struck up against the nose of the slumbering horse, and darted merrily after the moth that fluttered round the raven's nest in the old pollard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

All that day Harley L'Estrange had been more than usually mournful and dejected. Indeed, the return to scenes associated with Nora's presence increased the gloom that had settled on his mind since he had lost sight and trace of her. Audley, in the remorseful tenderness he felt for his injured friend, had induced L'Estrange towards evening to leave the Park, and go into a district some miles off, on pretence that he required Harley's aid there to canvass certain important outvoters: the change of scene might rouse him from his reveries. Harley himself was glad to escape from the guests at Lansmere. He readily consented to go. He would not return that night. The outvoters lay remote and scattered, he might be absent for a day or two. When Harley was gone, Egerton himself sank into deep thought. There was rumour of some unexpected opposition. His partisans were alarmed and anxious. It was clear that the Lansmere interest, if attacked, was weaker than the earl would believe; Egerton might lose his election. If so, what would become of him? How support his wife, whose return to him he always counted on, and whom it would then become him at all hazards to acknowledge? It was that day that he had spoken to William Hazeldean as to the family living.--"Peace, at least," thought the ambitious man,--"I shall have peace!" And the squire had promised him the rectory if needed; not without a secret pang, for his Harry was already using her conjugal influence in favour of her old school-friend's husband, Mr. Dale; and the squire thought Audley would be but a poor country parson, and Dale--if he would only grow a little plumper than his curacy would permit him to be--would be a parson in ten thousand. But while Audley thus prepared for the worst, he still brought his energies to bear on the more brilliant option; and sat with his

Committee, looking into canvass-books, and discussing the characters, politics, and local interests of every elector, until the night was well-nigh gone. When he gained his room; the shutters were unclosed, and he stood a few moments at the window, gazing on the moon. At that sight, the thought of Nora, lost and afar, stole over him. The man, as we know, had in his nature little of romance and sentiment. Seldom was it his wont to gaze upon moon or stars. But whenever some whisper of romance did soften his hard, strong mind, or whenever moon or stars did charm his gaze from earth, Nora's bright Muse-like face, Nora's sweet loving eyes, were seen in moon and star-beam, Nora's low tender voice heard in the whisper of that which we call romance, and which is but the sound of the mysterious poetry that is ever in the air, would we but deign to hear it! He turned with a sigh, undressed, threw himself on his bed, and extinguished his light. But the light of the moon would fill the room. It kept him awake for a little time; he turned his face from the calm, heavenly beam resolutely towards the dull blind wall, and fell asleep. And, in the sleep, he was with Nora,--again in the humble bridal-home. Never in his dreams had she seemed to him so distinct and life-like,--her eyes upturned to his, her hands clasped together, and resting on his shoulder, as had been her graceful wont, her voice murmuring meekly, "Has it, then, been my fault that we parted? Forgive, forgive me!" And the sleeper imagined that he answered, "Never part from me again,--never, never!" and that he bent down to kiss the chaste lips that so tenderly sought his own. And suddenly he heard a knocking sound, as of a hammer,--regular, but soft, low, subdued. Did you ever, O reader, hear the sound of the hammer on the lid of a coffin in a house of woe,--when the undertaker's decorous hireling fears that the living may hear how he parts them from the dead? Such seemed the sound to Audley. The dream vanished abruptly.

He woke, and again heard the knock; it was at his door. He sat up wistfully; the moon was gone, it was morning. "Who is there?" he cried peevishly.

A low voice from without answered, "Hush, it is I; dress quick; let me see you."

Egerton recognized Lady Lansmere's voice. Alarmed and surprised, he rose, dressed in haste, and went to the door. Lady Lansmere was standing without, extremely pale. She put her finger to her lip, and beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed mechanically. They entered her dressing-room, a few doors from his own chamber, and the countess closed the door.

Then laying her slight firm hand on his shoulder, she said, in suppressed

and passionate excitement,

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, you must serve me, and at once. Harley! Harley! save my Harley! Go to him, prevent his coming back here, stay with him; give up the election,—it is but a year or two lost in your life, you will have other opportunities; make that sacrifice to your friend."

"Speak--what is the matter? I can make no sacrifice too great for Harley!"

"Thanks, I was sure of it. Go then, I say, at once to Harley; keep him away from Lansmere on any excuse you can invent, until you can break the sad news to him,—gently, gently. Oh, how will he bear it; how recover the shock? My boy, my boy!"

"Calm yourself! Explain! Break what news; recover what shock?"

"True; you do not know, you have not heard. Nora Avenel lies yonder, in her father's house,—dead, dead!"

Audley staggered back, clapping his hand to his heart, and then dropping on his knee as if bowed down by the stroke of heaven.

"My bride, my wife!" he muttered. "Dead—it cannot be!"

Lady Lansmere was so startled at this exclamation, so stunned by a confession wholly unexpected, that she remained unable to soothe, to explain, and utterly unprepared for the fierce agony that burst from the man she had ever seen so dignified and cold, when he sprang to his feet, and all the sense of his eternal loss rushed upon his heart.

At length he crushed back his emotions, and listened in apparent calm, and in a silence broken but by quick gasps for breath, to Lady Lansmere's account.

One of the guests in the house, a female relation of Lady Lansmere's, had been taken suddenly ill about an hour or two before; the house had been disturbed, the countess herself aroused, and Mr. Morgan summoned as the family medical practitioner. From him she had learned that Nora Avenel had returned to her father's house late on the previous evening, had been seized with brain fever, and died in a few hours.

Audley listened, and turned to the door, still in silence. Lady Lansmere caught him by the arm. "Where are you going? Ah, can I now ask you to

save my son from the awful news, you yourself the sufferer? And yet-- yet--you know his haste, his vehemence, if he learned that you were his rival, her husband; you whom he so trusted! What, what would be the result?--I tremble!"

"Tremble not,--I do not tremble! Let me go! I will be back soon, and then,"--(his lips writhed)--"then we will talk of Harley."

Egerton went forth, stunned and dizzy. Mechanically he took his way across the park to John Avenel's house. He had been forced to enter that house, formally, a day or two before, in the course of his canvass; and his worldly pride had received a shock when the home, the birth, and the manners of his bride's parents had been brought before him. He had even said to himself, "And is it the child of these persons that I, Audley Egerton, must announce to the world as wife?" Now, if she had been the child of a beggar-nay, of a felon--now if he could but recall her to life, how small and mean would all that dreaded world appear to him! Too late, too late! The dews were glistening in the sun, the birds were singing overhead, life wakening all around him--and his own heart felt like a charnel-house. Nothing but death and the dead there,--nothing! He arrived at the door: it was open: he called; no one answered: he walked up the narrow stairs, undisturbed, unseen; he came into the chamber of death. At the opposite side of the bed was seated John Avenel; but he seemed in a heavy sleep. In fact, paralysis had smitten him; but he knew it not; neither did any one. Who could heed the strong hearty man in such a moment? Not even the poor anxious wife! He had been left there to guard the house, and watch the dead,--an unconscious man; numbed, himself, by the invisible icy hand! Audley stole to the bedside; he lifted the coverlid thrown over the pale still face. What passed within him during the minute he stayed there who shall say? But when he left the room, and slowly descended the stairs, he left behind him love and youth, all the sweet hopes and joys of the household human life, for ever and ever!

He returned to Lady Lansmere, who awaited his coming with the most nervous anxiety.

"Now," said he, dryly, "I will go to Harley, and I will prevent his returning hither."

"You have seen the parents. Good heavens! do they know of your marriage?"

"No; to Harley I must own it first. Meanwhile, silence!"

"Silence!" echoed Lady Lansmere; and her burning hand rested in Audley's, and Audley's hand was as ice.

In another hour Egerton had left the house, and before noon he was with Harley.

It is necessary now to explain the absence of all the Avenel family, except the poor stricken father.

Nora had died in giving birth to a child,--died delirious. In her delirium she had spoken of shame, of disgrace; there was no holy nuptial ring on her finger. Through all her grief, the first thought of Mrs. Avenel was to save the good name of her lost daughter, the unblemished honour of all the living Avenels. No matron long descended from knights or kings had keener pride in name and character than the poor, punctilious Calvinistic trader's wife. "Sorrow later, honour now!" With hard dry eyes she mused and mused, and made out her plan. Jane Fairfield should take away the infant at once, before the day dawned, and nurse it with her own. Mark should go with her, for Mrs. Avenel dreaded the indiscretion of his wild grief. She would go with them herself part of the way, in order to command or reason them into guarded silence. But they could not go back to Hazeldean with another infant; Jane must go where none knew her; the two infants might pass as twins. And Mrs. Avenel, though naturally a humane, kindly woman, and with a mother's heart to infants, looked with almost a glad sternness at Jane's puny babe, and thought to herself, "All difficulty would be over should there be only one! Nora's child could thus pass throughout life for Jane's!"

Fortunately for the preservation of the secret, the Avenels kept no servant,--only an occasional drudge, who came a few hours in the day, and went home to sleep. Mrs. Avenel could count on Mr. Morgan's silence as to the true cause of Nora's death. And Mr. Dale, why should he reveal the dishonour of a family? That very day, or the next at furthest, she could induce her husband to absent himself, lest he should blab out the tale while his sorrow was greater than his pride. She alone would then stay in the house of death until she could feel assured that all else were hushed into prudence. Ay, she felt, that with due precautions, the name was still safe. And so she awed and hurried Mark and his wife away, and went with them in the covered cart, that hid the faces of all three, leaving for an hour or two the house and the dead to her husband's charge, with many an admonition, to which he nodded his head, and which he did not hear. Do you think this woman was unfeeling and inhuman? Had Nora looked from heaven into her mother's heart Nora would not have

thought so. A good name when the burial stone closes over dust is still a possession upon the earth; on earth it is indeed our only one! Better for our friends to guard for us that treasure than to sit down and weep over perishable clay. And weep!--Oh, stern mother, long years were left to thee for weeping! No tears shed for Nora made such deep furrows on the cheeks as thine did! Yet who ever saw them flow?

Harley was in great surprise to see Egerton; more surprised when Egerton told him that he found he was to be opposed,--that he had no chance of success at Lansmere, and had, therefore, resolved to retire from the contest. He wrote to the earl to that effect; but the countess knew the true cause, and hinted it to the earl; so that, as we saw at the commencement of this history, Egerton's cause did not suffer when Captain Dashmore appeared in the borough; and, thanks to Mr. Hazeldean's exertions and oratory, Audley came in by two votes,--the votes of John Avenel and Mark Fairfield. For though the former had been removed a little way from the town, and by medical advice, and though, on other matters, the disease that had smitten him left him docile as a child (and he had but vague indistinct ideas of all the circumstances connected with Nora's return, save the sense of her loss), yet he still would hear how the Blues went on, and would get out of bed to keep his word: and even his wife said,

"He is right; better die of it than break his promise!" The crowd gave way as the broken man they had seen a few days before so jovial and healthful was brought up in a chair to the poll, and said, with his tremulous quavering voice, "I 'm a true Blue,--Blue forever!"

Elections are wondrous things! No man who has not seen can guess how the zeal in them triumphs over sickness, sorrow, the ordinary private life of us!

There was forwarded to Audley, from Lansmere Park, Nora's last letter. The postman had left it there an hour or two after he himself had gone. The wedding-ring fell on the ground, and rolled under his feet. And those burning, passionate reproaches, all that anger of the wounded dove, explained to him the mystery of her return, her unjust suspicions, the cause of her sudden death, which he still ascribed to brain fever, brought on by excitement and fatigue. For Nora did not speak of the child about to be born; she had not remembered it when she wrote, or she would not have written. On the receipt of this letter, Egerton could not remain in the dull village district,--alone, too, with Harley. He said, abruptly, that he must go to London; prevailed on L'Estrange to accompany him; and there, when he heard from Lady Lansmere that the funeral was

over, he broke to Harley, with lips as white as the dead, and his hand pressed to his heart, on which his hereditary disease was fastening quick and fierce, the dread truth that Nora was no more. The effect upon the boy's health and spirits was even more crushing than Audley could anticipate. He only woke from grief to feel remorse. "For," said the noble Harley, "had it not been for my passion, my rash pursuit, would she ever have left her safe asylum,--ever even have left her native town? And then--and then--the struggle between her sense of duty and her love to me! I see it all--all! But for me she were living still!"

"Oh, no!" cried Egerton, his confession now rushing to his lips.

"Believe me, she never loved you as you think. Nay, nay, hear me! Rather suppose that she loved another, fled with him, was perhaps married to him, and--"

"Hold!" exclaimed Harley, with a terrible burst of passion,--"you kill her twice to me if you say that! I can still feel that she lives--lives here, in my heart--while I dream that she loved me--or, at least, that no other lip ever knew the kiss that was denied to mine! But if you tell me to doubt that--you--you--" The boy's anguish was too great for his frame; he fell suddenly back into Audley's arms; he had broken a blood-vessel. For several days he was in great danger; but his eyes were constantly fixed on Audley's, with wistful intense gaze. "Tell me," he muttered, at the risk of re-opening the ruptured veins, and of the instant loss of life,--"tell me, you did not mean that! Tell me you have no cause to think she loved another--was another's!"

"Hush, hush! no cause--none--none! I meant but to comfort you, as I thought,--fool that I was!--that is all!" cried the miserable friend. And from that hour Audley gave up the idea of righting himself in his own eyes, and submitted still to be the living lie,--he, the haughty gentleman!

Now, while Harley was still very weak and suffering, Mr. Dale came to London, and called on Egerton. The curate, in promising secrecy to Mrs. Avenel, had made one condition, that it should not be to the positive injury of Nora's living son. What if Nora were married after all? And would it not be right, at least, to learn the name of the child's father?

Some day he might need a father. Mrs. Avenel was obliged to content herself with these reservations. However, she implored Mr. Dale not to make inquiries. What could they do? If Nora were married, her husband would naturally, of his own accord, declare himself; if seduced and

forsaken, it would but disgrace her memory (now saved from stain) to discover the father to a child of whose very existence the world as yet knew nothing. These arguments perplexed the good curate. But Jane Fairfield had a sanguine belief in her sister's innocence; and all her suspicions naturally pointed to Lord L'Estrange. So, indeed, perhaps; did Mrs. Avenel's, though she never owned them. Of the correctness of these suspicions Mr. Dale was fully convinced; the young lord's admiration, Lady Lansmere's fears, had been too evident to one who had often visited at the Park; Harley's abrupt departure just before Nora's return home; Egerton's sudden resignation of the borough before even opposition was declared, in order to rejoin his friend, the very day of Nora's death,--all confirmed his ideas that Harley was the betrayer or the husband. Perhaps there might have been a secret marriage--possibly abroad--since Harley wanted some years of his majority. He would, at least, try to see and to sound Lord L'Estrange. Prevented this interview by Harley's illness, the curate resolved to ascertain how far he could penetrate into the mystery by a conversation with Egerton. There was much in the grave repute which the latter had acquired, and the singular and pre-eminent character for truth and honour with which it was accompanied, that made the curate resolve upon this step. Accordingly; he saw Egerton, meaning only diplomatically to extract from the new member for Lansmere what might benefit the family of the voters who had given him his majority of two.

He began by mentioning, as a touching fact, how poor John Avenel, bowed down by the loss of his child and the malady which had crippled his limbs and enfeebled his mind, had still risen from his bed to keep his word. And Audley's emotions seemed to him so earnest and genuine, to show so good a heart, that out by little and little came more: first, his suspicions that poor Nora had been betrayed; then his hopes that there might have been private marriage; and as Audley, with his iron self-command, showed just the proper degree of interest, and no more, he went on, till Audley knew that he had a child.

"Inquire no further!" said the man of the world. "Respect Mrs. Avenel's feelings and wishes, I entreat you; they are the right ones. Leave the rest to me. In my position--I mean as a resident of London--I can quietly and easily ascertain more than you could, and provoke no scandal! If I can right this--this--poor--[his voice trembled]--right the lost mother, or the living child, sooner or later you will hear from me; if not, bury this secret where it now rests, in a grave which slander has not reached. But the child--give me the address where it is to be found --in case I succeed in finding the father, and touching his heart."

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, may I not say where you may find that father--who he is?"

"Sir!"

"Do not be angry; and, after all, I cannot ask you to betray any confidence which a friend may have placed in you. I know what you men of high honour are to each other, even in sin. No, no, I beg pardon; I leave all in your hands. I shall hear from you then?"

"Or if not, why, then, believe that all search is hopeless. My friend! if you mean Lord L'Estrange, he is innocent. I--I--I--[the voice faltered]--am convinced of it."

The curate sighed, but made no answer. "Oh, ye men of the world!" thought he. He gave the address which the member for Lansmere had asked for, and went his way, and never heard again from Audley Egerton. He was convinced that the man who had showed such deep feeling had failed in his appeal to Harley's conscience, or had judged it best to leave Nora's name in peace, and her child to her own relations and the care of Heaven.

Harley L'Estrange, scarcely yet recovered, hastened to join our armies on the Continent, and seek the Death which, like its half-brother, rarely comes when we call it.

As soon as Harley was gone, Egerton went to the village to which Mr. Dale had directed him, to seek for Nora's child. But here he was led into a mistake which materially affected the tenor of his own life, and Leonard's future destinies. Mrs. Fairfield had been naturally ordered by her mother to take another name in the village to which she had gone with the two infants, so that her connection with the Avenel family might not be traced, to the provocation of inquiry and gossip. The grief and excitement through which she had gone dried the source of nutriment in her breast. She put Nora's child out to nurse at the house of a small farmer, at a little distance from the village, and moved from her first lodging to be nearer to the infant. Her own child was so sickly and ailing, that she could not bear to intrust it to the care of an other. She tried to bring it up by hand; and the poor child soon pined away and died. She and Mark could not endure the sight of their baby's grave; they hastened to return to Hazeldean, and took Leonard with them. From that time Leonard passed for the son they had lost.

When Egerton arrived at the village, and inquired for the person whose address had been given to him, he was referred to the cottage in which

she had last lodged, and was told that she had been gone some days,--the day after her child was buried. Her child buried! Egerton stayed to inquire no more; thus he heard nothing of the infant that had been put out to nurse. He walked slowly into the churchyard, and stood for some minutes gazing on the small new mound; then, pressing his hand on the heart to which all emotion had been forbidden, he re-entered his chaise and returned to London. The sole reason for acknowledging his marriage seemed to him now removed. Nora's name had escaped reproach. Even had his painful position with regard to Harley not constrained him to preserve his secret, there was every motive to the world's wise and haughty son not to acknowledge a derogatory and foolish marriage, now that none lived whom concealment could wrong.

Audley mechanically resumed his former life,--sought to resettle his thoughts on the grand objects of ambitious men. His poverty still pressed on him; his pecuniary debt to Harley stung and galled his peculiar sense of honour. He saw no way to clear his estates, to repay his friend, but by some rich alliance. Dead to love, he faced this prospect first with repugnance, then with apathetic indifference. Levy, of whose treachery towards himself and Nora he was unaware, still held over him the power that the money-lender never loses over the man that has owed, owes, or may owe again. Levy was ever urging him to propose, to the rich Miss Leslie; Lady Lansmere, willing to atone, as she thought, for his domestic loss, urged the same; Harley, influenced by his mother, wrote from the Continent to the same effect.

"Manage it as you will," at last said Egerton to Levy, "so that I am not a wife's pensioner."

"Propose for me, if you will," he said to Lady Lansmere,--"I cannot woo, --I cannot talk of love."

Somehow or other the marriage, with all its rich advantages to the ruined gentleman, was thus made up. And Egerton, as we have seen, was the polite and dignified husband before the world,--married to a woman who adored him. It is the common fate of men like him to be loved too well!

On her death-bed his heart was touched by his wife's melancholy reproach,--"Nothing I could do has ever made you love me!"

"It is true," answered Audley, with tears in his voice and eyes; "Nature gave me but a small fund of what women like you call 'love,' and I lavished it all away." And he then told her, though with reserve, some portion of his former history; and that soothed her; for when she saw

that he had loved, and could grieve, she caught a glimpse of the human heart she had not seen before. She died, forgiving him, and blessing.

Audley's spirits were much affected by this new loss. He inly resolved never to marry again. He had a vague thought at first of retrenching his expenditure, and making young Randal Leslie his heir. But when he first saw the clever Eton boy, his feelings did not warm to him, though his intellect appreciated Randal's quick, keen talents. He contented himself with resolving to push the boy,--to do what was merely just to the distant kinsman of his late wife. Always careless and lavish in money matters, generous and princely, not from the delight of serving others, but from a grand seigneur's sentiment of what was due to himself and his station, Audley had a mournful excuse for the lordly waste of the large fortune at his control. The morbid functions of the heart had become organic disease. True, he might live many years, and die at last of some other complaint in the course of nature; but the progress of the disease would quicken with all emotional excitement; he might die suddenly--any day--in the very prime, and, seemingly, in the full vigour, of his life. And the only physician in whom he confided what he wished to keep concealed from the world (for ambitious men would fain be thought immortal) told him frankly that it was improbable that, with the wear and tear of political strife and action, he could advance far into middle age. Therefore, no son of his succeeding--his nearest relations all wealthy--Egerton resigned himself to his constitutional disdain of money; he could look into no affairs, provided the balance in his banker's hands were such as became the munificent commoner. All else he left to his steward and to Levy. Levy grew rapidly rich,--very, very rich,--and the steward thrived.

The usurer continued to possess a determined hold over the imperious great man. He knew Audley's secret; he could reveal that secret to Harley. And the one soft and tender side of the statesman's nature--the sole part of him not dipped in the ninefold Styx of practical prosaic life, which renders man so invulnerable to affection--was his remorseful love for the school friend whom he still deceived.

Here then you have the key to the locked chambers of Audley Egerton's character, the fortified castle of his mind. The envied minister, the joyless man; the oracle on the economies of an empire, the prodigal in a usurer's hands; the august, high-crested gentleman, to whom princes would refer for the casuistry of honour, the culprit trembling lest the friend he best loved on earth should detect his lie! Wrap thyself in the decent veil that the Arts or the Graces weave for thee, O Human Nature! It is only the statue of marble whose nakedness the eye can behold without

shame and offence!

CHAPTER XIX.

Of the narrative just placed before the reader, it is clear that Leonard could gather only desultory fragments. He could but see that his ill-fated mother had been united to a man she had loved with surpassing tenderness; had been led to suspect that the marriage was fraudulent; had gone abroad in despair; returned repentant and hopeful; had gleaned some intelligence that her lover was about to be married to another, and there the manuscript closed with the blisters left on the page by agonizing tears. The mournful end of Nora, her lonely return to die under the roof of her parents,—this he had learned before from the narrative of Dr. Morgan.

But even the name of her supposed husband was not revealed. Of him Leonard could form no conjecture, except that he was evidently of higher rank than Nora. Harley L'Estrange seemed clearly indicated in the early boy-lover. If so, Harley must know all that was left dark to Leonard, and to him Leonard resolved to confide the manuscripts. With this resolution he left the cottage, resolving to return and attend the funeral obsequies of his departed friend. Mrs. Goodyer willingly permitted him to take away the papers she had lent to him, and added to them the packet which had been addressed to Mrs. Bertram from the Continent.

Musing in anxious gloom over the record he had read, Leonard entered London on foot, and bent his way towards Harley's hotel; when, just as he had crossed into Bond Street, a gentleman in company with Baron Levy, and who seemed, by the flush on his brow and the sullen tone of his voice, to have had rather an irritating colloquy with the fashionable usurer, suddenly caught sight of Leonard, and, abruptly quitting Levy, seized the young man by the arm.

"Excuse me, sir," said the gentleman, looking hard into Leonard's face, "but unless these sharp eyes of mine are mistaken, which they seldom are, I see a nephew whom, perhaps, I behaved to rather too harshly, but who still has no right to forget Richard Avenel."

"My dear uncle," exclaimed Leonard, "this is indeed a joyful surprise; at a time, too, when I needed joy! No; I have never forgotten your

kindness, and always regretted our estrangement."

"That is well said; give us your fist again. Let me look at you--quite the gentleman, I declare--still so good-looking too. We Avenels always were a handsome family.

"Good-by, Baron Levy. Need not wait for me; I am not going to run away. I shall see you again."

"But," whispered Levy, who had followed Avenel across the street, and eyed Leonard with a quick, curious, searching glance--"but it must be as I say with regard to the borough; or (to be plain) you must cash the bills on the day they are due."

"Very well, sir, very well. So you think to put the screw upon me, as if I were a poor little householder. I understand,--my money or my borough?"

"Exactly so," said the baron, with a soft smile.

"You shall hear from me." (Aside, as Levy strolled away)--"D---darnation rascal!"

Dick Avenel then linked his arm in his nephew's, and strove for some minutes to forget his own troubles, in the indulgence of that curiosity in the affairs of another, which was natural to him, and in this instance increased by the real affection which he had felt for Leonard. But still his curiosity remained unsatisfied; for long before Leonard could overcome his habitual reluctance to speak of his success in literature, Dick's mind wandered back to his rival at Screwstown, and the curse of "over-competition,"--to the bills which Levy had discounted, in order to enable Dick to meet the crushing force of a capitalist larger than himself, and the "tarnation rascal" who now wished to obtain two seats at Lansmere, one for Randal Leslie, one for a rich Nabob whom Levy had just caught as a client, and Dick, though willing to aid Leslie, had a mind to the other seat for himself. Therefore Dick soon broke in upon the hesitating confessions of Leonard, with exclamations far from pertinent to the subject, and rather for the sake of venting his own griefs and resentment than with any idea that the sympathy or advice of his nephew could serve him.

"Well, well," said Dick, "another time for your history. I see you have thrived, and that is enough for the present. Very odd; but just now I can only think of myself. I'm in a regular fix, sir. Screwstown is not

the respectable Screwstown that you remember it--all demoralized and turned topsy-turvy by a demoniacal monster capitalist, with steam-engines that might bring the falls of Niagara into your back parlour, sir! And as if that was not enough to destroy and drive into almighty shivers a decent fair-play Britisher like myself, I hear he is just in treaty for some patent infernal invention that will make his engines do twice as much work with half as many hands! That's the way those unfeeling ruffians increase our poor-rates! But I 'll get up a riot against him, I will! Don't talk to me of the law! What the devil is the good of the law if it don't protect a man's industry,--a liberal man, too, like me!" Here Dick burst into a storm of vituperation against the rotten old country in general, and Mr. Dyce, the monster capitalist of Screwstown, in particular.

Leonard started; for Dick now named, in that monster capitalist, the very person who was in treaty for Leonard's own mechanical improvement on the steam-engine.

"Stop, uncle, stop! Why, then, if this man were to buy the contrivance you speak of, it would injure you?"

"Injure me, sir! I should be a bankrupt,--that is, if it succeeded; but I dare say it is all a humbug."

"No, it will succeed,--I 'll answer for that!"

"You! You have seen it?"

"Why, I invented it!"

Dick hastily withdrew his arm from Leonard's.

"Serpent's tooth!" he said falteringly, "so it is you, whom I warmed at my hearth, who are to ruin Richard Avenel?"

"No; but to save him! Come into the City and look at my model. If you like it, the patent shall be yours!"

"Cab, cab, cab," cried Dick Avenel, stopping a "Ransom; "jump in, Leonard,-jump in. I'll buy your patent,--that is, if it be worth a straw; and as for payment--"

"Payment! Don't talk of that!"

"Well, I won't," said Dick, mildly; "for 't is not the topic of conversation I should choose myself, just at present. And as for that black-whiskered alligator, the baron, let me first get out of those rambustious, unchristian, filbert-shaped claws of his, and then--but jump in! jump in! and tell the man where to drive!"

A very brief inspection of Leonard's invention sufficed to show Richard Avenel how invaluable it would be to him. Armed with a patent, of which the certain effects in the increase of power and diminution of labour were obvious to any practical man, Avenel felt that he should have no difficulty in obtaining such advances of money as he required, whether to alter his engines, meet the bills discounted by Levy, or carry on the war with the monster capitalist. It might be necessary to admit into partnership some other monster capitalist--What then? Any partner better than Levy. A bright idea struck him.

"If I can just terrify and whop that infernal intruder on my own ground for a few months, he may offer, himself, to enter into partnership,--make the two concerns a joint-stock friendly combination, and then we shall flog the world."

His gratitude to Leonard became so lively that Dick offered to bring his nephew in for Lansmere instead of himself; and when Leonard declined the offer, exclaimed, "Well, then, any friend of yours; I'm all for reform against those high and mighty right honourable borough-mongers; and what with loans and mortgages on the small householders, and a long course of 'Free and Easies' with the independent freemen, I carry one--seat certain, perhaps both seats of the town of Lansmere, in my breeches pocket." Dick then, appointing an interview with Leonard at his lawyer's, to settle the transfer of the invention, upon terms which he declared "should be honourable to both parties," hurried off, to search amongst his friends in the City for some monster capitalist, who alight be induced to extricate him from the jaws of Levy and the engines of his rival at Screwstown. "Mullins is the man, if I can but catch him," said Dick. "You have heard of Mullins?--a wonderful great man; you should see his nails; he never cuts them! Three millions, at least, he has scraped together with those nails of his, sir. And in this rotten old country, a man must have nails a yard long to fight with a devil like Levy! Good-by, good-by,--Goon-by, MY DEAR, nephew!"

CHAPTER XX.

Harley L'Estrange was seated alone in his apartments. He had just put down a volume of some favourite classic author, and he was resting his hand firmly clenched upon the book. Ever since Harley's return to England, there had been a perceptible change in the expression of his countenance, even in the very bearing and attitudes of his elastic youthful figure. But this change had been more marked since that last interview with Helen which has been recorded. There was a compressed, resolute firmness in the lips, a decided character in the brow. To the indolent, careless grace of his movements had succeeded a certain indescribable energy, as quiet and self-collected as that which distinguished the determined air of Audley Egerton himself. In fact, if you could have looked into his heart, you would have seen that Harley was, for the first time, making a strong effort over his passions and his humours; that the whole man was nerving himself to a sense of duty. "No," he muttered,--"no! I will think only of Helen; I will think only of real life! And what (were I not engaged to another) would that dark-eyed Italian girl be to me?--What a mere fool's fancy is this! I love again,--I, who through all the fair spring of my life have clung with such faith to a memory and a grave! Come, come, come, Harley L'Estrange, act thy part as man amongst men, at last! Accept regard; dream no more of passion. Abandon false ideals. Thou art no poet--why deem that life itself can be a poem?"

The door opened, and the Austrian prince, whom Harley had interested in the cause of Violante's father, entered, with the familiar step of a friend.

"Have you discovered those documents yet?" said the prince. "I must now return to Vienna within a few days; and unless you can arm me with some tangible proof of Peschiera's ancient treachery, or some more unanswerable excuse for his noble kinsman, I fear that there is no other hope for the exile's recall to his country than what lies in the hateful option of giving his daughter to his perfidious foe."

"Alas!" said Harley, "as yet all researches have been in vain; and I know not what other steps to take, without arousing Peschiera's vigilance, and setting his crafty brains at work to counteract us. My poor friend, then, must rest contented with exile. To give Violante to the count were dishonour. But I shall soon be married; soon have a home, not quite unworthy of their due rank, to offer both to father and to child."

"Would the future Lady L'Estrange feel no jealousy of a guest so fair as you tell me this young signorina is? And would you be in no danger

yourself, my poor friend?"

"Pooh!" said Harley, colouring. "My fair guest would have two fathers; that is all. Pray do not jest on a thing so grave as honour."

Again the door opened, and Leonard appeared.

"Welcome," cried Harley, pleased to be no longer alone under the prince's penetrating eye,--"welcome. This is the noble friend who shares our interest for Riccabocca, and who could serve him so well, if we could but discover the document of which I have spoken to you."

"It is here," said Leonard, simply; "may it be all that you require!"

Harley eagerly grasped at the packet, which had been sent from Italy to the supposed Mrs. Bertram, and, leaning his face on his hand, rapidly hurried through the contents.

"Hurrah!" he cried at last, with his face lighted up, and a boyish toss of his right hand. "Look, look, Prince, here are Peschiera's own letters to his kinsman's wife; his avowal of what he calls his 'patriotic designs;' his entreaties to her to induce her husband to share them. Look, look, how he wields his influence over the woman he had once wooed; look how artfully he combats her objections; see how reluctant our friend was to stir, till wife and kinsman both united to urge him!"

"It is enough,-quite enough," exclaimed the prince, looking at the passages in Peschiera's letters which Harley pointed out to him.

"No, it is not enough," shouted Harley, as he continued to read the letters with his rapid sparkling eyes. "More still! O villain, doubly damned! Here, after our friend's flight, here is Peschiera's avowal of guilty passion; here, he swears that he had intrigued to ruin his benefactor, in order to pollute the home that had sheltered him. Ah, see how she answers! thank Heaven her own eyes were opened at last, and she scorned him before she died! She was innocent! I said so. Violante's mother was pure. Poor lady, this moves me! Has your emperor the heart of a man?"

"I know enough of our emperor," answered the prince, warmly, "to know that, the moment these papers reach him, Peschiera is ruined, and your friend is restored to his honours. You will live to see the daughter, to whom you would have given a child's place at your hearth, the wealthiest heiress of Italy,--the bride of some noble lover, with rank only below

the supremacy of kings!"

"Ah," said Harley, in a sharp accent, and turning very pale,--"ah, I shall not see her that! I shall never visit Italy again!--never see her more,--never, after she has once quitted this climate of cold iron cares and formal duties! never, never!" He turned his head for a moment, and then came with quick step to Leonard. "But you, O happy poet! No Ideal can ever be lost to you. You are independent of real life. Would that I were a poet!" He smiled sadly.

"You would not say so, perhaps, my dear Lord," answered Leonard, with equal sadness, "if you knew how little what you call 'the Ideal' replaces to a poet the loss of one affection in the genial human world. Independent of real life! Alas! no. And I have here the confessions of a true poet-soul, which I will entreat you to read at leisure; and when you have read, say if you would still be a poet!"

He took forth Nora's manuscripts as he spoke.

"Place them yonder, in my escritoire, Leonard; I will read them later."

"Do so, and with heed; for to me there is much here that involves my own life,--much that is still a mystery, and which I think you can unravel!"

"!" exclaimed Harley; and he was moving towards the escritoire, in a drawer of which Leonard had carefully deposited the papers, when once more, but this time violently, the door was thrown open, and Giacomo rushed into the room, accompanied by Lady Lansmere.

"Oh, my Lord, my Lord!" cried Giacomo, in Italian, "the signorina! the signorina! Violante!"

"What of her? Mother, Mother! what of her? Speak, speak!"

"She has gone,--left our house!"

"Left! No, no!" cried Giacomo. "She must have been deceived or forced away. The count! the count! Oh, my good Lord, save her, as you once saved her father!"

"Hold!" cried Harley. "Give me your arm, Mother. A second such blow in life is beyond the strength of man,--at least it is beyond mine. So, so! I am better now! Thank you, Mother. Stand back, all of you! give me air. So the count has triumphed, and Violante has fled with him!"

Explain all,--I can bear it!"

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