By the same Author.

AUSTIN FRIARS.
TOO MUCH ALONE.
THE RICH HUSBAND.
MAXWELL DREWITT.
FAR ABOVE RUBIES.
A LIFE'S ASSIZE.
THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH.
HOME, SWEET HOME.
PHEMIE KELLER.
RACE FOR WEALTH.
THE EARL S PROMISE.
MORTOMLEY'S ESTATE.
FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.
THE RULING PASSION.
MY FIRST AND MY LAST LOVE.
CITY AND SUBURB.
ABOVE SUSPICION.
JOY AFTER SORROW.

THE RULING PASSION.

A Novel.

BY

Charlotte Eliza Lawson (Cowan)

~~MRS. J. H.~~ RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

GEORGE GEITH,' 'CITY AND SUBURB,' 'MAXWELL DREWETT,' 'TOO MUCH ALONE,' 'THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH,' 'FREMIE KELLER,' ETC.

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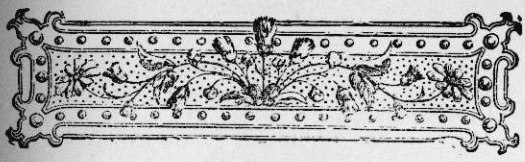
PREFACE.

THE Author wishes it to be understood that the following work is a revised edition of a story originally published several years ago.



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THE RULING PASSION.

CHAPTER I.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

When Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn (or Devlin, as some persons irreverently pronounced his name), confidential clerk to Samuel Snooks, Esquire, Solicitor, deceased, married that gentleman's widow, all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance said he was the most fortunate fellow in existence; and in one sense this was true, for when he led Mrs. Snooks to the altar, he wedded not merely that fair lady, but also her late husband's clients, and the numerous guineas he had made and saved during the course of a long and prosperous professional career.

Mr. D'Evelyn stepped at once from the office to the drawing-room; from a dependent situation, where large services were rewarded with small pay and smaller thanks, to an exalted position from which he could contemplate his change of circumstances with infinite satisfaction, and curse and rate his clerks, as Snooks, before he descended into the grave, had cursed and rated him.

After living up three pairs of stairs in a street almost imperceptible on a map of London, breakfasting on the weakest of tea, dining at the cheapest of eating-houses, supping sometimes with a friend, sometimes meagrely at home, he found himself suddenly translated to a well-furnished house, where

capital dinners awaited his release from business each evening at six o'clock; where muffins and cold ham, chickens, and so forth, greeted him when he descended to breakfast at nine A.M.; where he never shivered, even though coals were at freezing prices; where no indignant landlady ever waylaid him on the staircase, stating that he must either "pay or turn out;" where, in a word, he was free from the inroads of the demon poverty, and enjoyed to their utmost extent all those necessaries and luxuries of existence, to obtain which he had married.

"Every good in life has its drawback."

Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn was acquainted with this axiom before he wedded Mrs. Snooks; but having, as he imagined, cast up both sides of the account correctly, and finding the result in favour of the nuptial benediction, he tied himself for better or worse to the widow.

On the evening before the irrevocable knot was tied, however, when his "best" man, Mr. Daniel O'Shaughnessy, one of the most reckless and good-natured amongst Irishmen, after he had swallowed tumblers of punch till he was almost incapable, said, as he bade his friend "Good night," and wrung his hand with a warmth born partly of his country, partly of his country's beverage—

"God bless you, Tom; I hope you'll be happy. I trust your wife may prove everything you could desire——"

Mr. D'Evelyn returned, with a somewhat rueful countenance—

"Thank you, Shaughnessy, for your good wishes; there is enough of her, any way, that is one comfort."

From which remark it will probably be inferred that the clerk had wooed the lady for money, not for love; which inference, if we substitute the word "wed" for "wooed," is quite correct, for it was the lady who "wooed" Tom, and Tom who "wed" the lady.

Looking at the marriage from one point of view, it was indeed a very fortunate circumstance for the penniless clerk; but, as has been before stated, it had its disadvantages: for instance, Mrs. Snooks was almost old enough to be his mother; fat enough to be exhibited at a cattle-show; vulgar and common enough to annoy the least fastidious taste; odd enough to drive a man half frantic; and last, though not least, at times cross enough to make home a sort of purgatory, where all the sins committed out of doors, during the course of a week, might fairly be deemed expiated in an hour.

The wisest of men assures us that "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife;" and often did Thomas D'Evelyn look back from the well-spread table, where plenty might be, but where peace assuredly was not, with something very like regret, to the free bachelor life he had led when shillings were scarce in his pockets as Queen Anne's farthings; when he always ate his dinner in advance, so to speak; when he often laid his head on his pillow, uncertain whether the same roof would shelter him on the succeeding night, and whether a breakfast would turn up from any unexpected source to give him strength for the labours of the ensuing day.

Mr. D'Evelyn had come up from Somersetshire poor as country man, or rather country boy, could be, to push his fortune in what rustics deem a sort of El Dorado, and an El Dorado it assuredly is, though often not for them; came up to London with plenty of assurance, plenty of talent, plenty of hope, plenty of pride, plenty of ancestors, and a lamentable scarcity of cash; came up to make a fortune in a few days, with which fortune he proposed returning to his native town, buying an estate, gladdening the heart of his poor old mother, portioning his pretty sister, restoring to its pristine greatness the name of D'Evelyn, and becoming, in one word, an English country gentleman.

Time went on, and brought to Thomas D'Evelyn, as it has since done to the heart of many a better man, nothing but disappointment and vexation of spirit.

His assurance availed him nothing; his talent but little. His hopes were blasted; his pride was so frequently wounded, that at length it almost gave up the ghost in despair; his ancestors were permitted to sleep tranquilly in their graves, without even a stone to mark the spot where they reposed, within pistol-shot of where Castle D'Evelyn had stood in the time of the first Edward: the fortune did not come; his mother died, and what was perhaps even worse, so did her income; his sister started a milliner's shop, married a policeman, and finally emigrated to America: the glory he had dreamt of never gilded the name of D'Evelyn, and poor Tom, after ten long years of drudgery and penury, found himself still a very threadbare and very much undervalued clerk in the employment of Samuel Snooks, Esquire, who initiated him, in consideration of a very small fee, into all the mysteries of attorneyship, and dimly hinted, when in a good temper, by way of apology for the small remuneration he offered the young man, that some time he would make him a partner, and prophesied that Tom would yet be an "ornament" to the profession.

Buoyant, like almost every descendant of Adam, D'Evelyn, though sunk in the trough of depression one day, yet rode triumphant on the billows of hope the next.

That partnership would make the fortune he had dreamt of years before; it could not be deferred much longer, he imagined. Mrs. Snooks was uncommonly gracious towards him; clients began to say he "would do," when his principal was absent. Mr. Snooks invited him, though at rare intervals, to dinner; and matters were just beginning, not indeed actually to brighten with Tom, but to look a little brighter, when one day Mr. Snooks was driven home from

Court in a fit—a fit it proved from which he never recovered.

When the servants, assisted by the cabman, carried the attorney upstairs to that bed from which he was so soon to be borne to his grave, Mrs. Snooks sent for Mr. D'Evelyn, who sat below copying laboriously in the office; and, obedient to the word of command, Thomas ascended to the chamber where lay his patron, an hour before apparently full of life and health, now tottering on the very verge of death.

They did all they could for the solicitor. His wife cried over him till she thought she had performed her duty in that respect, and then she and Mr. D'Evelyn tried every restorative possible and impossible. They sent for doctors, who bled him and blistered him, and quarrelled over him; they put hot bottles to his feet, and cold water to his head; sent for clergymen, who prayed beside him; for friends, who creaked round his dying bed on tiptoe, making more noise in doing so than could possibly have been the case if they had set down the whole of their heavy boots at once on the carpet; sent for dainties that he could not swallow, for drugs which could only serve the purpose of rendering his last ideas of taste, ere he quitted this world, as disagreeable as possible; and finally, when doctors, clergymen, and friends had all departed, Mrs. Snooks, Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn, and a servant sat down near the couch to watch the process by which the former was so soon to be made a widow.

The lady and the clerk, with a decanter of wine between them, contrived to pass the time tolerably comfortable. Mrs. Snooks, urged by Tom and the excess of her own grief, sipped and wept, and wept and sipped; whilst her companion frequently replenished his own glass, and grew at once sentimental and happy on the melancholy occasion.

At length, as morning approached—that morning which

one of the group was destined never to see breaking—Mr. Snooks opened his eyes and muttered some unintelligible words; the first he had essayed since he fell back insensible into the arms of a professional brother.

Mr. D'Evelyn, at a sound, rushed to his side; the heavy lids drooped again for an instant, then unclosed for the second time; the dim eyes glanced around with that strange look of semi-intensity and semi-blindness which so frequently precedes the last struggle; he raised himself with unnatural strength, and stretched forth his arms as if to clutch some retreating object (was that object Life?); then uttering a deep groan, followed by the rattle which announces immediate dissolution, he fell back on his pillow dead.

"It is all over," said Mr. D'Evelyn, turning to the widow; who, altogether overcome with grief and watching,—never to speak of the contents of the decanter,—flung herself sobbing on his neck, exclaimed—

"Oh! Tom D'Evelyn, you are the only comfort left to me on earth!" and was forthwith carried to her room, kicking, in violent hysterics.

If, after the above confession, Mr. D'Evelyn proposed for the fair relict of Samuel Snooks, Esquire, the most fastidious in such matters can scarcely accuse him of presumption.

The widow was, as the phrase goes, "a great catch," and Thomas D'Evelyn was, unhappily, a very little one; but the former had an affection for him, and stated she required some one to look after her affairs and manage her money matters, to prove the truth of which assertion, she got a legal friend, Mr. Thompson, to see, as she remarked in confidence, "that no man living, more especially Tom D'Evelyn, could pick a hole in her marriage settlement;" which settlement gave to her the exclusive control over all the property her husband had left behind him.

Still she had an affection for the clerk, and accordingly

bribed him, with the late Mr. Snooks's clients, and a house full of good furniture, and a joint share of her property, and the prospect of affluence and comfort in lieu of poverty and misery, to make her Mrs. D'Evelyn, while in return he gave her all he had to bestow:—a very handsome husband, somewhat unprincipled, utterly careless, very extravagant, thoroughly indifferent, wonderfully amiable; offered at once his poverty, his ancestors, and his dependent position on her shrine, laid all down at her feet, never to reclaim any of them (excepting perhaps the ancestors), and became, one fine December morning, Thomas D'Evelyn, Esquire, Solicitor, a well-to-do man of the world; a person to be courted by a few; treated as an equal by some; to be looked down on and sneered at by many.

And yet he was utterly wretched! It is the lot of all living to be haunted by a skeleton. Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn had conceived such a distaste for the ghastly companion with which Fate, in the outset of his career, had provided him, that the moment the chance presented itself, he discarded it, and tried another species of helpmate.

Which was—the old one, or the new one—the least endurable? Which was, the demon poverty or his wife, the hardest to tolerate?

The thought of both—the one in the old days of his weary clerkship, the other in the time of his outward prosperity—abode ever with him; walked by his side in the busy city; up the bare stairs that led to his dreary garret; down the broad well-carpeted flight which took him away for a time from the sight of *her;* sat near him on days when he kept a compulsory fast, and on festive evenings in his new home; on his pillow at night, in the office by day; in the streets,—everywhere, first the spectre poverty, and then the memory of that irrevocable tie, haunted him. The old skeleton

greeted the new one; passed it with a grim smile of welcome, and gave place to it. Which was the worst?

Which? Ye who toil and sorrow without hope; and ye who labour and mourn with a prospect of a not remote termination to your grief and work, answer.

Five years passed away. Mr. D'Evelyn never became accustomed to the yoke; and as his wife's temper grew worse and worse, and his own failings of mind and character more and more confirmed, matters did not mend with the course of time; in fact, as the wheels of his chariot rolled farther and farther along the road of life, the way seemed to become rougher, the journey more wearisome, and Tom secretly and publicly cursed his fate, and Mrs. D'Evelyn bemoaned hers, and both often wished they were dead, though it is probable that had the King of Terrors entered their drawing-room, when they expressed so vehement a desire for his advent, they would have requested him to walk out again; and grey hairs were plentifully scattered through Tom's once raven locks, and his wife's face had grown more wrinkled, and care and dissatisfaction were stamped in the visages of the solicitor and the widow of Snooks, Esquire, deceased; and the true position of domestic affairs was known amongst all their acquaintances, and sneered at even by the little errand boy, who never saw Mr. D'Evelyn without pulling his hair at, or touching his cap to, that ancient Somersetshire gentleman.

It was this pair, then, who sat at their morning meal, one day late in September; the one pettishly drinking scalding tea, and fuming behind an urn; the other discussing, as is the wont of some husbands, fathers, and brothers, the "Times" and his breakfast together.

How pleasant it is for a lady to sit during the course of fifteen, twenty, ay, sometimes even sixty minutes, with an individual who is reading a newspaper, in utter silence,

broken at rare intervals by the rustle of that eternal paper, and the words, "Another cup, if you please," and then a half-abstracted "Thank you!" How pleasant to travel in company with a person who only occasionally looks over the top of the "Times," alternately at her and the window; who swallows dinners and debates with almost equal avidity, and gets through a railway journey and the interminable sheets at an inverse ratio of speed!

So, perhaps, Mrs. D'Evelyn reflected; or, what is more probable, being in an uncommonly bad temper, she seized on any pretext for quarrelling with her husband; and, accordingly, the instant he laid down the "Times," accompanying the action with a weary sigh, she demanded if there were anything new in the paper.

"Not a word," replied Mr. D'Evelyn, answering the question after the fashion most in vogue amongst inveterate readers of the daily prints.

"Not a word!" she repeated; "that is what you say, morning after morning. Pray, if there be not a word, what fills the 'Times'? what has so engrossed your attention since nine o'clock, that out of five questions I asked you only answered one, and that one the last? What——"

"Pshaw!" interposed Mr. D'Evelyn. "Of course I did not mean to say there was nothing absolutely new; but nothing worth repeating. There is one paragraph from a foolish mother to her foolish son, who has, it seems, run away from home: to C. A. G. from A. B. S., who earnestly entreats a reply: one man has lost fifty pounds, and a lady, residing at Hammersmith, a locket: a number of people are in want of clerks and servants: there has been another revolution in Spain, and an abolition meeting somewhere else: butchers' meat is up a halfpenny per pound: a man has been committed to jail, to stand his trial at the next assizes, for murdering his dearest friend: one of the perio-

dical famines is expected in Ireland: a new steamer has been built on the Clyde: some few people have had the sense to die, and many more the folly to get married. There, my dear, is the whole of the news I have discovered in the columns of the paper, excepting, perhaps, that a vessel will sail for Adelaide on the 20th of next month."

"I wish I were going in it," sighed the lady. Mr. D'Evelyn mentally wished to heaven that she was, but held his peace.

"It would have been well for me, Thomas D'Evelyn," resumed his wife, "if you had deemed marriage a folly five years ago."

"Your remark being complimentary," he replied, "I feel a melancholy pleasure in returning it. It would have been well for me had I known as much of—the holy state of matrimony, at the period you refer to, as I now do."

"Oh, you ungrateful wretch!" exclaimed Mrs. D'Evelyn; "how can you, how dare you say such a thing! Who made you what you are—took pity on you when you were almost starving; gave you money, clients, houses, riches,—a position? Who made you what you are? Just answer me that one question."

"Fate," said Tom, solemnly, as he balanced a spoon adorned with the crest of the Snooks on the top of his cup; "Fate, and, in my opinion, a very pretty mess she has made of it. Ladies never manage business matters well, and why on earth a goddess should have been entrusted with the shaping of men's destinies, except to make worse confusion in the world than would otherwise have proved the case, it is utterly impossible for me to say."

"Time was, Thomas D'Evelyn," she answered, "when you vowed——"

"That women were angels, my dear," he interrupted in a tone half of bitterness, half of levity. "Well, perhaps I think

so still, or perhaps I did not know so much about them then; or perhaps I meant that, like other angels, there were two sorts; at all events, I have no desire to express an opinion on the subject now."

"And this is what I married for," observed Mrs. D'Evelyn; "this is what I threw myself away for on you; these are the thanks I get for all my kindness, my self-denial, and generosity; this is the return I have for taking compassion on you, raising you to the rank you now hold, tying myself to an ungrateful, wild, hairbrained, heartless——"

"And do you think," he hurriedly interposed, "that I relinquished nothing when I married you?"

"I know you did—your garret and threadbare coat!" she retorted.

"Can you think of nothing more?" he asked, looking steadily at her, whilst a crimson spot glowed on the top of each cheek.

"The custom of going supperless to bed, perhaps," was the reply.

"Madam!" he said, violently pushing his plate away, and rising up, whilst the flush spread over the whole of his care-worn face, "was it nothing at thirty to relinquish liberty, to quench hope, to leave myself without an object in existence, to tie myself to—to you? Was it nothing to fling from me the prospect of a quiet happy home for ever; to place myself in a position, where you, even you, could taunt me with my poverty; to reproach me, who made half your late husband's fortune, with being enriched solely by the results of his industry? Was it nothing for me to seek a miserable substitute for a home, in a place where neither peace or happiness, or love or affection ever could dwell; to debar myself for ever even from the luxury of contented solitude—was this nothing? Oh! gold," he added, striking his forehead with his hand, "well may men call you accursed, for they

fling away the best gifts in existence to obtain you, and find, when it is too late, that you lure but to misery and dissatisfaction."

"Very fine, sir! pray go on; it is no matter how you talk to your wife," said Mrs. D'Evelyn, with a sort of passionate sob.

Her husband paused suddenly in his excited speech, and then resumed, in a sad but quiet tone: "Perhaps we both gave up many things, but why should we continue thus everlastingly to recount the catalogue of all we vowed away at the altar? It serves no purpose but to make us repining and melancholy. What is done cannot be undone. Would it not, therefore, be better, wiser, happier for us mutually to forbear a little? If we were not so perpetually pulling at the chain and reminding each other of its existence, it would not irritate us so constantly as is now the case. All the laws in England cannot unmarry us; for five long years we have been making the worst of it. I am tired of this—suppose we now try to make the best of a bad business."

Pleadingly a pair of soft brown eyes had risen before the attorney's imagination—a pair he had once loved to gaze upon, now closed for ever in death; pleadingly they had spoken to his heart for the woman he had made his wife, who was so very unendurable, and yet still whom he had to endure, and who might be, after all, to a certain degree dependent on him for happiness. Those soft eyes appealed to him as a still softer voice would have done ere its music was hushed on earth, for her whom he had committed the great wrong of marrying without affection. It was one of the few gentle moments of Thomas D'Evelyn's life. Had Mrs. D'Evelyn cared for peace, or wished for it, or understood any feelings more tender than those which incessantly ruffled her wayward temper, there might have been at least the semblance of unity between them. But he had touched

a chord which the slightest word caused to vibrate angrily in her heart—money; and the soothing sentence with which he had endeavoured to repair what he felt his unkindness, had no more effect on her than oil flung on the top of burning coals might have in subduing the intensity of the flame.

"And so you confess, you do confess—you have the presumption to stand there and say you married me for money?"

He was quite calm again, and having resumed his seat, after his momentary outbreak of indignation, answered—

"Was there any deceit practised on my part in this most ill-assorted union? Did I ever profess love, any great attachment, anything——"

"So you married me for gold?"

Had they lived together for five weary years, and did she only make this discovery now? No! but it was the first time he had admitted the fact, and she was not slow to perceive the advantage she gained in the argument by his imprudence.

"So you married me for gold?" was the question she asked him, in a tone of forced composure, which once more compelled her husband to demand—

"Did I ever make any profession of disinterested affection?"

"Did you ever tell me before marriage it was solely for the sake of so many thousands of pounds you asked me to become your wife?"

"No, not in so many plain words," confessed Mr. D'Evelyn; "but——

"Do you think, if you had, I should now have been Mrs. D'Evelyn?" she pursued.

"I do not know," replied her husband, who was fast subsiding into his usual state of semi-carelessness and semi-

sarcasm; "I do not know. I think, however, it is extremely probable you might; at least, I am positive you presented those thousands in a very inviting point of view before I proposed——"

"I wish I had never accepted you."

"What is the use of wishing about that which it is now impossible to undo? Why cannot you quietly talk over my plan of making the best of our position? I am weary of wrangling; I want peace: I do not profess affection, nor I suppose do you; but because we see our mistake with such unfortunate distinctness, why should we disagree so much more than other married people who are in a somewhat similar predicament? Once again, and for the last time, I propose—let there be at least peace between us. Many years of life, in all human probability, lie before both; let us resolve to pass them more comfortably, or rather less miserably, than the years that are gone!"

It was a great concession for him to repeat this proposition twice; but in truth, as he said, he was "tired of strife." He wanted what was never to be for him in that house—peace. He might better have demanded it of the winter wind.

"So you married me for gold?" she repeated again, as though it were quite a new idea he had presented for her consideration; one so very new and surprising that she really could not get over it.

Mr. D'Evelyn did not reply, but he looked at her and wondered for what else he could, by any stretch of imagination, have been supposed to marry her; and that one glance also assured him that his project of "making the best" was utterly futile. No; there was nothing for it but jogging on over the rough road as they had previously done, each striving to make the other's path as disagreeable as possible. He held his peace for the time, however, and

commenced finishing his breakfast with what appetite the little altercation had left him.

"So you married me for gold?" she said once again, seeing him push back his chair as though about to depart.

"I have had the pleasure of hearing you repeat that truism four times," remarked her husband, wearied of the tone in which she rung the changes on those half-dozen words.

"It is one I may well repeat with tears to my dying day," returned the lady. "I wish I was dead, I do, from my very soul; I wish I was in my grave."

"Death is the greatest blessing in life, I admit," said Mr. D'Evelyn, rising to leave the room, and so end the argument.

"Yes, I am sure you think it would be a great blessing if I were to die," she returned. "You think you would get all my money. You think I am going to leave it to you. You imagine I am about to die——"

"Believe me, I have not an idea of the kind," said her husband, grasping the handle of the door.

"I am glad to hear you say so," she retorted, "for you will not then be disappointed. I am not going to die; I am not going to—stay for one moment, if you please—I think it only right to tell you I have made my will; and, as you married me from such disinterested motives, and have proved such a good, affectionate husband, I have provided handsomely for you——"

"Extremely thoughtful on your part," sneered Thomas, who had a pretty good idea of what was to follow. "Quite unnecessary, but still most generous and thoughtful. Pray go on; I see I interrupted you."

"Leaving you in possession," she resumed, as if he had not spoken, "of all the wealth, and lands, and estates you owned before you so unfortunately (for yourself, of course) wedded me; and, in addition, my thanks for your kindness,

and my blessing, and one shilling of the current coin of the realm."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. D'Evelyn, "when that mournful day arrives, I will strive to prove I have not been altogether unworthy of such a wife, and will endeavour to show my gratitude for the unprecedented love and devotion you have evinced towards me. You shall lie in state, if such be your desire; shall have mourners and mutes, and plumes, and four horses, and a tablet to the memory of you and your virtues, and an oak coffin; and the same shall be mounted with pure silver, for I will nail the shilling you so generously mean to bequeath me on the lid thereof, and so do all justice to the memory of a much-lamented wife."

At these words, the storm which had been so long brewing behind the tea-urn burst forth. To tears and hysterics Mr. D'Evelyn had long been indifferent, but to paroxysms of rage and invective he never could become accustomed; so he cut the matter short by opening the door and walking out of the apartment, in which act he almost upset a servant who had been listening to the altercation, and who presented him with a letter which had come, as she stated, by "express."

It were a difficult question to decide whether the man is most to be envied or pitied who has attained to that profession in life, or condition of mind, in which a letter by express has no power to excite him even for a moment.

Something might be said on both sides, something on the state of *insouciance* at which such a being must have arrived, something concerning the passing away of that feverish expectation and perpetual imagining which makes youth seem so very unsatisfactory a period whilst it is with us, so very bright a time when it has departed for ever; something also concerning that callousness of heart and feeling which treats the cares and anxieties of a fellow-creature as mere matters which rather hinder the routine of business, and can be kept

waiting in an agony for an indefinite period. Some philosopher might almost write an essay on the subject: happily for the readers of this work it is one not now necessary to discuss, the only fact needful for record being that Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn, having, by right of years, matrimony, and attorneyship, attained to a state of supreme indifference concerning most things terrestrial and celestial, did not open the letter handed to him by the servant, but took it quietly with the large seal up, on which he gazed vacantly till he had ascended the first flight of stairs leading from the breakfast-room to the upper chambers of the house he called "his;" then, however, carelessly turning the missive over, and recognizing the handwriting, he paused on the landing and opened it.

The September sun, which shone, oh, with what a glory! upon fields where the golden grain stood ready for the hand of the reaper; upon woods just tinged with the first autumnal tints; upon grand old mountains clad with purple heather; upon gardens filled with those gorgeous flowers which make the passing away of the year seem more like a triumphant departure than a mournful adieu; over lakes dotted with fairy islands, and glistening with tiny barks; upon the boundless ocean, strange and wonderful to contemplate even in its calmest moments;—shone likewise on that brick-built mansion in a London square, which held within its walls so much of talent wasted, of existence blighted.

It streamed, as if in mockery, through the window by which the attorney stood; it fell on his head, as it fell on the loveliest things in the pure and quiet country; it cast a strange light on his careworn face, over the many wrinkles stamped on his brow, on the prematurely old expression of his countenance, on the grey hairs which at thirty-five made Thomas D'Evelyn look already a middle-aged man. And the rays of that same sun fell also on the few lines contained in a letter

destined, it might be, to work untold misery to many hearts. Oh! how brightly they shone, how they lighted up each word, how clear they rendered each syllable! for the bright sunbeams, like the drops of the refreshing rain, fall alike on the "just and the unjust," on the thing which is evil and that which is good.

Mr. D'Evelyn perused the letter attentively, from the date to the signature; then he raised his eyes, and seeing the servant who had brought it to him emerging from the breakfast parlour, said—

"Tell Edward to call a cab; let it wait till I am ready."

The period to which he referred was not long in arriving; for in about ten minutes he descended to the hall, with a valise containing a few necessaries in his hand. He stood on the steps for a moment, till the cab he had ordered drove up, and the messenger jumped down from his place beside the driver. The air of the summer's morning fanned his throbbing brow. He looked at his watch: he had time to walk to his destination; it would be pleasanter than jolting over the London streets in a noisy coach: so he gave his valise to the office boy, and told him to drive to the place from which the mail for Brenslow started, take a seat for him in the coach, and remain till he arrived.

The lad had not yet reached that time of life when walking, and driving, and everything seem indifferent, or merely a choice of evils, so, happy as a king, he obeyed his master; whilst Mr. D'Evelyn, after seeing the boy depart, turned himself to walk to his destination along the smooth pavements of England's metropolis.

Not alone! for the dark shadow—dark, though the sun of heaven was so bright—stalked silently beside him. Not alone! for memory and thought went with him; memory and thought, unwelcome travelling companions in the long journey of life, which sometimes mar the happiness of the pleasantest

hours, and thrust some unwelcome reflections forward, just when the heart most desires to be at peace.

Not destitute of human companionship either, after a little; for soon a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice, once familiar, but long unheard, sounded in his ear—

"D'Evelyn! do you not know me?"

"O'Shaughnessy! is it possible?"

"Back again, you see," answered the other, with a forced laugh; "poor as when I went away. Some people are born to be rich, and others to starve. See, now, the different fates of two old friends: here are you, clothed in purple and fine linen, and living in great ease and comfort; and I, with as much brains as you, am possessed of just enough worldly wealth to keep me from the parish. I have been trying to pull against the stream of fate ever since we parted, and being tired of the experiment, have returned to London, to float with the tide—perhaps in it, at last," he added, pointing in the direction of the river. "But how have you got on since we parted company that December morning which made you happy? I was on my way to see you when we met. Where are you going now?"

It was a curious sentence with which to open a conversation after five years' absence; but underneath the light tone it was easy to trace how much of pain, and suffering, and recklessness that same pulling against the stream had caused.

"I am going out of town," answered Mr. D'Evelyn, who felt as though Mr. O'Shaughnessy's presence somehow filled his cup of annoyance that morning to overflowing. They had never met from the time when Mrs. Snooks became Mrs. D'Evelyn till that moment, and it reminded him of all that had happened during the interim.

"I am going out of town, on pressing business; if you have nothing better to do, you might walk down to the

coach with me, and tell me all about yourself. I shall be back in a day or two, and then I hope you will come often to the Square.—And so you have returned from India?"

That certainly was self-evident; the man was there, poor as when he went away; a good deal older in constitution and disappointment, young as ever in industry and common sense. He had his story to tell of unrequited services, and trickery and falsehood and wrong in everybody but himself, which narrative, with sundry Hibernian digressions, lasted till they came in sight of the coach which was to convey the attorney to Brenslow; and also of the little errand boy, who, flushed and happy, stood in the crowd, thinking how much he should like to go away into the country on the top of that wonderful vehicle. As the two friends paced together till the time came for them to separate, and just, in fact, as the ostler was requesting all passengers to take their seats, Mr. D Evelyn said to his companion—

"And so, O'Shaughnessy, you have actually tried matrimony since we parted? Where is your wife?"

"Dead!" answered the other; and, to do him justice, his voice trembled a little.

"Would to God I could say the same of mine!" ejaculated Mr. D'Evelyn; having uttered which pious wish, he wrung the Irishman's hand, ascended to his place on the roof of the coach, and was soon miles and miles away from London, with green fields, and hedgerows, and nature around him—miles and miles away from the woman whose death he said he so ardently desired, travelling to meet a client at the country town of Brenslow.

And having introduced that client's attorney to the reader, it will be needful to take an author's privilege, and proceed a little in advance of the coach along the king's highway, and some fifteen days behind it upon the road of time, in order to speak more particularly of the place to which Mr.

D'Evelyn was journeying, and give some idea of the individual whom he had been summoned to join.

CHAPTER II.

BRIARTON.

THIRTY-FIVE miles from London is situated the picturesque town of Brenslow; without exception one of the loveliest spots on which the eye of wearied traveller ever rested, and one of the dullest abiding-places wherein any unhappy descendant of Adam was ever doomed to pass even a short portion of his existence.

Built on a hill, the coach road—the artery which led from that mighty heart of England, London, to the not very remote, but apparently insignificant, portion of the body national, Brenslow — wound gradually up the incline, with many a picturesque turning and winding, which presented fine views to the traveller over hill and dale, tree, water, and field, and at length, when he had just arrived at the conclusion that the ascent, like some streets in the metropolis so lately quitted, had no end, deposited him safely in front of the "Bishop's Arms," an hotel presided over by a man who pinned his faith on the prelate's lawn sleeves, and by so doing procured the patronage of many of the gentry, and some few of the humbler inhabitants of Brenslow.

The "Bishop's Arms" was, in short, the aristocratic hotel of the town; and it was there that, one fine September even-

ing, in the year of grace 18—, the mail coach from London paused to change horses, and deposit the few passengers destined to alight at Brenslow.

On the afternoon in question, the only person, besides a fat country woman and a thin tradesman, who descended from the roof of the vehicle, was a tall gentlemanly-looking man, whose sole luggage consisted of a moderate-sized carpet-bag, a hat-box, and a small japanned case. The owner of these effects is mentioned, not because of anything especially extraordinary in his appearance, but because he has much to do with the future progress of this story.

Dressed plainly, yet well, according to the fashion then most in vogue amongst persons of the middle class, there was yet a something about him which conveyed the impression, that either from wealth, or birth, or circumstances, he had a claim to a higher position than that he apparently occupied. His complexion was dark, as if bronzed by long exposure to a tropical sun; his eyes were brown; his nose was straight from the broad forehead to the short scornful upper lip; and a remarkably well-formed mouth attracted attention for a moment; but the observer generally turned away, thinking there was little either extremely winning or remarkably disagreeable in the stranger's face.

Such, as far as could be seen in a first glance, was the individual who, addressing the landlord of the "Bishop's Arms," asked if he could be accommodated with apartments for a few days.

Of course he could, for the inn, excepting during the progress of a contested election, was never full; the host was proud, happy, delighted to meet his wishes.

"Would the gentleman walk in and inspect the rooms at once?"

No; the gentleman had business at the little village of Moreton, some three miles farther on, whither he intended

proceeding by the coach which had conveyed him so far on his journey; he would return, however, to Brenslow that night, and begged that in the interim apartments might be prepared for him; he would also leave his luggage in the charge of his landlord; and having done so, and relieved himself of all his valuables, except the japanned case, he once more ascended to his place behind the coachman, and was speedily *en route* to the little hamlet known in those days by the name of Moreton, which was as pretty and romantic a village as could have been met with in the length and breadth of England.

At the extreme end of the hamlet arose the grey church tower, emblem at once of all which is most sad and most soothing in life; for who can look at the spire, pointing upwards from the house of God, without thinking of death—that, to the survivor, bitterest pang of existence—and of the better land, where those who parted in tears here below will meet in joy above? There it stood, silent and solemn, amidst the cares and passions which agitated the bosoms of those who dwelt within view of it, who worshipped within its walls; and amongst the resting-places of those who, after living their little day, had gone to their long home, and slept under its shadow—it stood there, towering above grey head-stones and freshly covered-up graves, backed by the pure blue sky of heaven, and the woods that bordered the domain known in the neighbourhood by the name of Briarton, the residence of General Ireby.

It was indeed a lovely evening in the golden summer-time, when the coach, which passed through the village on its way from Brenslow to the next large town, might have been observed dashing along under the shade of those ancient trees; dashing, as stage coaches were wont to do, as fast as four horses could travel along a level turnpike road.

The stranger who had engaged apartments at Brenslow

occupied the seat behind the coachman (the space beside that useful functionary being filled by a young gentleman from Oxford, who, however, seemed familiar with the country and its inhabitants), and for some time appeared to be so busily employed in not over-pleasant musings, as to take no notice of the scenes through which he passed; but as the vehicle approached Moreton, he roused himself from his reverie, and became interested not merely in the sights and sounds of nature, but also in the conversation carried on between the Oxonian and the coachman.

"The General is very ill, then," said the former, taking the cigar from his mouth, and looking over the broad fields and waving woods of Briarton, as if he thought the possessor of such a property could scarcely be so.

"Dying, sir," returned the man, touching up his near leader, by way of giving additional emphasis to the information thus conveyed; "dying—at least, I am told he is."

There was no reply for a moment: the young man, full of health, life, and vigour, looked again over the landscape, thoughtfully, as though he were considering what sort of sensation it must be to exchange lands, houses, wealth, and luxury, for the narrow and dark coffin; narrow and dark, no matter how covered over with the trappings and ornaments the rich like to heap on the last unwelcome resting-place of mortality; then he said, after he had considered this, and also what the heir must feel—

"It is a fine property. Reginald Ireby will spend more out of it than ever his father did."

"Yes," was the rejoinder; "for he's just as open-hearted as he's hot-tempered; he's a real fine young gentleman. It is a pity the General and his son have not agreed as well as they might of late days."

"So I understand," replied the Oxonian; "the heir played the owner before his time came, and the General did not approve."

"I don't know about that; but he spent more money than suited the old gentleman's taste. Young people will be young people; and what, when all is said, is the use of money, if it's not to be circulated? The old man, they say, is afraid of the estate being sold—passing out of the family: if all accounts be true, it is giving him far more concern than the state of his soul. He can't get better—the doctors have given their opinion that it's a mere matter of time; and Mr. Reginald is away shooting in Scotland, and the two young ladies are all alone nursing the General. He ought to come home, but I understand he can't think his father in such danger as he really is. The fact is, the old gentleman has been so long ailing that none of the family think there is anything more than usual the matter with him; but strangers see the difference, owing to not being with him every day, and they say he is *dying*." And having delivered himself of this, he pulled up at the door of the little village inn, where those who came to stop at Moreton alighted, and those who merely wished to refresh themselves with the worthy landlord's assistance descended also.

The traveller got down with the rest, but he neither crossed nor paused by the threshold of the village inn; he strolled over the green sward carelessly, like one whom curiosity more than business had induced to visit the place, and stopped at length by the gate of the churchyard.

How extraordinary it is that we never appear to have thoroughly seen a place till the graveyard has been visited by us! After we have held communion with the dead as well as the living inhabitants, we feel satisfied—our work is done, our object accomplished; we can depart whensoever we choose, without the disagreeable sensation haunting us that something has been left unfinished—some task only half performed.

Not on the lowly homes of the rustics, however, did the

stranger's eyes rest, but on the stately monument reared above the vault of the Irebys, where mouldered the ashes of the ancient possessors of Briarton; where the deceased wife of the present proprietor was interred; where he himself would soon be laid.

"And who next?" murmured the observer, musingly.

Apparently the question was capable of no satisfactory answer, for he kept repeating it to himself long after he had turned from the churchyard gate—long after he had inquired the nearest route to Briarton through the grounds, and had, in accordance with the directions he received, crossed a stile, and proceeded a considerable distance along a gravel walk, which led him at length into one of the loveliest gardens on which he had ever gazed.

About half an acre of the smoothest turf sloped gradually down to a little stream, across which a rustic bridge was thrown, leading in its turn to a similar spot of emerald. where was erected a tasteful summer-house. In the grass beds of various forms were cut filled with the rarest of exotics and the sweetest of our common flowers; baskets made of wickerwork and unbarked wood contained heliotrope, mignonette, and other plants of sweet perfume: the whole was hemmed in with grand old trees, that sheltered the spot alike from the storms of winter and the intense heat of summer.

A frown gathered on the brow of the man who surveyed all this, and a sigh escaped his lips, as, with arms folded on his chest, he stood regarding the evidence of wealth and culture; when, after a moment's pause, he turned gloomily away, he muttered between his teeth—

"*She* had nothing, I had nothing: they have been all in all."

With a cloud on his face he left the garden, and entered one of those long pleasant walks overshadowed by the

branches and dancing foliage of many trees, passed along it a little way, and then raising his head, found himself immediately in front of a simple residence—beautiful because of its very simplicity. It was, indeed, a spot where the summer seemed to come early and linger late; a place where peace and contentment—if such things be habitants of this earth—might have been supposed to dwell; and whilst awaiting admittance, or at least attention, the traveller looked over the smooth lawns and the landscape stretching far away; and the soft wind fanned his cheek and bore to his senses the perfume of all exquisite flowers, and the lowing of distant herds, and the chiming of village bells.

All was unavailing; Nature seemed, indeed, to have donned her fairest robes to captivate the wanderer, and yet the shadow only grew darker on his face as light and loveliness beamed more and more in hers.

"Is General Ireby at home?" he demanded, when a servant appeared in answer to his summons.

"Yes, sir—no, sir; that is, he is at home, but cannot be seen," was the reply.

"I merely meant, was he in?" rejoined the visitor, calmly.

"He is, sir."

"Then I must see him," was the reply.

"I assure you it is impossible," answered the man, who, concluding—it were useless to conjecture why—that the stranger was not one of his master's "set," delivered himself of this refusal in a manner that slightly irritated the stranger; "I assure you, sir, it is impossible: the General is very ill, confined to his bed, and no one, excepting the doctor and clergyman, and the young ladies, ever see him."

"You say he is very ill," persisted the traveller, in a cool, determined sort of way, which impressed even the pert footman with a feeling something akin to awe—"*very* ill?" he continued, laying a marked emphasis on the first word.

"Dangerously, sir," returned the servant.

"I have heard he is dying, is that true?" demanded his questioner.

The man glanced back, as though fearful the observation might have been overheard by anxious ears; then appearing reassured, he replied, in a confidential whisper, "Since you ask me, sir, I answer, that some people *do* say he is dying."

"I must see him, then, at once."

"What! sir, when he is dying?—at least," added the man, correcting this too positive form of expression, "as some fear."

"That is precisely the reason I desire an interview. Listen, my friend," continued the stranger, in a tone which implied anything rather than a friendly feeling towards any one. "I am not a person to be refused admittance by you. My business is urgent. See him I must, and will: if you assist me to do this, I will recompense you liberally, if not, I must find some other means of effecting my object."

The servant hesitated—apparently he was uncertain whether to shut the door in the visitor's face or to open it wide for him to enter; so whilst he was settling which course were wisest and best to pursue, he remained with it half closed, gazing with an expression partly perplexed and partly confused at the gentleman, who persisted on being shown into the apartment which only a few privileged persons were ever permitted to enter.

"Take this locket to your master," said the stranger, in a tone of authority, sliding at the same time a golden inducement into the man's hand; "and tell him that the present owner of it is waiting here, and must speak to him. Yes," he added, *sotto voce*, "*will* speak to him, though he were drawing his last sigh."

There are some who profess to have discovered the nearest way to a man's heart, and others who imagine that word of

mouth is the most direct route to his brain. With regard to the first proposition, it is unnecessary here to speak; but in reference to the last I beg, with due submission, to urge that, after all, the sound which most effectually convinces the reason of either man or woman is—money; and accordingly the footman, who five minutes before had considered the stranger a tiresome fellow, who was only "tormenting" to see the General, and must be got rid of by some means, was, by the magic touch of that little piece of gold, on which his hand instinctively closed, perfectly satisfied of the urgency of the business which caused him to desire an interview with his master, and the necessity which existed for him to obtain that interview immediately.

"If he pay so well," thought the man (not unnaturally), "why, the matter must be pressing, and no humbug about it;" and thus arguing, he asked the visitor to walk in, opened the door of a room, where he requested him to wait for a few minutes, and thus left him alone.

The apartment was a sort of boudoir, fitted up tastefully, yet, like everything else in and around the mansion, simply; the large bay window opened to the floor, two steps conducting from it to the grass and flowers beneath. There were a closed pianoforte, a harp, of which some of the strings were broken, an easel on which lay an unfinished drawing; some books, prints, and songs were scattered on the tables, a piece of embroidery, but just begun, had been thrown carelessly down on the couch placed near the pleasant window; but the stranger hardly did more than notice these details; his attention being riveted, the moment the door closed behind him, on a portrait which hung over the piano.

He drew near, nearer still, until at length, with arms resting on the instrument, he stood silently contemplating it.

He did not gaze at that face in admiration of its beauty, he did not look at it because of any affection for the original,

but he did contemplate it because he hated that woman—hated her in the depths of his soul, because he had never seen her, because he desired to stamp her every lineament on his memory.

He knew at once whom that portrait represented,—a person he had never known save in imagination; who did not now live in the house amidst the flowers and sunshine and trees, but rested in the family vault at Moreton, surrounded by the dark secrets of death and decay, in that last home where no one ever visited her, in that lonely charnel-house where beauty and deformity, rank and loveliness, wealth and poverty, are all at last equal; there she dwelt, for the woman was dead, and yet he hated her.

Yes; the proud eyes appeared to flash defiance back at him; the stately presence, the wonderful beauty, the waves of rich raven hair, the flush mantling in the otherwise colourless cheek, the small mouth—that seemed as though the next instant it would curl with scorn,—the exquisite upper lip,—ay, even the arched neck, the falling shoulders, the faultless bust and pure broad forehead, flung fuel on the fire burning so fiercely in his heart. Dust to him she was not: she was not a dead but a living enemy—an enemy in the past, in the present, in the future, throughout all time to come.

"Heavens! how beautiful!" he murmured; and his chest heaved with uncontrollable emotion, and he felt in his heart the hatred he had cherished towards that lady through years, when he had only imagined how lovely she was, treble in intensity when her painted image was thus presented to him.

"You wish to see General Ireby?" were the words uttered in a clear voice, which caused him to start and colour like a criminal. A young girl had entered the apartment, and glided so gently to his side, that, wrapt in contemplation of the portrait, he had remained unconscious of her approach; but

when she spoke, he turned and looked upon her with a feeling half of admiration, half of surprise. It had previously seemed to him that the chamber was solely tenanted by the stately lady who, with proud and supercilious eyes, appeared to survey the scene from her gilt frame—tenanted and filled so completely by *her*, that nothing so soft, so fragile, so feminine as Marian Ireby could find entrance into it.

He replied to her question in a conciliatory manner, very different from his ordinary one of uncompromising command: in truth, the girl seemed to have cast a spell over him, it was so strange to turn from contemplating the mother to look on the child; the one so unbending, so striking in her beauty, the other so appealing and feminine in her loveliness; the long fair curls half veiling the slender figure, the large purple eyes, the delicate complexion, the sweet mouth, which looked incapable of uttering any words save those of kindness; no wonder the abrupt appearance of such a vision charmed for an instant the stranger's rugged nature, and made him listen eagerly to the tones of that young, clear voice as she said, very sorrowfully—

"He is so ill that we fear to agitate him in any way; no one ever sees him besides my sister and myself, excepting one or two dear friends; therefore, before delivering your message, I have come to see if your business will not bear a little delay: my brother, we hope, will be home in the course of a few days, and——"

She raised her eyes to his face, and a flush came over hers, as she saw an expression of bitterness sweeping across it, like a black shadow over a previously fair landscape.

"My business *is* urgent," he somewhat curtly replied; "it is imperatively necessary for me to see General Ireby at once: were my message delivered to him, he would be the first to admit this. No one, not even you," he added, softening towards her a little again, "can prove a substitute for him."

Half reluctantly she turned to leave the room, but before she had reached the door, the stranger strode after her, and said in a low, hurried voice—

"Tell him this:—say the son of Margaret Maxwell *must* speak a few words to him;—say he has travelled far—across the ocean, over the land—to touch his hand, and cannot return without effecting his object."

It was hardly a dozen paces from the chamber where her dead mother's portrait hung to where her dying father was lying; and Marian gently opened the door of the latter apartment, and entered it.

Who amongst us has not, at some time or another, entered such a room, where guests once sat, and revelry once was held, and youth, and hope, and health all joined together to make the hours pass pleasantly; but where, in later days, when the hospitable owner has been struck by sudden illness or lingering disease, a bed has been hastily prepared, from which he can at first be easily carried into the fresh air, then into the next apartment, then to the open window, and finally to his grave? The handsome furniture is displaced, the guests have departed, the revelry is hushed: in a narrow bed the once active frame lies motionless; and it seems, in the darkness of the closed blinds or well-shaded lamps, as though the portraits ranged along the walls were looking grimly down on that wasted form, and speculating when it, like many of their originals, would depart, leaving no mark behind save that which endures through years, sometimes through centuries,—features traced with oil and paint on a piece of canvas.

"Papa!"

"Marian, my child."

She spoke so softly, that she had to bend quite close to him before he could catch her words.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you."

"I can see no one," he replied.

"I told him so; but he says his business is pressing and admits of no delay: he desired John to give you a locket, and say the owner of it asked a few minutes' conversation; and he begged me to add, that the son of Margaret Maxwell had 'travelled across the ocean and over the land to touch your hand, and could not return without having effected his object.'"

"The son of whom?" The General trembled so violently as his daughter pronounced those two words, "Margaret Maxwell," softly over again, that Marian grew quite alarmed at the agitation thus produced.

"Light! Marian; give me light, draw the curtain aside, my child; I—I must;—Merciful Providence! it is he." And the pale face flushed, and every muscle worked as if under the influence of some strong excitement.

"I must see him, Marian. He is there?—bring him here," he exclaimed, after a pause.

"Dear papa, you are not strong enough," she ventured to suggest, casting an appealing look for aid to her sister, who had stood regarding the scene with no small astonishment.

"Let me ask him to call again to-morrow?"

"Now, now I must see him!" replied her father. "Send him here at once; I must speak to him immediately, before night comes."

Which night did the General mean,—the one on which morning dawns, or that other which veils for ever all earthly things in obscurity? for him both were very near at hand—was he conscious of the fact?

Without another word, Marian withdrew to lead the stranger to her father's presence.

In silence they crossed the hall together, and opening the door of the sick-chamber, she bade him enter.

As the sound of their approaching footsteps struck on his ear, General Ireby said to his eldest daughter, "Constance,

I must speak to him alone; I will ring when I require you." Obedient to this command, she moved forward, and thus encountered the visitor as he entered.

He started when he beheld her, for it seemed as though the portrait in the other room had stepped down from its frame, and stood in all the pride of living beauty there before him. For a moment the real and the ideal swam confusedly before his eyes. The lady placed a chair by her father's bedside, and moved once again to leave the room. He did not sit down, but held the door open for her to pass out, watched her emerge from the darkened chamber into the well-lighted hall, and finally bowed ere he closed it after her. And thus they met for the first time, and passed and parted, not for the last; and thus we, in like manner, often meet and pass persons destined to change our fortunes for life, ignorant of the colour of the thread they are commencing to intertwine with the darkly-chequered web of our existence.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

THE soft evening light was excluded from the sick man's room by carefully-closed blinds and crimson curtains, which made all things seem for a moment, after passing from the pleasant boudoir and cheerful hall, to blend together in a sort of semi-darkness.

The stranger saw dimly, as in a dream, a couch, where

lay the man he had longed so earnestly to behold—there was the shadowy outline of something which turned, as if endeavouring to discern the face of the visitor; but failing in this attempt, General Ireby broke the silence by saying—

"You are——"

The tone thrilled to the heart of the younger man like the unexpected sound of some strange instrument; and as those two monosyllables came forth from that almost invisible form, and seemed, though spoken in a tremulous voice, to echo through the silent darkened chamber, the soul of the wanderer was touched, and kneeling down by the bedside and pressing his lips on the wasted hand, he answered, in accents tender almost as those of a woman—

"I am Delavelle Ireby, father—your son!"

What emotions passed over the faces of both no one may ever know, for no eye save that of Him who sees all things witnessed that meeting. His son,—his never before seen, never before met, never before spoken of, his so closely bound together by ties of blood, so loosely linked by the social chain, that for thirty-five years each had pursued paths wide almost as the poles asunder, without ever previously finding that chain draw them nearer towards one another.

They met to know, to see, to speak, to part: it is what we all do in our passage through life; but with them the whole drama was, so to speak, to be acted simultaneously. The curtain of separation, which had for so long a period debarred the parent and son from mutual intercourse, was at last raised, the incidents of a lifetime were to be narrated in a few brief sentences; they might look on one another for an instant, and then that other curtain, which some deem not so dark as absence on earth, was to fall betwixt the one and his almost unknown father; between the other and his newly-found son, the children who had always dwelt with

him since their birth,—from friends, light, and sunshine; for the curtain of time was soon to drop behind him who was so fast fleeting to eternity.

Darkness around, about them—the black shadow cast by the all-powerful conqueror, striding towards that shaded room, lying upon their hearts—a denser darkness hovering above them in the shape of an as yet unseen temptation! Thus they met! Ah! if they could then have parted; if death had entered and shrouded all material objects from the view and thoughts of one ere the demon crept into both their souls — ere that cunning voice was listened to which lures man imperceptibly to destruction—ere temptation was yielded to and became a sin!

"Light!"

For the second time on that summer's evening the dying man craved for light—light from the soft, peaceful sky, from the golden clouds amid which the sun was sinking to rest; it was not long ere it had been well for him, well for many another, if it had entered into his soul to pray earnestly for a stronger, surer light, from Him who alone can see and pity the blindness of our fallen race!

He wanted light to see his son, to notice every feature, to scrutinize the lines, and lineaments, and peculiarities of that face he had sometimes, though very rarely, pictured to himself.

Draw back the folds of the damask curtains, raise the blinds which exclude external nature from the eyes of him who ere long will have done with all terrestrial things for ever!

It is soon done, and the lids close for an instant on the pained eyes, dim with tears, half of weakness, half of pleasure, and once again Delavelle approaches the bed.

"Raise me up," said the parent; and his son obeyed, propping him up with pillows, supporting him with a stronger

arm than any which had for weeks past twined around him; then the thin hands took that bronzed face between them, and scanned it curiously; the dim eyes grew clearer gazing on that wayworn and world-stained countenance, which, to his imagination, softened, and changed, and altered as he gazed, till at length it seemed not that of a suspicious, struggling man, but of a lovely, trusting woman.

"You resemble your mother," said the General, at length; "you have her eyes and her mouth. Yes; I can trace the likeness;—though she was soft, and fair, and fresh, and you look rough, hard, and weary, I can trace it!"

Some unaccountable impulse caused the listener to raise those eyes, said to resemble his mother's, and, as he did so, they encountered, surveying him from the canvas, that proud gaze which had seemed to bid him defiance as he entered his father's apartment.

That lady's portrait was everywhere; now apparently taken in the first bloom and flush of youth, and afterwards, when years had only changed the character of her beauty, ere robbing her of a single charm.

Here she was again—that woman whom he so hated, who seemed to defy him, whose silent face appeared to regard him like an intruder in his father's house.

She was in every place in that house—on its walls, in the affections and memories of its inmates; she had dwelt there and exercised authority over the heart of its master; the family mausoleum held her mortal remains; an elaborate inscription recorded her virtues and her death.

Bitterly did these reflections move the gazer's soul.

What had been his mother's place in that home, where the proud beauty held sway? She had never seen it; where did her image dwell?

In one heart—in two, perhaps; certainly not in more.

Her face was lovely as that other, and yet no artist had

ever been employed to transfer it to his canvas. Where did she sleep? Under the grass of a quiet churchyard, thousands of miles away, they had laid her, broken-hearted, to sleep that long sleep from which her troubled spirit would never know awakening. What was her epitaph?

A few words graven on an old grey stone.

These reflections shot through his jealous heart quick as the electric fluid along the quivering wires, and caused Delavelle Ireby to answer, in a tone of reproach—

"Yes, when you first saw her, she was soft, and fair, and fresh; but ten long years of sorrow and neglect stole away her beauty, paled her cheek, destroyed the light of her eye, drew lines of care upon the once smooth face, wasted her form, destroyed her happiness, and carried her to an untimely grave.

"My face may well be rough, for I have been battling with the world since boyhood; it may well look hard, when my lot has been so far, so very far, from an easy one. I may well look weary, when I have never known, since she died, greater love than that bestowed by strangers, whom, like many another, I found kinder than my natural relatives; when no brother's voice ever sounded joyfully in my ear; when my mother so soon sank wearily into her lonely, humble grave; when no sister's hand ever pressed mine with love and sympathy; when, after thirty-five years spent amidst busy men, toiling, jostling, pushing, I meet my father for the first time."

When we are looking our last on a scene which has been very dear to us, it is on the farthest portion of the landscape our eyes dwell the longest and the most lovingly. We gaze on that remote spot till it grows clearer and clearer, and remains stamped indelibly on our recollection throughout all subsequent years; and so, in like manner, when standing almost on the brink of eternity, we turn back to review at a

glance the road we have travelled, the places where we have dwelt, the people we have known, the familiar haunts we are leaving for ever, it is not on the incidents of later years, it is not on the events of yesterday, that our imaginations fix their last lingering gaze, but on that far-off time, when life lay like a pleasant book still unread, unopened before us; when we dreamt not of the sad realities of the story we should have to pursue and weep over, and feel in our own persons, ere the volume of existence was, to us, closed for ever; it is not on the exciting period of struggling manhood, nor on the dark, dreary winter-time of our lives, that the eyes look mournfully back;—no: it is on that distant speck in the horizon, which, in spite of the intervening darkness, seems still lighted with a gleam of sunshine, that the last look of fond regret or of sickening despair is turned; and thus back, back, quick as thought, quicker than light, did General Ireby's memory carry him through the waste of prosperous and struggling years,—back from the loves, and the ties, and the cares of later times; back to a rustic stile, where, with the white hawthorn flowers drooping on her head, sat a village maiden, young, lovely, light-hearted, listening to the voice of one who had as yet seen merely the gay binding and gilding of that weary book all have to read, and read through to the very last page;—who believed in all things good, and fair, and noble;—in love, and friendship, and constancy, and deemed that change in a world full of nothing else was impossible;—who believed in affection lasting throughout time, throughout eternity;—who believed, and this was the most dangerous delusion of all, implicitly in himself.

And she believed in him—when she listened to him under the hawthorn; when she vowed in a little rustic church to love him, to cherish him, to obey him; when he put on her finger the golden circlet, which bound the heed-

less boy and thoughtless girl together; when, at his request, she kept their marriage secret, lest his prudent, worldly uncle, hearing of it, should disinherit the rash young husband; when he left her to seek fortune, fame, and riches on a foreign shore; when letters came rarely, and, at last, not at all; when friends looked coldly on the unacknowledged wife; when parents, with whom worldly matters had not prospered, bore her away to that remote land where news of him never came, where life was a blank to her, where inquiry and search, though made by him in years after she had sought the better shore, for the purpose of ascertaining if she were dead, if he were free, if the shackles of his youthful folly still bound him, came not in time to save her heart from breaking, nor to cheer the last minutes of existence;—through life, in death, she believed in him, thought him noble, true, affectionate, sick, dead—but forgetful or untrue never! She believed in him, and her son now returned to the country she once called home, to find him tended by loved children, the children of the proud stately lady who had succeeded the village beauty in the affections of his father.

"Delavelle," said that parent, looking into the face of his son, "I never thought to see you before I closed my eyes on this world for ever. I scarcely knew I had a second son living; indeed, I imagined you had followed your dear mother to the grave; I never hoped to give you my blessing ere I died."

"Hoped or feared, which is the correct expression?" asked the other, bitterly. "When men desire anything, they usually make some slight effort to accomplish their object. Did you ever make the smallest exertion to discover me—to ascertain positively whether I were living or dead? And yet I am your son, your eldest-born. I ought to have been much to you; but since my birth it has been my lot to be a

wanderer through the world, an outcast from your heart and home."

"Hoped is the right word," answered the General, in a weak, pleading voice; "hoped! for if, in times long gone, I did dread that knowledge of my marriage should reach my uncle's ears, and consequently kept that marriage a profound secret, I also at the same period loved your mother with the whole strength of my boyish soul."

"Loved her then, perhaps, as you loved another since," persisted his son, his glance instinctively turning to the portrait on the wall; "the great difference being that you felt for the last a more abiding attachment. Do not think, however," he added, hastily, "that I blame you for marrying again; do not think I am jealous of the place she and her children had, and have, in your heart;—no, no: I only mourn to reflect how, whilst my sainted mother was still on earth, you neglected and scorned her; how she died, broken-hearted, to the last, however, believing in your affection for her; how utterly uncared-for I was, whilst the children of your second marriage were reared in luxury and comfort;—I only mourn, I say, to think how little place she who gave up all for your sake really had in your heart; how completely her son was forgotten by you; how through long years, whilst I was utterly neglected, the proud lady and her children have been to you all in all."

"Spare me, Delavelle," said the old man, turning his weak eyes entreatingly on the stern face of his eldest-born. "It is easy to see the fault, it is impossible to know the palliating circumstances: some time, not just now, however, but some time, when I am less agitated, I will tell you all; at present do not reproach me: I am ill and feeble, and cannot bear it: surely, surely, you did not come here merely to reproach me?"

"I did not; I came here with no such intention. I came,

as in years long past I vowed I would do, to touch your hand, to ask your blessing, to have you publicly acknowledge me as your son; to request from you a certain document, which, while you were fighting your way to rank in India, and my mother, unconscious whether you had sunk a victim to the climate or the sword, was dying in America, she would have given much to possess for my sake; I came to have this simple act of justice done to me and mine, intending then to depart, and trouble no one further with my unwelcome presence."

"Not unwelcome," murmured the father, speaking slowly and in broken sentences; "not unwelcome. I always meant to do you justice, always; but first the dread of losing this property kept me silent, then I heard it was believed you were dead, then other ties did twine tenderly around my heart, and your very existence was so much a matter of doubt and uncertainty, the probabilities tending so greatly towards the supposition of your early decease, that I thought there was no use in making public a matter which had, through many years, never been suspected, and which, as I conceived, could by no possibility benefit any living being.

"But when," he added, after a pause of exhaustion, "my health began to fail, as it did some three years since, when life hung by a very uncertain thread, when day by day I felt my strength decreasing, and my infirmities growing greater, I began to reflect more than I had ever previously done on the subject of my early marriage; and, as no positive proof of your death had ever reached me, I thought it only right to insert a clause in my will, bequeathing to you, if alive, the sum of six thousand pounds, at the same time acknowledging you to be my eldest son."

Delavelle Ireby at this intelligence bowed his head, and, rising, walked to the window, from which he gazed over lawn and plantation, whilst the expression of his face became pain-

ful to contemplate; it was at once defiant, mortified, proud and contemptuous.

When he returned to the bedside he was calm again, however, and said carelessly—

"What is the rent-roll of this Briarton property?"

"About three thousand per annum," returned the General, who was greatly exhausted with so much conversation, and who did not precisely see the object of the question.

"Humph!" said his son; then, after a moment's reflection, resumed, in his usual manner: "I am glad you acknowledged me in the deed to which you refer; glad you did that act of justice spontaneously—of your own free will. With regard to the legacy, thank God, I am not in want of money, and shall not accept the sum you named just now; add it to your daughters' fortunes; leave it to your youngest son to embellish this house; bequeath it to the suffering poor or to deserving charities; in one word, do what you like with *it*, so long as you receive *me* as your son; that is all I ask, expect, or require: a few thousands, more or less, is a matter of the utmost indifference to me."

"What! are you rich, then?" demanded his father, surprise for the moment making him speak with rapidity and even with strength.

"Rich enough to retire and live comfortably," replied Delavelle, with some exultation; "rich enough to leave handsome fortunes to my children, and a handsome jointure to my wife: ay, rich enough, if need were, to buy Briarton. You asked no proofs of my identity, and I thank you for believing my bare assertion——"

"I needed no proofs," interposed the General, hurriedly; "the tone of your voice sounded like hers; it fell on my ear like the music of an instrument long mute, which time had changed, but not destroyed. I knew you were her son

by your voice. I am never deceived in a voice; I may be in a face, in a likeness, but never in that."

He had partially raised his head whilst he spoke, but when he concluded it dropped wearily back on the pillows, which his son arranged for him with a gentle hand. He saw the spirit was over-exerting the body, so he answered, in a gentle manner—

"I was going to say that, as you had received me at once as your son, the least I could do was to confide in you as a parent, and tell you briefly the history of my life; but I perceive that at present you require rest and repose. I will come again to see you—to-morrow, the day after, any time you please, and we can then talk more fully concerning these matters. When shall I return?—at the same hour to-morrow evening?"

"To-morrow, say, at twelve o'clock," returned his parent; "I am always a little stronger in the middle of the day. I shall be able better to understand you then;" and the thin hand eagerly clutched his son's, and retained it, whilst he murmured, "You will be quite sure to come back, quite?"

"I shall not fail," answered Delavelle; "to-morrow, at twelve."

As he passed from the house and crossed the green sward, over which he seemed to find some great pleasure in walking, a pair of anxious observers watched his figure, growing gradually more and more indistinct in the twilight. He was not aware that two pairs of eyes were strained after him as he retreated farther and farther from sight, till he had, in fact, passed from view altogether, and entered the long arched walk which conducted him to the pretty garden; nor was he conscious that as the girls turned away from the windows, where they had stood with arms twined around each other, Marian Ireby said to her sister—

"Is it not very strange, Constance? I wonder who he is?

To which Constance replied, "It is most unaccountable. I feel uneasy about it, though I can scarcely tell why: I will write to Reginald to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST AND SECOND WIFE.

WHILE General Ireby lies restless and feverish on his sick couch, thinking over the interview with his son, and Mr. Delavelle Ireby is moodily retracing the three miles of turnpike road intervening betwixt Moreton and Brenslow, it may not prove altogether uninteresting to ascertain the precise amount of truth contained in the assertions both gentlemen had made to each other during the progress of the conversation recorded in the last chapter.

How rarely in life is the unvarnished truth told to mortal ears; how very seldom do men whisper it even to themselves!

It may be (who amongst us would willingly disbelieve such to be the case?) that at the bottom of that unfathomable well, the human heart, the precious gem is lying; but, unhappily, so many falsehoods are heaped on the top of it; so many jarring interests and false views of expediency choke up the fountain from which it ought to gush clear and bright; so much which turns out subsequently to be but worthless tinsel instead of pure gold is palmed upon us in its place; that at length we almost come reluctantly to admit

the idea, either that truth has forsaken her old haunts altogether, or that she sleeps so very far down that it is merely waste of time looking for her.

Some of the facts advanced by General Ireby were then perfectly correct; but others of his assertions were mere fictions, in which he had, by dint of frequent repetition to his own conscience, come to believe implicitly. As to the residue, they were invented under the spur of excitement, agitation, and his son's reproaches.

In the course of many subsequent interviews he told Delavelle such a tale as he fondly believed would convince his eldest-born that, let who else be faulty, he was not; but as that narrative, half fictitious, half authentic, by no means imposed on his son's understanding, it may prove more expedient to take the General's statements to pieces, and see where the correct portion ended and the fabulous commenced.

It was quite true, then, that he had, as he said, loved Margaret Maxwell fondly; quite true that dread of his uncle's displeasure had induced him never to divulge his marriage; quite true that he imagined his son to be dead; quite true that he was rejoiced to see him, to lay his hand over the dark brown hair which curled thick and close on his broad forehead, to think that tall, stately, independent-looking man was his first-born.

But when he asserted that he had loved the village maiden with the whole strength of his boyish soul, General Ireby was either oblivious to, or unconscious of, the fact that something lay far closer to his heart than love for wife, child, relative, friend, fair dealing,—and that something was Briarton.

For it he had almost unconsciously courted and flattered and yielded homage to his uncle; for it he had forsaken the girl he had secretly married; for it he braved the rigours of an Indian climate; for it he fought and won renown; for it

he toiled and slaved and suffered; and he had gained at length the rich reward—for Briarton was his.

Does this seem to you unnatural, reader? Do you deem it impossible for anything inanimate to twine itself so closely around a man's affections?

Look around your circle of acquaintances, and see if you cannot discover a parallel instance of love of property. Look around—penetrate the secrets of your neighbours' homes, and think yourself fortunate, if no broad acres, or hoards of gold, or darling mania of some sort or other, is hugged closer to the heart of the individual you love best on earth, than yourself—beautiful, or talented, or fascinating though you may be.

"Delavelle," said the father to his son, as he lay on his dying bed, and addressed a few parting words to the boy destined in after years to become a General, "Delavelle, I have little but my blessing to leave you, my child; my blessing, and a piece of advice you will do well to remember—never offend your uncle. His property, though a little embarrassed, is a fine one. You will find it a deal easier to step, when he dies, into possession of Briarton, than to earn, in any profession, or by any amount of cleverness, the wherewithal to buy such another estate. Your uncle has promised to be a father to you when I am gone. Remember my dying words—never offend him, Delavelle."

Perhaps Delavelle might have been altogether a happier and a better man if he had not possessed so accurate a memory. Be that as it may; he went home to Briarton, and never, during the many years Mr. Ireby lived and kept him, as he considered, out of the estate, openly did anything likely to irritate that worthy gentleman.

His uncle had a respect for the military profession; so Delavelle became lieutenant, by purchase, *vice* Gordon retired. He was a mere boy when, radiant with joy and pride,

clad in scarlet, and glorious with epaulettes, a sash, and a sword, he surveyed himself in a mirror; a mere boy when he found himself almost alone in desolate country quarters, where he had ample leisure to persuade Margaret Maxwell, who resided at an old-fashioned farmhouse some three miles or so from his quarters,—to pursuade her, and, for that matter, himself too, that he was fonder of her than of aught else on earth, and that his affection would last for ever.

He had plenty of leisure to walk, day after day, over to the stile, where she might frequently have been seen in those sweet sunny days, when the hawthorn was white with perfumed blossoms, and her heart as free from care as that of the bird whose song sounded in her ear. He had plenty of leisure to persuade her to marry him; to keep that event secret from her parents; plenty of leisure to convince her he would be true till death, and that he loved her more than anything else on earth; plenty of leisure and eloquence to picture how happy they would be when his uncle died, and she was mistress of the estate he so frequently described to her; plenty of leisure, moreover, to detect, after a time, so many little faults of manner, such a lamentable deficiency of education and cultivation, so many inaccuracies of language and grammar, — so many wants, in one word, by no means desirable in the bride of an Ireby,—that he felt uncommonly relieved when orders came hurriedly down for the regiment to embark for India, and bade farewell to his wife, wishing from his soul he could as easily shake off the burden of matrimony as he could her.

Margaret bid him farewell with an almost breaking heart. She attributed the alteration in his manner to grief at leaving her, his friends, his home, his country. To her he seemed the same as ever. Dreaming not of change or coldness herself, it never entered into the unfortunate girl's brain to conceive that his feelings were altered towards her. No; she

was spared that pang; but still it was a dreadful trial to see him depart to that far-off shore where she might not follow; to be left so utterly desolate. It seemed almost as though the sea over which he was to pass resembled the dark gulf separating time from eternity; and in effect these forebodings proved correct; for on this side the grave they were destined never to meet again.

He went forth to win a name, and to make out a clear title to Briarton; went forth with a heavy heart in a young bosom—a fettered man, an unconfessed husband. Perhaps he may have had some vague ideas of doing ample justice to the foolish girl he had foolishly wedded; but if so, those ideas were indeed so very vague that they never acquired a definite form. Amid the dissipation of Indian quarters, in the heat of battle, in the pride and excitement of victory, he forgot the ties which bound him, and felt occasionally free.

Letters came frequently, more frequently by far than he desired, from Margaret. One amongst the earlier ones told how sickness and bad seasons, and much care and sorrow, had fallen heavily on her parents; how she had told them of her marriage, and how they had mourned because of the unequal union; how the clergyman who had united them was dead, and how inopportunely that event had occurred; how they were all leaving England for America, she accompanying her parents because no other home was open to her; how anxiously she should expect a letter from him.

She did not add how fervently she prayed for his return; how she loved him; how much she had suffered for his sake. She did not tell him that nothing but her maddened entreaties had prevented her parents going to his uncle and divulging all. She did not tell the reproaches they had heaped on her head; all she had patiently endured. She did not say that her heart was breaking; and yet all this

was true, though the sole return she asked for her long love and great suffering was a speedy answer.

He was so glad to hear she was leaving England that he gave her this: a letter short indeed, but fond and affectionate, Margaret thought, as she read it under the shade of a forest in the far West, thousands of miles removed from the man who wrote it.

For some time longer she continued to receive answers to her badly-spelt and wretchedly-written epistles; epistles that nevertheless had more of genuine womanly feeling and intrinsic goodness contained in them than could be detected in many an effusion which Delavelle prized just as highly as he despised the others; but at length, like angels' visits in former times, they came rarely, and finally, like angels' visits in these later days, they came not at all.

For Delavelle Ireby, being dangerously wounded in a battle in which he gained his fourth step, was borne from the field to the tent of a brother officer, where he lay for some time hovering betwixt life and death. Recovering, however, almost by a miracle, he at last rallied sufficiently to be removed to his friend's house, where, during the course of a long and most tedious illness, he was nursed by Constance Winston, the loveliest and the proudest beauty who ever captivated an impetuous Colonel.

Delavelle was a Colonel now, and Constance Winston did enslave him completely. He left her father's house, after days, weeks, months of sickness, a changed and sorrowful man; and from the hour when her dark eyes first rested on him, he wrote no more to Margaret, his wife, the mother of his child, who, after years of silent suffering, did what is the best thing for a woman to do under such circumstances, viz., die, as Ireby, to his immense relief, learned when he came home for the last time on sick leave from India,—a General, the intended husband of Constance Winston, and the owner

of Briarton, which his uncle bequeathed to him with his blessing.

This was, then, the mode in which he fulfilled his just intentions, if indeed he had ever actually entertained any with regard to his first wife. A word more with regard to his parental feelings, and this somewhat tedious though necessary digression may be concluded.

For many years after his second marriage General Ireby, when he thought about the matter at all, believed his eldest son to be dead, and was perfectly content that it should be so: the memory of that boyish folly was insupportable to him; the reflection of how much he had nearly lost by rushing heedlessly into a marriage with one so far beneath himself in rank positively made him tremble; he was perfectly content that mother and child should both be sleeping in their graves; and having obtained proofs of the demise of the first, he was willing to receive the decease of the latter on mere hearsay: it relieved him from all further responsibility; and he quieted his conscience during almost one-third of the portion of time allotted to man, by such scraps of consolation and specious arguments as persons whose principles are by no means of the highest description commonly employ with great success on such occasions.

Meanwhile, trouble, though it had not altogether overlooked his dwelling, had on the whole dealt leniently with it. His beautiful wife was laid in her coffin, some fourteen years after their union, it is true, and General Ireby mourned passionately for her loss: when her dark eyes were closed for ever in death, when her musical voice was hushed into silence, when he turned from the family mausoleum at Moreton, and re-entered his once happy home, it seemed to him for a time that the sun had ceased to shine on earth, that from thenceforward life was a blank to him; that the light which had cheered and irradiated his whole existence was

quenched and shrouded in darkness. But time, at once the universal consoler and the universal destroyer, brought comfort as it sped by. Briarton was left to him: thanks to the extravagance of former possessors, it had come into his hands so heavily mortgaged, that though the nominal rent-roll was three thousand a year, almost two-thirds of that amount was annually swallowed up in payment of interest.

To clear the estate had become, in one word, the object of his life; and at length, by dint of economy, management, and prudent financial arrangements, he contrived to lessen the debt by one-half. The whole of his wife's fortune, not, it is true, a very large one, bequeathed to her some years after marriage by a distant relative, was devoted to this purpose; but to this arrangement she never objected, for the property was to go to Reginald, her only and darling son, and portions for the girls were to be secured upon it. General Ireby persuaded her, ay, and himself too, that it was for the ultimate good of his children he was labouring so incessantly, and she implicitly believed him; and it never entered into the minds of either that Briarton was dearer far to him than Reginald, or Marian, or Constance, and that time, which reveals all things, would prove this to have been the case.

Briarton, then, comforted the General when his wife died —Briarton and his children,—for he was in the main a tender and an indulgent father. He loved Reginald devotedly, as the future possessor of the place: he was proud of the grace and beauty of his daughters; and they were a very happy and a very united family;—until Reginald grew up, and the General ill; until, as the Oxonian who sat beside the London coachman remarked, "the heir began to play the owner before his time;" until the son became rebellious, and the father, perhaps, a little despotic; until the time arrived when the young man required more money to spend than his parent was either willing or able to give him; until he commenced

contracting debts, which General Ireby was reluctantly compelled to pay; until, in a sentence, jarring interests arose between them, and quarrels became the rule and peace the exception.

This state of warfare commenced some three years before the scene narrated in the last chapter; commenced, indeed, about the same period as that fixed by General Ireby in speaking of the circumstance to his eldest son, when, as he said, he "began to reflect more on the subject of his early marriage than he had ever previously done;" and during the course of his frequent musings on that event, a sort of dim flickering idea crossed his mind, that *if* his first-born had not died, *if* he had sought him out and given him a son's place in his father's home, it might perhaps have been better for all parties; for the General, whom Reginald, sure of the property, thwarted and annoyed and disobeyed perpetually; for Reginald himself, who, with this sort of check constantly near to remind him his prospect of Briarton was by no means certain, might have turned out a more thoughtful and less extravagant young man; for the eldest son, concerning whom, now that he was offended with Reginald, and that he saw death stealthily drawing near unto him, General Ireby was beginning to have some qualms of conscience; and finally—and this influenced his ideas on the matter more than any other consideration could have done—might it not have proved better for Briarton if it had been possible for him to leave it to one of two sons; to that one, in fact, whom he deemed best worthy of so great a treasure, and who would, moreover, be likely to take good care of the precious inheritance?

It was in this mood of mind that General Ireby made the will and testament to which he referred when speaking to Delavelle, in which he devised and bequeathed to a son whom he more than half believed to be dead, the inheritance of six thousand pounds, with which princely bequest he

thought to atone for years of neglect;—for the broken heart of his first wife; for the utter indifference and heedlessness he had shown with regard to her child.

"If the boy be actually living," murmured the General, —"if he be actually living, this sum will be quite a fortune for *him;* and if he be dead, why, there is no harm done; it reverts to Reginald; and if the hairbrained youth have any sense or judgment left, he will pay off so much of the mortgage with it. Stay, I will insert a special clause to that effect in this instrument;" and so saying, he took up his pen again, and completed a long rambling will, which would have furnished many a point for lawyers to disagree upon, had any one ever come forward to dispute the document with Reginald, which no one ever did.

With all these contending interests, feelings, and emotions agitating him, whilst a slow, wasting disease weakened the powers of his mind on all subjects save one, and that one Briarton, General Ireby received his first-born. How that individual came to see his father, it is only fair to permit him to explain; but as already so much has been said with regard to the self-deception wherewith General Ireby imposed on his own understanding, and endeavoured to impose in like manner on that of his son, it is necessary to add, that when Delavelle Ireby stated he was not jealous of the place that Constance Winston and her children held in the heart and the home of his father, he merely used one of those conventional phrases which sound well, and are in reality perfectly false; which people who employ them almost believe to be true, and which they imagine are received in the same spirit by those who listen to them, but which, after all, in the end deceive nobody.

When a lady is jilted or deserted by a gentleman who subsequently marries another, it is not against the real offender that the fair one's wrath is bitterest; it is rather

directed towards the innocent individual who has succeeded to his affections, and retained a firmer hold upon them than herself; and just so, though Delavelle Ireby knew perfectly well that, from first to last, long years before General Ireby ever looked on the face of his second wife,—long years after he had made her his bride,—he, and he alone, the real criminal,—it was more against the dead lady and her living children that Delavelle Ireby's hatred, indignation, and revenge were excited, than against the man who had deserted his mother, and left him, as he said, in the bitterness of his spirit, "to toil, push, and jostle through the world for thirty-five years."

When he said he "did not blame the General for marrying again—that he was not jealous of the children who had shared his home and his heart—that he only mourned," and so forth; there was just as much truth in these assertions as there is (to revert once again to the case of the deserted lady) when a young creature, who has been engaged to some faithless swain, declares, with a sob, on learning that he is about to lead to the altar some new flame, "that she hopes from her heart they may be happy,"—a thing she knows perfectly well she does not do, and a wish which, perhaps, it is impossible for any daughter of Eve to utter with even the faintest semblance of sincerity.

Delavelle Ireby, however, refreshed by a sound morning sleep after a night spent in wild plans and unformed desires, is on his way back to Briarton to tell his tale. Surely it is deserving of a new chapter.

CHAPTER V.

NEW VIEWS.

On the occasion of his second visit, no self-important footman or anxious daughter delayed Delavelle from entering his father's apartment. As on the preceding evening, Constance was desired to leave General Ireby and the stranger alone; once again she swept gracefully by him, once again he held the door open as she passed out, once again their eyes met as she did so, and the glance of those beautiful orbs sent a fierce, painful sensation quivering to her brother's heart.

"She does not know that I am her brother, then," he thought, as he bowed stiffly in answer to her quiet salutation. "She knows nothing, in short, about me; so much the better, so much the better."

And, as the last words were mentally pronounced, he took his parent's hand in his, and inquired how he was, how he had rested, how he felt; whereupon the General answered he had slept badly, and felt very ill.

"But still strong enough to hear your story, Delavelle," he continued. "I long to hear it: do not fear exciting me, I am quite calm now."

"You know how and why my mother, your first wife, left England," commenced his son, without further preamble; "you are aware she with her parents sought that distant land which is a land of promise to some and of death to others: it proved the latter to them. You have heard all this."

General Ireby made a gesture of assent, and he proceeded:

"Let me not, then, speak of her, for at the very mention of her name my heart throbs angrily, and words rise to my lips which ought not to be uttered here. The grass has, for a quarter of a century, been growing green on her grave; summer winds have swept over it, winter snows have covered

it; let her rest in peace! Thank God, she has long been sleeping quietly!" The voice of the strong man trembled either with tenderness or some less soft emotion as he pronounced these last words, but he quickly recovered his self-possession, and resumed:

"I came here to speak of my own struggles, not of her wrongs: let me refrain from touching on them, for when the grave has closed over its victim the time for justice and atonement has passed away for ever, though an eternity of years may lie before the survivors for repentance. Before she died she gave me a packet of letters, which I promised should never be read by me till some seven or eight years had passed over my head: you who knew her gentle character and—well, well, no matter what else—can perfectly understand the motives which induced her to exact this promise from me: she knew if you were dead their contents could not avail me; she feared, if you were living, that injudicious friends might appeal to your uncle for aid; she hoped, perhaps, when you heard of her death, you would seek out her son and take better care of him than strangers were likely to do; and that, in a father's house, those papers might, in subsequent years, be perused. God only knows what were her precise views on the matter, only, woman-like, she gave me the letters as a sort of sacred bequest—gave me them and her blessing, and died.

"Still a mere child, I went forth to battle with the world. I left the village in which she ended her days, or rather friends sent me from it, into the nearest city, hundreds of miles away, where I was apprenticed to an honest trade at a tender age; apprenticed so young, because I was in the world so desolate, and soon fell sick. Being reduced by that long illness almost to the grave, it was reported I was dead; some chance traveller carried the news of my decease back to the hamlet whence I had come; the false intelligence, it

appears," he added, with a bitter smile, "was wafted across the wide Atlantic, and from thenceforward all search, all inquiries for me ended: what, after all, is the use of searching for a person hoped and believed to be dead?

"I was not dead, however,—I recovered; very slowly, it is true, but still I did recover. My master was a just and a good man; he educated me, he taught me a trade, by which many a one would have stuck through life, making an honest living by his expertness; he treated me in the main kindly, and years flew by as no years have ever flown since, and I was a tall stripling, and the time specified by my poor mother during which her packet was to remain unopened had expired, and I was free to read and learn my history.

"It was night when I sat down to peruse those papers which I had always regarded superstitiously, as a sort of spell—a charm; the contents whereof, when known, were destined to change the current of my whole existence.

"It was night, as I said, when, still a boy, a stripling, I opened that mysterious packet; morning's light found me still poring over it, a changed being—a man.

"I had always been proud; always had vaguely desired to be a something beyond a mere artificer; had sometimes dreamt of going forth, fighting my way up with the best, achieving some victory over fate; but now these imaginings assumed a definite form: I had previously wanted an object; it was supplied to me; and from that day forth I have pursued that object without cessation.

"My heart was not with my work; I was ill, I was almost insane: night came to soothe and tranquillize, but I tossed about uneasily for hours and hours.

"Years have passed away since then; years of struggle and endurance; years of comparative prosperity and rich reward; days of anxiety and toil, nights of restlessness and dissatisfaction; boyhood has gone from me like a dream of

the morning; new hopes, new desires have arisen; but nothing, no one event of my life is so strongly impressed on my memory as the opening of that packet of letters; no period of my existence can I recall so vividly as that day and that night after I learned my history.

"At length my resolve was taken: it came into my mind as the knowledge of genius arrives to some,—almost in an instant; and starting from the bed where I had lain for some hours sleepless and feverish, I made a vow to which from thenceforth I adhered unceasingly.

"It was made while scalding tears of wounded pride and mortified feeling moistened my cheeks; it was made under the influence of bitter anger and mortification; pride and anger dictated it, but strong resolution spoke it—spoke it to the silent moon, to the passionless stars, in the solitude and quietness of night; and I swore, so help me God! to keep it."

The strong man was speaking now as the passionate boy might then have done, with clenched hands and a quivering voice. He arose, paced about for a few minutes, but observing how much his agitation affected his parent, he resumed his seat, and quietly proceeded—

"Pshaw! I am talking now like an impetuous youth instead of what I am. I will tell you what that vow was: to toil through years, half a lifetime, if that period were necessary to effect my purpose, to amass wealth; to hoard it, to treasure it, to increase it; to add shilling to shilling; to make shillings pounds; to trade, to prosper, to become rich, the possessor of thousands; and then—why, then to return to England; if you lived, to insist that you should acknowledge your son, who did not want to crave charity, but who came a man of substance, demanding a mere act of tardy justice to be done to him; if you were dead, to succeed to your name and position.

"How I accomplished my purpose, it were but waste of time to tell; for the story of every one who has risen from poverty to affluence by diligent application and successful speculation is pretty similar. I amassed wealth, it is true; and what was, perhaps, more,—what made me persevere in my design, what endued me with strength to overcome and ability to achieve,—I learnt wisdom, I gained knowledge.

"Whilst you believed me dead, or had forgotten that such a being ever existed, I had constant intelligence of you: almost the secrets of your home were revealed to me. I learnt how a new attachment had completely banished *her* memory from your heart; I heard of the beauty—the matchless beauty—of your wife, of the loveliness of her children, of the domestic felicity which only ended with her death, of the love you lavished on the boy destined to become your heir; finally of your failing health: then I felt my coming ought not longer to be delayed. With my wife and children, —for I, the neglected child, the poor apprentice, had married well, according to the estimation of this world, and well also according to a more rational interpretation of the word,—with those who were dear unto my heart, with money, a standing, a name high in the commercial world, I embarked from the shores of that land where my mother's remains are lying, for that country she had tenderly loved,—resolved to accomplish my purpose, to ask you to acknowledge as your son the man who from his birth had been unto you as an alien, an unregarded stranger, whose very existence had not been deemed a fact worthy of accurate investigation.

"At length I set my foot on English ground; I travelled from Liverpool to London; I merely paused there to arrange a few pecuniary and business matters, and finally I am here.

"Such is my history. I do not come with the intention of taking one shilling from you; as I said last night, thank God, I am not in want of money. Leave Briarton to your

second son; I hear he is a spirited, generous lad. Give whatever you can spare from the property to your girls; beautiful they are, Heaven knows, beautiful as angels; but still, fortunes may enhance and never will mar their loveliness. Leave all to them: they have shared your heart, why should they not divide your substance? I am rich and independent; they have nothing, and are dependent on you: a few thousands may be a matter of moment to your daughters, if not to Reginald, but it would be nothing to me. No; all I want, all I ask, is that you do me tardy justice;—acknowledge me; say, 'This man is my son; these are my grandchildren.' For this, I have toiled; to hear this one sentence spoken, I have amassed wealth; for this, I have crossed the Atlantic; for this I have told you my story. I came here to touch your hand, to obtain this one boon—receive the first and last paternal blessing,—and then to go hence, for ever!" and, as he uttered the last words, Delavelle Ireby crossed his arms on his chest, and relapsed into moody silence; silence as profound as his speech had been vehement.

He spoke the truth when he employed the word, "came," for he had come, with a heart full of anger and bitterness, to his father's home, intending merely, as he said, to obtain one boon, and then to depart, to go thence for ever. But a change was already passing over his soul: as the desire which, for years, had incessantly devoured him was on the eve of gratification, a new one, as yet unperceived, was silently arising to supply its place; but, for so far, he was unconscious of this fact. He mistook the nature of his own feelings: he deceived himself—he deceived his parent, but he spoke what he sincerely believed, or imagined, to be the simple truth.

Both remained silent for some time; then General Ireby broke the stillness by saying—

"And so, Delavelle, you have children?"

"Yes, sir; two boys, one girl."

"Their names——"

"The eldest is called Henry, after my wife's father; the next, a daughter, we christened Margaret; the third we baptized Delavelle."

"So that name is not likely to die out in the family just yet," remarked the General, with a faint yet pleased smile.

His son assented to this with a mere inclination of his head: he had called the child Delavelle, at his wife's desire, after himself, most assuredly not from any love he bore his parent.

But the fact that the boy was so christened seemed to gratify the General, who never referred nor alluded in any way to the tale his son had told him, though not a syllable of the narrative was lost upon his attentive ear. He continued to talk about the children; he learnt that the eldest was delicate, and the youngest a mere infant; he asked the amount of their mother's fortune; he inquired, in his feeble voice, concerning many particulars concerning which Delavelle was glad to afford him information; he rested for a time, and then spoke a little more, or listened whilst his first-born spoke; in short, the father and the son, the long estranged, the suddenly united, were rapidly becoming more than reconciled to each other, they were becoming united—oh! dangerously united on one point: what that one point was speedily became apparent; but ere time developed what was passing in their hearts many days stole rapidly by, during which the General sank gradually, while Delavelle Ireby remained still unacknowledged, and stayed at Brenslow, from whence, morning after morning, in that glorious September time, he walked over to Briarton, and thought, at each succeeding visit, that the place grew lovelier and lovelier, and that it would be a very pleasant thing to own such a property, and call it home; and although he was so

very rich, Mr. Ireby began to consider, in a sort of half-dreamy way, that more wealth would prove by no means an encumbrance, and that two thousand per annum would be a very snug addition to his present income; and, in fine, he came to the conclusion many a man under similar circumstances might have arrived at, namely, that after all it was rather unfair he, an elder son, a married man, a father, a person of judgment, sense, and experience, should be cut out of an estate by a wild, extravagant, heedless boy, such as on all hands he understood Reginald to be.

And the General, lying in that darkened chamber, with a darker eternity glooming before, and the world fleeting from him, began to ponder plans for the better preservation and great extension of Briarton—Briarton, which was destined to be to him, ere long, as though it had never been; which was fated to prove a bone of contention to many a one whom he left behind him, throughout years and years, long after he had passed to that shore where years are counted not.

And day after day Constance Ireby and her sister Marian saw the stranger come and go; a mystery in their home, where all had previously been frankness and unreserve, at least to their apprehension; already it seemed as though divided interests and strange thoughts were crossing the threshold of that once happy house. Well, indeed, might the girls wonder and marvel concerning their father's visitor; well might they tremble, though they scarce knew why, for coming events were casting their shadows darkly before them, and coming evils were gathering quickly around those who had for so many years dwelt peacefully in that pretty house surrounded by trees and fields, flowers, sunshine, and happiness.

Time flew rapidly by; time, which was bringing the dying man close to eternity; and many new plans became de-

veloped in his mind, and many new desires had arisen in the heart of Delavelle Ireby; and the former persuaded himself his plans were justifiable and desirable, and the latter came gradually to perceive whither his vague wishes were tending, and to believe they were capable of accomplishment; and thus matters stood, when one day the General opened his mind wholly and completely to his son—that is, wholly and completely as regarded his fears for the loss of Briarton, but with some circumspection so far as his projects for its future preservation were concerned.

"There are two things which trouble me, Delavelle," remarked the parent, in continuation of a conversation he had been previously holding with his rich first-born; "two things which disturb my mind greatly, more than any one knows—more than any one can imagine."

Had this speech been the introduction to a death-bed confession of fraud, murder, or robbery, it could not have been made with greater appearance of distress, nor could Delavelle Ireby have listened to it with greater sympathy and interest.

He knew perfectly well what one at least of those points was; but he inquired, artlessly—

"And what are those matters which affect you so deeply?"

"Reginald and my daughters," answered the General, with a deep sigh.

"Reginald and your daughters? Why," added Delavelle, with some hypocrisy, "I understood the former was all the fondest parent could desire; handsome, liberal; quick-tempered, perhaps, but easily appeased; clever, well educated, gentleman-like, with some accomplishments befitting his station and expectations; and as for the girls, I have seen them, and——"

"Stay!" interposed his father; "you misunderstand my meaning. Constance and Marian are beautiful and good, as

you imagine; and as for Reginald, the boy is well enough, though, perhaps, a little wilful and obstinate; he was always over-indulged; but, considering his education, his training, and my inconsiderate folly in gratifying his every desire, he is well enough; still, when all is said, he is little more than a boy; and—and the fact is, Delavelle, he is so extravagant, so prodigal of money, that I greatly fear he will soon squander his income, sell Briarton, and finish by leaving himself and his sisters positively penniless."

It was singular that such a mournful picture as this, presented, too, so suddenly for his consideration, should cause a smile to flicker for a moment over Delavelle's face; the General did not perceive it, however, for the apartment was dark as ever, and besides, it had completely vanished ere his son replied somewhat coldly—

"It seems to me, this is a matter you should have considered years ago. Reginald is older now, not younger than when you made your testamentary dispositions: it would have been better had you then thought that life was always uncertain; that your tenure of it was by no means more to be relied on than that of others, old and young, rich and poor; it might have been well had it then entered into your mind to conceive that Reginald might enter into possession of Briarton before he grew very wise or very prudent, and that, in any case, it was but just to leave your daughters' fortunes totally independent of him."

"But that was impossible, quite impossible," rejoined his father, "unless a portion of the property were sold."

"Could their portions not have been secured upon it?" suggested Delavelle.

"So they are," returned the General; "but what difference does that make?"

"All the difference in the world, I should say," responded his son. "Perhaps I do not clearly understand your mean-

ing, but it really seems to me that if their fortunes are secured upon Briarton, they must in consequence be perfectly safe: surely it is good for twice twelve thousand pounds."

"Yes, but you do not seem to comprehend; you do not see precisely what I fear," answered the General, whose anxieties with regard to his daughters' portions were small indeed when compared with those which harrassed him respecting Briarton; "Reginald will first spend his own property; then he will run into debt; then he will get his sisters to sign away their claims on the place; and finally Briarton will be sold, and, as I said at first, he and they will be left positively penniless."

"Which proves what I said at first," maintained Delavelle, "that you should have thought of all this before, and secured their fortunes better; left them, in fact, beyond both his and their control."

"Well, well," retorted the General, "perhaps I ought to have done something of the kind; perhaps if I had thought of it, I might have left their money differently, though there were some difficulties and obstacles in the way. With regard to Constance, she is to marry Lord Bether's nephew, a fine young man who will probably succeed to his lordship's title and estate; perhaps they will look after Marian's interests and take care of her when I am gone; but, but—even if their money be saved out of the wreck, that will not prevent Reginald from selling Briarton; even if he do not reduce his sisters to beggary, he will squander his own inheritance, and leave himself without wealth, reputation——"

"Without Briarton, in short," interrupted Delavelle. "Well, perhaps he may, and I do not see how you could have worded the bequest so as to avoid such a consummation: you might have devised that the estate should not be sold; but it eventually would have been, or else so heavily mortgaged that Reginald's successor would never have thanked fate for the

legacy. Even had the place been entailed, he still could have raised money on it: like the properties in Ireland, the rent-roll would barely have paid the interest, and left the boy enough afterwards to buy a new coat yearly. No, I do not see that, entailed or unentailed, foreseeing or not, you could have managed to secure him from the consequences of his own imprudence; and so long as your daughters are not involved in the general ruin, there will be much cause for thankfulness."

"You seem to forget, Delavelle," said the father, "that had Briarton been entailed, *you* would have been the heir."

"So I should, I believe," returned his son, carelessly, and as though the idea had never previously occurred to him; "but as it is not entailed, Reginald gets it, and, I fortunately, am rich enough already not to envy him his inheritance, and consequently can say, Heaven send he may enjoy it!"

Silence reigned for a considerable period in the darkened chamber after the utterance of the above sentence, for the General was exhausted, and Delavelle did not care to disturb him, or interrupt his musings.

It was thus they always talked, eagerly, earnestly, at periods, with long pauses of repose between; when not speaking they thought; when they opened their lips, some portions of their meditations were communicated to each other.

"Delavelle," at length resumed the General, "did you not say you meant to buy an English property?"

"Yes, sir," returned the son with some asperity; "but as I desire to make an immediate investment, I fear I can scarcely promise to wait until Reginald thinks proper to offer Briarton for public competition. I should be very happy to do anything, any reasonable thing, I mean, which might gratify you, but——"

"No, no," interposed the General in a feeble voice; "I did not contemplate asking you to do that; but I was think-

ing that as there is a splendid estate to be sold joining my property, which would be a most desirable investment, perhaps you might purchase it: I assure you it is a most eligible place; and then, as it and Briarton lie together, as though they were in fact one domain——"

"I might in time make them actually so," said Delavelle, as his father broke off. "It is a very nice plan, certainly; but unfortunately it is by no means likely that, even if Reginald wishes to dispose of his inheritance, he will give it to me a bargain, though I am his brother; and I, being a man of business, and desiring a good per-centage for my money, should hesitate long before paying him a high price for Briarton; for, in spite of his being my brother, I might not feel inclined to provide him with the wherewithal to pacify importunate creditors or to gratify extravagant desires. No, had I not for years past laid out every pound to the best advantage, I might at this day have been a backwoodsman, a clerk, or a mechanic; I am not going to adopt a different policy now to that which has raised me from poverty to wealth; besides, I am scarcely my own master—for the sake of my children and my wife, I must be prudent; for their sakes, in fact, if not for my own, I must look well before I leap."

Again there was a pause, during which the General pondered over his son's words. Delavelle waited for a considerable period, to see if he would resume the conversation, but he did not; so the younger man rose to leave: ere permitting him to do so, however, his father said, in an imploring voice—

"I wish very much, I do, indeed, wish very much, Delavelle, you would buy that place."

"Show me any great advantage likely to result to me or mine from so doing, and I am willing to gratify your desire,' answered Delavelle.

"I will, I will," returned the old man in broken accents;

"but not to-day;—great advantages;—I will tell them to you to-morrow."

On the morrow the son and the father held a long and confidential conversation, the result of which was that the former stated he would become the purchaser of the desirable property adjoining Briarton, and that General Ireby expressed a desire to make a new will. And for that purpose he told Constance (at Delavelle's suggestion) to write a note to Robert Empson, Esq., Solicitor, Brenslow, requesting him to call early on the following morning, which note Constance penned, and dispatched to Robert Empson, Esq., by the hands of a footman on the very same afternoon, and the messenger brought back an imposing-looking letter, which contained three lines, stating the solicitor's regret that a pressing engagement would prevent his reaching Briarton at the time specified, but that he could, if General Ireby desired it, see him at seven o'clock on the following evening.

And General Ireby did desire it, and so Mr. Empson and the time came, as also did Mr. Delavelle Ireby, whose presence had been specially requested by his parent, whom he had learnt in the course of one short fortnight "to honour, that his days might be long in the land."

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW WILL.

THE time came, and Empson with it. The attorney entered the apartment to which he had been summoned with a quiet tread (how singular it is that no people make so much

noise in sick-rooms as doctors!) passed to the bedside, and took the thin hand which his client extended to him.

"How do you feel this evening, sir?" he asked, in a subdued voice.

"Sinking fast, sinking fast," was the reply. "Sit down here, near me, so that I need not exhaust myself speaking to you; but stay, first let me introduce you to my son, my eldest son, Delavelle Ireby. Delavelle, this is Mr. Empson."

The solicitor turned sharply towards the person indicated: he was standing by the hearth, where a fire had been kindled, for although the days were still warm and fine, the evenings were chilly. The professional glance took him all in at once; examined and cross-examined him; and having thus acquired all the information just then obtainable, dismissed him with a stiff bow, and fastened itself eagerly on the pale face of the individual whose days on earth were numbered.

"You were not previously aware I had another son, Mr. Empson," remarked the General, nervously, "and I dare say are surprised to discover such to have been the case."

"I was not cognizant of the fact, certainly, until this moment," was Mr. Empson's reply, uttered with a grim smile; "but we solicitors are never surprised at anything."

"I—I—contracted a private marriage when a mere boy," pursued the invalid; "immediately afterwards I was ordered to India with my regiment; whilst serving there my first wife died in America, where she went with her parents, and —and—in short, Mr. Empson, not to dwell on a painful passage in my life, having heard my son was dead also, I too rashly, perhaps, believed the tale, and so left him to his fate. For that very reason, perhaps, fate has been very kind to him, and enabled him to seek me out. In short, fate and his own exertions have enabled him to return to England a very rich and prosperous man."

The attorney dryly congratulated father and son on their union, and on the success which had attended Delavelle's endeavours; but the sound of his voice almost grated on the ears of his listeners, it seemed so suspicious, so guarded.

Having said what he considered most proper to be said on such an occasion, Mr. Empson relapsed into silence, and waited for any fresh remark from the General; but for some time none came, and no sound broke the stillness during a few seconds, save that caused by the occasional dropping of a cinder on the hearth, or by the noise Mr. Delavelle Ireby made by tapping his fingers impatiently on the chimney-piece.

"I requested your presence this evening, Mr. Empson," the General at length commenced, making an effort at composure, "because I desire your assistance in finally arranging my worldly affairs. I feel my strength failing so rapidly, that I think it is absolutely necessary for me to make some prudent testamentary dispositions. I am not able to converse for any considerable period at a time, but I wish to make my will, and should be glad if you would take down my instructions for that purpose."

There was a constraint in the General's voice, which did not escape Mr. Empson; but he answered—

"I trust your fears exaggerate your danger, and that for many happy years you may be spared to your family and friends. Nevertheless, as regards your desire, I am of opinion that, as the making of a will never brings a man one day sooner to his grave, it is well for you to have your mind settled on that point. If I recollect rightly, however, I think, speaking of this subject upon a former occasion, you said to me you had made a just and equitable division of your property?"

The last words were uttered with apparent carelessness; but, as he pronounced them, Mr. Empson noticed the change which

passed over the countenances of both General Ireby and his son; the sudden flush that mounted even to the temples of the former, the ill-concealed sneer which curled the lips of the latter.

"The conversation you allude to occurred a considerable time since," was the reply; "and circumstances have latterly changed my opinion concerning the prudence of my former will. For more than twelve months I have been, I may say, almost daily thinking of making some different dispositions of my property; but now, as I said before, I feel the matter ought no longer to be delayed; therefore, having every confidence in your professional knowledge and often-proved discretion, I have sent for you."

"And I am here to receive your instructions," returned the attorney.

"My son Reginald is so very wild, so very extravagant, and so very boyish, in short," resumed the General, "that I fear it will never do to leave him in possession of Briarton." Here the speaker paused, hoping Mr. Empson would confirm this opinion; but finding that gentleman did not do so, he demanded, "What do you think?"

"It is a point solely for your own consideration," was the reply; whereupon General Ireby bit his lip, and Delavelle muttered, "Confound the fellow!" in confidence to the fire.

"I feel," resumed the invalid, "that I am not equal to explain the many reasons which induce me to rearrange my affairs. Delavelle, I have confided them to you; will you briefly tell Mr. Empson what I dread, what I desire?"

"My father," said Delavelle, now speaking for the first time, "dreads that Reginald will, if left in possession of Briarton, ultimately reduce himself and his sisters to beggary. He thinks, if I understand him rightly, that his son is too young to become sole guardian of himself and the two girls; and he consequently desires that the estate should be

tied up, and that some more experienced person than Reginald should supply his place when he unhappily is removed from amongst us. Have I put my meaning clearly?" he demanded, looking in the solicitor's grave, passionless face.

"Perfectly — and — concisely," was the unmoved reply. "And that more experienced person, pardon me if I seek further information, is——"

"Myself," said Delavelle, "as you had previously concluded."

"As I had previously concluded," blandly acquiesced Mr. Empson; "but I desired to have my conclusion verified."

"Your desire is then gratified," retorted the other, sulkily, turning once again towards the fire, while Mr. Empson replied, with provoking *sang-froid*,—

"It is indeed, thanks to your politeness."

"May I trouble you to take my instructions, Mr. Empson?" here interposed the General.

"I am quite ready when you feel equal to the exertion," replied the attorney, drawing a small writing-table close to the bedside; whilst Delavelle murmured—

"We must have counsel's opinion on that will; I believe the fellow would put a flaw in it on purpose."

"In the first place, Mr. Empson, I revoke all previous wills and testaments."

"Of course," said the listener, scrawling some hieroglyphics on the paper, and then pausing for further information.

"Well, you know best how to word it legally. What I want is to leave the house and domain of Briarton, together with the farms and woods and so forth,—please to make it as short as possible."

This had been Delavelle's suggestion, and the General alluded to it now because it delayed for a moment the necessity of finishing his sentence.

"I shall not forget the injunction," responded Mr. Empson: "the whole of the property called Briarton to——"

"My grandson," murmured the dying man.

"His name?" demanded the attorney, drawing his pen lightly through one he had already traced.

"Henry Ireby, his heirs——"

"Of course," again acquiesced Mr. Empson, who continued writing for a few minutes.

"In case he attain the age of twenty-one years," dictated the General.

"And in case he do not?" inquired the solicitor.

"To my grandson Delavelle Ireby," answered his client, growing bolder as he imagined Mr. Empson was gradually acquiescing in his plan.

"To your grandson, Delavelle Ireby," repeated the other; "subject to what legacies?"

"To the payment of interest on twenty thousand pounds at present lying on the property by way of mortgage, and—oh! you understand best how to put it. I wish a suitable allowance to be made for the maintenance and education, and that sort of thing, of the child who is for the period heir, but whatever may be left after defraying those sort of expenses I desire to accumulate,—no, not to accumulate, but to be devoted towards clearing off the mortgage during the long minority."

"I see," said the attorney. "I will set forth your wishes in legal form; but do you mean that the property is to be left subject to no annuities, no legacies, no——"

"I do," answered General Ireby, quailing under the look of indignant amazement fixed upon him as the reply fell on his listener's ear.

"With regard to the residue of your property?" asked Mr. Empson, after an uncomfortable pause.

"I leave my eldest son Delavelle Ireby residuary legatee,"

responded his client; "he will discharge all my just debts; he knows all my wishes—he is willing and able to carry them fully out."

"And Mr. Reginald and your daughters?"

"He will supply my place; he will be father to them when I am gone."

"I have no desire to force advice upon you unasked," said Mr. Empson, "but we professional men consider all sorts of chances: there can be no question but that Mr. Delavelle Ireby will faithfully discharge the duties this will imposes on him;" this was said with a little touch of sarcasm; "none; but we all know life is uncertain, and supposing—recollect I am merely putting it as a supposition—supposing he were to die before he had carried out your wishes and provided suitably for the children of your second marriage, all the money and chattels and goods, to which, as residuary legatee, he becomes entitled, would in that event go to his children, and yours would be altogether excluded from any share of your wealth."

"Yes, but he will settle all that," answered the General.

"I will at once make such arrangements as must place them beyond the danger you apprehend," said Delavelle, turning from his fixed contemplation of the fire and addressing the solicitor.

"But as life is so very uncertain," persisted that gentleman, "would it not be better, would it not be wiser altogether, to make some sure provision for Mr. Reginald and the young ladies? If you authorize me to do it, I will put the whole matter in a few lines. If you are afraid of your son's extravagance, it would be easy to leave him an annuity or a legacy, the principal of which would be beyond his control; and your daughters' fortunes could and ought to be explicitly mentioned: they might be secured to them in some way on Briarton; or a portion of the rent-roll could be set apart for

a few years to that purpose, or a sum could be realized out of the personal property and invested for their benefit; in fact, there are half-a-dozen courses open for you to adopt, any one of which seems to me more eligible than the only plan which appears to have presented itself to your mind."

"Ah! Mr. Empson, there are great difficulties in the way," returned the General; "you see, Reginald is so very reckless, and the girls are not of age, and——"

"That makes no difference," suggested the solicitor; "if that be the only difficulty, it can be readily smoothed away."

"I do not approve of women being left with independent fortunes," said the invalid, doggedly.

"Leave them with dependent ones, then," suggested Mr. Empson; "leave the money beyond their control; leave it contingent on their marrying to their guardian's or trustee's satisfaction; leave it under certain restrictions; only, I entreat of you, leave something to those orphaned girls. Mr. Reginald is a man and may fight his way through the world, but your daughters——"

"I think it advisable to leave them under the protection of some sensible person," was the reply; "and therefore invest my eldest son with precisely the same amount of power as that I possess. He will portion Constance and Marian suitably; he will push Reginald forward, and provide handsomely for him; and yet he will still, by the arrangement I propose, keep in his hands a powerful check over all, which, if judiciously used, will be productive of incalculable good to my dear children when I am gone."

"But——" once again commenced Mr. Empson, when Delavelle interposed the civil remark that "His father had requested his professional services, not his advice as to the best mode in which to dispose of his (General Ireby's) property."

The solicitor did not heed this observation; he turned

sorrowfully to his client, and said, "You wish no addition to be made to this will, then?"

"None, save the names of my executors, and a few minor matters," was the reply.

"Nothing concerning your younger children?"

"Nothing."

"Their names are not even to appear in the instrument?"

"No."

"In one word, you are determined to leave them literally penniless?"

"Do you not see how you are agitating my father?" interrupted Delavelle. "Pray complete the instructions as he wishes."

"Delavelle will deal justly by them," answered his father.

"Perhaps so; but as far as any act of yours affects them, they are absolutely paupers."

"I really am not in a state of health to argue the matter with you, Mr. Empson," pleaded the General. "I assure you it will be all right in the end."

"It may come right in heaven, but never on earth," retorted the lawyer.

"It is the best disposition I can make under the circumstances," replied his client, feebly, though in a stubborn tone.

"Am I to understand, then, that it is your final determination to execute this most unnatural and unjust will?" demanded Mr. Empson, "that nothing will induce you to alter your resolution?"

"Nothing." The answer was given with white and quivering lips, but it was firmly spoken. Mr. Empson felt he need strive no longer.

"All I have further to say, then, is," he said, in a steady though mournful voice, "that I, at least, will be no party to the transaction. You may employ some other person to

draw out the will, or you may make it yourself. God turn your heart whilst you write it, if you adopt the latter course! But be it as it may, I will never lend myself to such a violation of all natural feelings, all divine laws. No, get who you like to word the will for you; it shall never be said one syllable of it was penned by Robert Empson!" and, as he concluded, he flung the paper he had covered with strange and extraordinarily formed letters into the fire, striding close to the spot where Delavelle stood, in order to effect his purpose.

"Mr. Empson!" exclaimed that individual, in a tone of wrath and surprise, "I am astonished to hear the language you employ, in my father's house, in his sick-chamber, by his dying bed."

"I do not care, sir, if it were beside his grave!" indignantly retorted the attorney, whose anger was blazing like the paper he had thrust into the flames. "It is perfectly iniquitous, and I have no doubt but that every one not lost to all ideas of right and sense would support me in that opinion. It is very much the habit, I know, to represent individuals of my profession as not over-scrupulous; but it has long been my opinion, that though attorneys frequently are not so good as they might be, our clients are worse. We are held responsible for all their follies and faults; the world sees the many wrongs and absurdities they insist upon committing; sees these, and blames us for them, as though we were the guilty parties. If it only knew the many sins and extravagancies we dissuade people who seek our assistance from rushing into, it would speak more leniently of our profession, and harder of those it now so lavishly pities. But this is all beside the question. I extremely regret what has just occurred, but I cannot take act or part in this business; and when next, Mr. Delavelle Ireby," he continued, addressing that gentleman, "when next you hear attorneys and lawyers sneered at—when next you feel tempted to abuse them a

little yourself—pray remember you once met with one who was an honester man than you are."

"May I beg of you to leave the room, sir?" said Delavelle, in a choking voice; "your impertinence agitates my father: pray, therefore, leave the room."

"You could not ask me to do anything at this present time more agreeable to my own feelings," answered Mr. Empson. Then advancing to the bedside, he took General Ireby's passive hand in his, and continued, "Forgive me if I have spoken freely. I have done so not with the intention of causing you pain, but of preserving those who, but a few weeks since, were very dear to you, from bitter agony and suffering. It is because I feel deeply on this matter that I speak strongly. God grant you may think seriously upon the words I have uttered, and that they may sink into your mind, and cause you to deal more fairly and justly by all your children. Should you decide on an equitable arrangement—Heaven send you may!—I am ready, as in times past, to devote my best energies to accomplish your design; if not, I hope He who knows the secrets of all hearts may of His mercy pardon the great wrong you are about to commit."

And having thus unburdened himself, he hastily quitted the room, crossed the hall, and was about to leave the house, when a thought occurred to him which induced him to pause and hesitate. Whilst he was debating the matter in his own mind, the door of the boudoir opened, and Constance Ireby came forth.

"I wish to speak to you," said Mr. Empson; and without further preamble he followed her into the apartment she had just left.

"Where is your brother?" he asked.

"In Scotland," she answered, trembling, because of his abrupt address, and a presentiment of evil which had been haunting her for many days.

"Why is he not here?—he ought to be here; his father is very ill, and his presence is required. Why is he not here?"

"I wrote to him several times," Constance replied, "saying how ill papa was, and how much I wished he would return; but it appears he went off to some distant part of the moors a fortnight since, and left no orders for his letters to be forwarded. So Mr. Bernard, who has just come back, told me this morning."

"Just what one might have expected," said the solicitor. "Well, Miss Ireby, he must be brought here instantly; not a moment ought to be lost."

"I will get his present address from Mr. Bernard, and write to him to-morrow," said his listener.

"Write! to-morrow!" echoed Mr. Empson. "My dear young lady, this business will bear no such delay. You have some trusty man-servant about the house, no doubt. Let him take the best horse in your father's stables, and gallop over to Appingham; there he will catch the night mail for the north. Tell him not to rest till he finds your brother. Tell him to bring the foolish boy home by force, if such prove necessary,—anything for the sake of expedition."

"You do not think," gasped the girl, "you surely do not think my father in such imminent danger as——"

"Pooh!" returned the attorney, "I never thought of his health. He is ill—very ill, no doubt; but that is not the weighty reason which induces me to wish your brother's return. Do not lose a minute. If you have not sufficient money without applying to General Ireby, take it from me. Bid the fellow neither spare gold nor exertion. I entreat of you not to delay——"

"Who is this stranger?" asked Constance, as he would have hurried her from the room.

"There, there! like a dear, good young lady, don't ask any questions," he answered. "We solicitors never know

anything; we are deaf, blind,—idiots, if you like, out of our offices and clients' chambers. I can tell you nothing about him. Do not waste precious time: send some one to fetch Mr. Reginald home at once. He must come—his presence is imperatively required here."

That night a messenger hasted northward, to bring back to his father's house the thoughtless youth whose inheritance was about to be wrested from him; and a few hours afterwards another servant was dispatched to London, bearing an epistle penned by Mr. Delavelle Ireby, and addressed to a solicitor with whom he was acquainted. We have already witnessed the receipt of that letter, and seen how Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn at once obeyed the summons, and repaired to Brenslow; for it was to that gentleman the communication referred to above was made, and Delavelle Ireby was the client whom he travelled to meet at the ancient cathedral town mentioned in the commencement of my second chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. D'EVELYN'S CLIENT.

The freshness of the country air, the beauty of the scenery through which he passed, and, above all, the knowledge that thirty-five miles English intervened betwixt him and the woman he was so blessed as to call wife, somewhat revived Mr. D'Evelyn's spirits ere he reached Brenslow; and when he alighted from the vehicle which had borne him thither, he felt quite equal to discuss any subject with any person.

Mr. Ireby greeted him upon his arrival, hurried him into

the sitting-room he occupied at the "Bishop's Arms," provided refreshment for the solicitor, and then opened his mind to that fortunate man.

Communicative, however, though General Ireby's first-born might be, he did not consider it necessary to acquaint Mr. D'Evelyn with the scene which had occurred on the preceding evening; therefore, when the solicitor, after patiently listening to his long detail, remarked—

"I cannot say I like the business, Mr. Ireby. Why does not your father employ his own professional adviser?"

Delavelle merely replied—

"That he thought it most probable the individual referred to by Mr. D'Evelyn would be prejudiced in favour of the second family, whom he had known from childhood; and that General Ireby considered it better to have the instrument drawn out by a stranger."

"Humph!" ejaculated the other, in a tone by no means agreeable to Mr. Ireby, who, not knowing exactly how to proceed, held his peace.

"And so he means to cut out the younger boy altogether, does he?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn, at length, half questioning Delavelle, half thinking aloud; "and intends devising to his beloved son Delavelle, and that sort of thing."

"No; hang it!" said Mr. Ireby, "no entreaties of mine could induce him——"

"So you have been entreating him?" remarked the attorney, drily.

"Yes," confessed Delavelle, "when I found that he was resolved, as you say, to cut the lad out, I thought I had the best right to come in; but he has some absurd notion about the property being extended, and a mortgage being paid off during a long minority; so he disinherits Reginald and passes over me, and leaves Briarton—to whom, do you suppose?"

"How should I know? Your son, perhaps."

"Precisely; to Henry, if he live; to Delavelle, if the eldest die; so that you see, virtually, I do not gain one shilling by this arrangement; in fact, I am a decided loser; for he has made me promise to purchase an estate adjoining Briarton, and I know I could invest my money more profitably."

"Yes," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn; "of course you gain nothing; you only get a son provided for; you only get the burden of supporting and educating him taken off your shoulders.'

Delavelle bit his lip, and retorted, "These were small recompenses to him for having half his capital tied up in green fields and old trees."

"You are greatly to be compassionated, no doubt, Mr. Ireby," continued the solicitor; "particularly as it is a predicament from which nothing can now extricate you. But suppose," he added quickly, seeing his client was growing restive, "we now deal fairly by one another. Acknowledge that although you had rather your father left the property to you, still you consider it a very good legacy for your son; and I will frankly congratulate you on your good fortune, and further add, I think it a much better thing for you that General Ireby has passed you by——"

"On what grounds, pray?" interrupted Delavelle.

"Very probably you may invest the half of your capital—the half which remains after buying the estate—in business," said Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Well, suppose I do; what then?"

"Why, then you might lose it, you know," returned D'Evelyn.

"A consolatory remark," said the other; "and in that case——"

"You will have Briarton to fall back upon."

"A most ingenious idea," said Delavelle; "so that I am now to be thankful at being superseded by my own child,

and forced to sink my money; because if I fail in business, this boy still retains possession of Briarton."

"And you receive a handsome sum yearly for maintaining him. Do not be angry at the plain way in which I state the case: you may invest your money in business, you may fail, you may, unless you secure it to your wife, be deprived of the other estate, but still Briarton is there; one, at least, of your family is comfortably provided for. Somehow, though the property may not be actually yours, you will be viewed through its beautifying medium. Why, on the strength of Briarton being left to your son, you might fail and begin again half-a-dozen times; I have known men make fortunes out of far less promising materials."

"I do not want to make a fortune," said Mr. Ireby, half offended, half amused; "I only desire to increase the one I already possess."

"And in that attempt, as I said before, may lose all," persisted Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I do not see why I should," Delavelle replied.

"I do not see why you should not," responded the attorney: "though you are a clever man, you are not more than mortal, and even very clever men occasionally overshoot the mark. But now about this will. Briarton, you say, is to go to your eldest boy?"

"Yes."

"Failing him?" pursued Mr. D'Evelyn.

"To Delavelle," was the reply.

"Failing him?" continued the attorney.

"Oh, he did not think it necessary to go on for ever," said Mr. Ireby, impatiently; "if he die before coming of age, do not I succeed as heir to my son?"

"Yes, and to your father," acquiesced Mr. D'Evelyn. "Well, we have done with that; now as regards the personal property?

"That is briefly disposed of. I am left residuary legatee you might almost condense the whole thing into a single sheet."

"And so leave less space for the lawyers to skate over," said Mr. D'Evelyn, with a smile, to which his client vouchsafed by way of answer a somewhat uneasy laugh.

"And what about his other son and his daughters?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I provide for them," said Mr. Ireby.

"How?" demanded the attorney.

"How!" echoed he. "Why, I will portion the girls, and do all that lies in my power for Reginald."

"But you are in no way bound to do this," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Except in honour," replied Delavelle.

"Ah! I did not mean in honour; I meant in law!" was the reply.

"No, the intended will does not limit my powers or specify how I am to discharge the duties devolving upon me. Nevertheless, I mean to discharge them faithfully, and to supply my father's place to the children of his second marriage."

"I hope you will provide for them somewhat better than he proposes doing," said D'Evelyn, in all sincerity; "and no doubt you will. Let me see: this Reginald is, you say, between two and three-and-twenty. What sort of young man may he be?"

"If my father's own opinion be correct, he is an extravagant, clever, hot-headed, and perfectly heedless boy; one totally unfitted to take care of himself, much less of his sisters and Briarton! he will be greatly the better for a little of the world's discipline,—at least, so his parent thinks."

"Possibly," remarked the attorney; "and his sisters?"

"The eldest is extremely handsome, and reported amiable;

the youngest is extremely pretty, and I am sure she is almost an angel."

"I hope you will give her golden wings," said Mr. D'Evelyn, considerably relieved by the manner in which Mr. Delavelle Ireby spoke of his newly-found relatives. "Now, I do not want to be groping in the dark, and if you will just answer me one question candidly I shall feel greatly obliged. Do you think it just for General Ireby to devise his property in the manner you intimate?"

"I do not," said Delavelle, frankly.

"It is an honest reply, at all events," rejoined Mr. D'Evelyn; "but such being your opinion, and you being an honest man, why do you not tell him to devise his estates differently? why not reason——"

"Did you ever attempt reasoning with a lunatic?" asked Mr. Ireby.

"No; but I have with a woman, which is next thing to it," answered the solicitor. "Your father, though, is neither one nor the other."

"A man may be mad on one point, and sane in all the rest of his ideas; you will not deny that?"

"No; I admit the proposition; but what then?" asked the other.

"His mania is Briarton: do you think he is disinheriting Reginald for love of me; for love of a couple of children he has never seen, of whose very existence he was not aware till a fortnight since? Pshaw!"

"So that, after all, the will which I am to draw out, and your father is to sign and seal, has not been dictated and made by you?" continued Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I never asked him to alter his testamentary dispositions, he commenced the subject himself; I came down here merely to have him publicly acknowledge me as his son, seeking no money from him. He told me he had left me a paltry six

thousand pounds; I replied I was rich, and did not require an addition to my fortune, and recommended him to leave that sum either to Reginald, his daughters, or the poor of the parish."

Mr. D'Evelyn laughed.

"And so, because you are not in want of money, he leaves Briarton to your son, and you residuary legatee?" he said.

"Precisely. I believe from my heart that, had I been poor, I might have considered myself fortunate had I even got the six thousand; and had I been twice as rich as I am, and could I have promised to buy this confounded estate, and pay off this mortgage, Briarton would have been left to me and not to my sons."

"I doubt the latter part of your sentence," said Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Why?" demanded Dalavelle, who talked more freely to this man than he ever spoke to any other individual, his wife not excepted.

"He knew you had made your fortune by trade: he feared you might lose Briarton in business."

"Perhaps you are right; but not to waste time in useless conjecture,—as he will not leave the place to me, it is perhaps just as well out of Reginald's hands, because in a few years he would have run through every shilling of it, and very possibly, as my father says, have spent his sisters' portions also. As the case stands, I mean to do all I can for him: his sisters will reside with me and my wife; and when they choose to fly away, they shall do so, as you say, with golden wings."

"You promise all this faithfully?" said Mr. D'Evelyn. "You mean to act justly and honourably by your sisters and brother; you intend to supply your father's place to them, and, in lieu of the natural parental feeling, to let common sense and fairness guide your conduct?"

"I do, upon my word and honour; upon my soul, I do," returned Delavelle.

"And this boy, Reginald, is he really a spendthrift,—a selfish, unheeding spendthrift?"

"Selfish, because utterly thoughtless; not from any deficiency in natural affection, so far as I can gather, but solely because he has always been over-indulged. It is not that he considers the feelings of others, and wilfully flings them overboard, but simply that he never thinks of any one but himself. He is selfish, not of malice aforethought, but of want of thought altogether."

"I understand; and you will not curb his spirit too quickly. That sort of training sometimes makes a fiery steed vicious," said the attorney.

"No; I mean to act a father's and a brother's part by them all: do you believe me?" added Mr. Ireby.

"I do," answered Mr. D'Evelyn, grasping the hand his client extended, as if to seal by that act the truth of his statement; "I do, and trust it may not prove a bad business. Beware, however: you are about to be put in the way of a great temptation; Heaven send you strength to resist it!"

There was a pause; then Delavelle said—

"Suppose we walk over now? my father wished me to bring you to Briarton as soon as possible."

"My dear sir, do you want the will to stand?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Yes; why do you ask?" exclaimed his client.

"Because if you do, you had better stay where you are. I go to General Ireby alone, take his instructions, which are perfectly unbiassed by the presence of any interested individual; you are not near to influence the tenour of his testamentary disposition. If perfectly agreeable to you, I will go alone."

To which Delavelle assented, and Mr. D'Evelyn proceeded forthwith towards Briarton, gleaning from the chance conversation of one or two people of the humbler class, whom he overtook and talked with by the way, some information which induced him to believe that perhaps, after all, Mr. Ireby was right, and that Reginald Ireby might not prove a very safe guardian of his own and his sisters' interests.

It would be doing Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn great injustice not to add, that he begged, prayed, implored General Ireby to leave some specified sum to his daughters. Apparently, the dying man had a fixed idea that if the will were lengthened, even by a few lines, it would be very speedily broken after his demise. The one absorbing thought was Briarton. Its extension, its freedom from mortgage, its adornment—these were the things that alone seemed dear to his heart: if it were safe he cared for nothing else; and to Mr. D'Evelyn's remonstrances he returned one unvarying reply, namely—

"That Delavelle was very rich; that Delavelle would look after affairs when he was gone; that Delavelle would take care of the girls, and provide for Reginald."

And the solicitor thinking he was even less open to reason than Mrs. D'Evelyn, to whom he had mentally referred in his conversation with Delavelle Ireby, discontinued his entreaties, and took down the General's instructions for the will which Mr. Empson had pronounced to be iniquitous, and which was in due time signed, sealed, and witnessed, and left, as many another will has been before and since, an evidence of human wickedness, human folly, and short-sightedness.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE HEIR.

"WELL, this is provoking!" said Mr. Ireby to his friend, as they sat at breakfast one morning together. "My wife, I hear, is dangerously ill, and I must return to town just when I most desire to remain in the country."

"I know one man," rejoined Mr. D'Evelyn, "who would not consider it needful to hurry back to London, even under the melancholy circumstances you mention; but you, happily for your domestic peace, not being the individual in question, I beg to condole with you on the sad news, and to remind you that there is an old motto to the effect, 'whatever is to be, will be;' and further to assure you, I think your presence by no means necessary here; and that probably a short absence may quiet some of the rumours which are floating through the atmosphere."

"But suppose my father die before my return?" suggested Delavelle.

"Well! suppose he do; what then?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I shall not see him again alive," was the reply.

"Once more I say, what then?" returned the solicitor.

"Do you think, sir, I have no filial affection?" demanded Mr. Ireby.

"Very little, I fancy," was Mr. D'Evelyn's answer. "But do not be angry at my candour, for I really cannot see why you should have. I know there are some people who make a great fuss about family ties; but, for my own part, I cannot imagine your entertaining any great attachment for a parent you never saw until recently, and without whom you have managed (as you have frequently informed me) to live comfortably during the space of thirty-five years."

"Mr. D'Evelyn," said Delavelle, in a tone of much vexation; "I really do believe if any other man addressed the same observations to me as you do, I would——"

"Never mind what you would do, as I am, unfortunately for myself, Thomas D'Evelyn, and no happier individual. I did not mean to offend you; I only meant to say that, although you may be devoted to General Ireby, and prefer, on the whole, remaining with him to returning to your wife, I cannot understand the feeling, and think you must have some other motive for desiring to prolong your stay in Brenslow than is at present apparent to me."

"Suppose I tell you I have another reason, what will you say then?" asked Mr. Ireby.

"I shall say, in the first place, that my conjecture was correct, and, in the second, that you are frank," rejoined the other.

"You will please to understand, then," resumed Delavelle, "that my father wants to see the boys who are to inherit Briarton——"

"One at a time?" interposed the attorney.

"One of whom at a time is to inherit Briarton; and I was about to dispatch a messenger to my wife, telling her to send Harry and the infant down, under charge of their nurse, when this intelligence reached me. I wish——"

"That Mrs. Ireby had postponed her malady for a few days; but as sickness cannot be put off, the misfortune could scarcely have been avoided. Things are never so bad, however, but that they might be worse; and, if you will go back to London and send nurse and children to me by to-morrow's coach, I will undertake to introduce them properly at Briarton, and take care of the little heirs as if they were parcels of jewelry."

"Will you do this?" said Mr. Ireby, immensely relieved; "can you do it? I thought you wished to return to London."

"That was merely because my work here was finished. Why should I entertain such a wish? *My* wife is not dangerously ill."

"I think you would not grieve if she were mortally ill," said Delavelle.

"Do you mean to imply *I* have no natural affections?" inquired Mr. D'Evelyn; whereupon his client laughed, and the solicitor laughed, and said, "After all, it was no joking matter."

So Mr. Ireby went back to London, and Mr. D'Evelyn, having no business to transact, bent his steps out of the ancient town of Brenslow, and took a walk miles and miles long, through pasture-fields, and fields where the golden corn was bound together in graceful sheaves; over grassy knolls, along shady lanes, under the waving branches of stately trees. It was very late ere he returned to the hotel, refreshed in body, and perhaps soothed in mind by that long country ramble, during the course of which he had recalled the days of his boyhood, spent so far away in Somersetshire. He had thought of the weary years, of his struggling clerkship; and sadly, of his ill-judged marriage.

Nor had his musings been altogether selfish. He reflected much about the will he had lately seen executed; he wondered about General Ireby, about the children of his second union; and, last but not least, he asked himself how Delavelle Ireby would fulfil the promises he had so faithfully made to him.

The chance that had thrown the two men together was commonplace enough. Mr. Delavelle Ireby, having a letter of introduction to a solicitor of high standing in London, consulted him concerning his affairs, paid him handsomely; was advised by him prudently, and invited to dinner; which invitation Mr. Ireby, who knew few people in town, and was a little bored at home, accepted. Thomas D'Evelyn hap-

pened to be of the party. When he chose to exert it, he possessed in no common degree the art of pleasing, and on the evening in question he did choose to make himself particularly agreeable. He told good stories, he sang his very best songs; he was the pleasantest of all on an occasion when even the dullest Englishman becomes by comparison almost lively. He completely won the good opinion of Delavelle Ireby, who had been somewhat chilled by the dry, official manner of his host; and, finally, it being a fine summer's night, and their homes lying in the same direction, the two gentlemen bent their steps from their entertainer's house together, conversing as they went.

The acquaintance speedily ripened into intimacy; there was some attraction which drew them towards one another. Both had started in the race of life poor and friendless—both had struggled, fought, hoped; but, oh! how different had been their success! The fates of both seemed now pretty well decided: at thirty-five the one was an apparently thriving man, but the sweetness which crowns the exertions even of the toiling poor had passed from his cup for ever. He had lacked the patience requisite to make a name, a fortune, a happy home for himself. He had made what he considered a good stroke; he had staked the peace of his whole existence on one rash throw, and, as many a man, and many a woman too, has done, lost.

At the same age the other stood triumphant. He had conquered obstacles, achieved marvels, he had gained everything, he had relinquished nothing; life to him was not an objectless scene. Both had set out with the same aim in view—viz., that of acquiring a fortune; both had gained their desire; but, oh! with what a different price had each purchased it! The one had given in exchange his time, talents, energies. The other had devoted them likewise; but all not proving sufficient to secure the prize, he sold himself,

as thousands, from the time of Esau down to the present day, have sold themselves, for a "mess of pottage."

Fate had decided their different lots; Fate, who, unacknowledged, but ever felt by mortals, shapes our various destinies, colours the threads wherewith the web of our existence is woven; Fate, that hovers over our cradles, follows us in childhood, tracks us in later life, gives us wealth or makes us beggars, and, finally, decides by what manner of death we shall die, and what little corner of the earth's surface shall contain our mortal remains; Fate, in short, which had settled that Delavelle Ireby should be a happy and prosperous man, and that Thomas D'Evelyn should be a prosperous one also, perhaps, but, in addition, a very wretched one; ordained besides that the two should become tolerably good friends, and that the solicitor should draw out and perfect the will which provided so handsomely for one, at least, of General Ireby's grandsons, both of whom, under the guardianship of that most respectable of widows, Mrs. Barnes, reached Brenslow on the day fixed on for their arrival: the one arrayed in the costume then commonly adopted by young gentlemen of his tender years; the other wrapt up and swaddled in white cashmere, and muslin, and lace. The one heir was four years old, pale, delicate-looking, and very handsome; the other had just been six months dwelling amidst the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. And yet here they were, through no cleverness or goodness of their own, about to be handsomely provided for. Surely the very least their father could do, by way of return, was to let the man who had passed his own children over, for the purpose of enriching the two boys, see their faces ere his own was covered for ever from mortal view.

Now, it chanced that when Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn, in compliance with the promise he had made to his client, drove over to Briarton with the children and their nurse, Constance

Ireby, wearied by a sleepless night, spent by her father's bedside, had sought her room to obtain a few hours' repose; and Marian watched in the sick-chamber alone.

Mr. D'Evelyn had never seen either of the daughters; but when Marian came out to speak to him, he of course knew at once which of the sisters he was addressing; and he marvelled exceedingly how General Ireby could dream of leaving so young a creature totally dependent, even for the common necessaries of life, on the justice and compassion of a comparative stranger.

He began to feel his position one of no ordinary difficulty, and grew confused when Marian inquired, in some amazement—"But who are these dear little things? why are they to see my father?"

"They are Mr. Ireby's sons, if you please, miss," explained their nurse, for the young lady's eyes had appealed to her for information—"they are Mr. Ireby's sons;" and Mr. D'Evelyn felt he could have strangled her without remorse.

"Mr. Ireby!—what Mr. Ireby?" asked Marian, looking towards Mr. D'Evelyn, who replied hastily—

"A relative of your father, the exact degree of consanguinity it is unnecessary now to inquire. I believe General Ireby wishes to see these children; perhaps I might trouble you to inform him of their arrival."

As she had done once before, on a somewhat similar occasion, Marian turned, without a word, to comply with the strange request; whilst in the same room where Delavelle had held such fierce communings with his own soul and the silent picture, Mr. D'Evelyn and his companions awaited her reappearance.

When she came back she was weeping, though she strove hard to suppress her tears; and Mr. D'Evelyn respected her sorrow, and interposed no remark when she said to the eldest boy—

"You will not be afraid to leave nurse for a few minutes, and come with me?"

The child was awed, but he put his little hand in hers, and the two went together out of the room. Had she known who she was leading to the gloomy chamber, how much faster her tears would have fallen! but in her ignorance she paused on the threshold for a minute to recover her composure, and stooped to kiss the boy, as if this silent act were capable of comforting her.

He looked up wonderingly in her pale face as she did so, and asked in his childish voice, though in a hushed tone, "why she cried?"

Which question proving too much for her, unbidden tears fell fast over the boy's face.

Not before any other older person would Marian Ireby have displayed her grief. She knelt down on the marble hall, she clasped him in her arms, and she—oh! so very young and helpless—sobbed out, in answer to the question, "why she cried?"—

"I am so unhappy!"

The boy did not shed a tear: excepting that sorrow frequently proves contagious, there was no reason why he should; but he looked long and gravely at her, and then, as if moved by some strong impulse, he put his little arms around her neck; laid his face close to her cheek, whilst her long curls swept his forehead; and pressed his warm lips to hers.

When she led the boy into her father's apartment she was quite calm. She had previously drawn up one of the blinds at his desire, and light was thus admitted into the room—light, which revealed to her the dreadful change that was coming over her father.

"This is the eldest," she said, taking the child in her arms, and placing him on the bed.

The dying man looked long and earnestly at his grandson, who, in his turn, stared with gravity—not unmixed with fear—at the pale wasted being who, laying one thin hand on the boy's head, exclaimed, in a tremulous voice—

"God bless and keep you, child, from all sin and harm, from all ills and temptations! God bless and keep you, child, for ever!"

Perhaps the Great Disposer of all events graciously heard and answered this appeal; perhaps prayer even from those who have much need to pray for themselves is not altogether unavailing. God did bless and keep the child, preserved it from all sin, ills, and temptations. He did bless and keep it for ever; for, in His great mercy, He took the boy to Himself, and, ere another year had passed, the lips that touched Marian's with such strange sympathy and solemnity were cold in death.

Meantime the nurse had been employed—woman-like—in sobbing and wiping her eyes; not that she knew why she cried, but weeping is contagious, and she thought it "hard for so young a creature to be crushed by sorrow:" a speech in which Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn heartily concurred.

Mrs. Barnes' distress, however, did not prevent her displaying her youngest charge to the greatest possible advantage. She removed the long white cloak which covered it; she took off the hood that concealed its utterly expressionless face from public observation; she arranged the lace borders of its cap, the worked muslin bodice, the long skirt; in fine, she had rendered it a sort of prince amongst babies ere Marian re-entered the morning-room hand in hand, as she had left it, with Henry Ireby.

The infant chancing, by way of rarity, to be a peaceably-disposed morsel of creation, did not burst forth into a prolonged wail of anguish when the girl took it in her arms, and accordingly the interview in the sick-chamber passed over without noise or excitement of any kind.

But not without making a deep impression on Marian. The contrast between youth and age, health and sickness—between the little children just entering into life and the man about departing from it—between the helplessness of the infant and the helplessness of the invalid—struck her forcibly. Oh! with what a sad heart the girl noted these things! how, almost unconsciously regarded at the time, they were in reality stamped indelibly on her memory! how the sight of the father, pale and wasted, sent a conviction to her mind, that ere long he would have departed to another world, where pain, and age, and sorrow, and sickness, enter not!

The whole scene was gone through in a few minutes, and the General motioned his daughter to take the infant away. Perhaps the little creature had grown restless; perhaps Marian was by no means an expert nurse; at all events, in crossing the hall, she managed to permit the clasp of her brooch to catch in the child's sleeve, and penetrate its arm, whereupon such a shriek arose as quite alarmed Marian, who, unable to extricate her brooch without dropping the infant, rushed to Mrs. Barnes for help.

As the offending pin was removed, and the wound kissed and bemoaned over in a suitable manner, Marian saw what had hitherto been concealed from view by the worked muslin sleeve and lace trimming, namely, three red marks, placed like a triangle on the child's arm between the elbow and the shoulder.

"How very singular!" she remarked, almost involuntarily.

Thomas D'Evelyn, at the exclamation, came forward, and examined the peculiarity which had induced the surprised comment.

"They were born with him," said the nurse, solemnly.

"Will they never go away?" asked Marian.

"It is hard to say, miss," replied the nurse, in an oracular manner; "they may, or they may not." Having obtained which satisfactory information, the young girl inquired the names of the children.

"That," said Mrs. Barnes, unheeding, and indeed not seeing Mr. D'Evelyn's visible anxiety, "is Master Henry, and this here baby is Master Delavelle Ireby."

CHAPTER IX.

TOO LATE.

THERE was no sound in a room wherein was being enacted the last scene of that drama called Life; no sound of woman's weeping—of man's half-subdued grief, of childish sorrow, of the moans of departing consciousness—none; yet there a father was dying, and a child keeping watch.

Keeping watch as some do when their hearts are breaking, with colourless cheeks, and white lips and eyes, whose natural expression grief and terror had changed into one of horror, and chattering teeth, and a heaving bosom, within which was pent up such an assemblage of various sensations as could find no relief in lamentation; keeping watch as few men, and still fewer women, ever do, by the side of one who, after having suffered, striven, and rejoiced through the years of his pilgrimage here below, stood at length face to face with the only conqueror—Death.

We fancy we understand what death is, so long as we have

never made acquaintance with it: we have dim theories concerning it, which, like many other theories, appear true, and are not so; we form vague ideas of what that step into eternity must resemble; we say it is taking a plunge over the edge of some frightful precipice; it is the sudden withdrawal of the only plank which has stood betwixt us and the dark wild waters of the fathomless ocean; it is setting forth in utter solitude on the long journey; it is the loud and last vibration of the one melancholy note which has been ever sounding in our ears,—sometimes softly, and again with a nearer tone; sometimes jarring against our feelings, anon soothing our sorrows with the prospect of a happy rest; it is the closing our eyes to all things here below, whether beautiful or unlovely; it is the solving of the enigma—Life; the exchanging of wealth and lands, affection and friendship, for solitude and the narrow space allotted to all living: we fancy it is all this, and so, perhaps, it may be, but it is still more; and we understand little about it, till we stand by the death-bed of one who is passing for ever from the turmoil of existence.

General Ireby seemed unconscious of how very near at hand his hour was; for though Constance was almost insane with grief—almost overwhelmed with the terrible reality which she had sometimes, as all have done at one period or another, endeavoured to picture to herself; yet there was little awful in the scene itself, nor was its sad effect heightened by any of those horrors which occasionally disturb the departing spirit, and leave an impression on the mind of the beholder, which no lapse of time, or succession of events, can ever effectually efface from his remembrance.

He lay there quite calm, almost motionless. There was the white line about the mouth, which betokens that soon the lips will be rigid in death; a film obscured the once clear eyes, for the wings of the mighty angel, who stills the most

feverish pulse that ever throbbed in agony, overshadowed them; the breath came short and quick; occasionally a slight sigh escaped his lips, but otherwise there was little to indicate how soon the spirit would be free from the shackles which still bound it,—free to understand all those wonders and mysteries which, whilst in the flesh, it had marvelled at and seen as "through a glass darkly."

For thirty-six hours Constance had scarcely left his side. During the whole of the preceding day, through the long watches of that apparently endless night, she and Marian had sat, and hoped and despaired, and tried to comfort one another; tried to think their father still might recover, and remain with them for years; tried to look cheerfully at that illness which they felt was mortal; tried to conceal the extent of their fears and their agony even from themselves, and thus watched through the dreary hours till the day broke.

The sun arose, and journeyed up high into the heavens. It was one of those beautiful September days when earth seems one bright Paradise, so covered is it with rich lovely flowers, so radiant with light, and warmth, and beauty, so full of life and enjoyment. When Constance Ireby passed from that darkened chamber, bitterly did the contrast between her feelings and the aspect of external nature strike her! It was the first time the contrast had presented itself forcibly to her mind; unhappily, it was not to be the last.

She left her father's room to speak a few hurried words to the doctor, who, after glancing at his patient, had beckoned her out. He led her into the boudoir, the pretty boudoir, where they had once been all so happy together, into the sunshine, to the sight of flowers, of the pure blue sky, and of the landscape stretching far away, and said gravely—

"I promised not to deceive you, and I am obliged to tell you that the time is approaching: it may come very soon,

and not for a few hours; but I know it is at hand. You must get your sister out of the room,—it is no scene for her. Nor for you either," he added, striving to suppress all appearance of emotion,—"nor for you either, only that it cannot be helped, and that you would have it so."

Constance did not cry out, but she shook like a young tree when the first blast of a storm sweeps over it; it was the storm of affliction, which is colder and more bitter than the winter's wind, that was just about to burst upon her head, and in anticipation of its rigours she turned deadly pale.

"God help you, child!" said the kind-hearted physician, who had known her since she was a baby; "God help you! I wish you had some one with you in this crisis. Where is Reginald? why does he not come back?"

"I am expecting him every minute," she answered.

"He has delayed too long already," answered the doctor; "but you will be better when he returns. Send your sister to me; I shall insist on her lying down for an hour or two, so that she may be able to watch to-night."

Constance looked in his face as he pronounced these last words, and turned her head away when she read that there would be no necessity for any one to watch that night, unless indeed it were to keep a desolate vigil by the side of her father's corpse.

"I am obliged to go to Brenslow," he said, pressing her cold hand; "but I shall call back in the course of the evening: send Marian to me now." And as he watched her leave the room, and cross the hall and enter the sick-chamber, tears dimmed the worthy doctor's eyes.

He had done all he could; he had tried to stay the progress of a slow, creeping disease, which it was beyond the power of any human being to cure; he had skill, and patience, and tenderness, but he had not strength to resist the might of the great lord and conqueror of all. He had entered

many households where death had singled out a victim, he had seen almost all varieties and expressions of grief, all forms of human misery, every shade and colour of despairing sorrow, and yet his heart was not hardened to this new shape in which suffering presented itself. When he opened his mind to his wife on the subject, he confessed—

"There was something in seeing those two motherless girls quietly watching by their father's dying bed, which almost made a woman of me."

And his wife, good, gentle soul, could very well believe the fact.

The doctor persuaded Marian to take some rest, and thus it happened that Constance watched alone. The sun went down, leaving a glory behind him in the western sky; but still Reginald did not come. His sister lit the well-shaded lamp, and then resumed her seat and her employment: trifling it seemed, but, oh! how full of anxiety to listen eagerly for his arrival, to bend over her parent to see if he still breathed, to moisten his lips with wine, to bear up against her sorrow and her terror, to bear through long weary hours of anguish!

Night came, and still the General lived, and occasionally clasped his daughter's hand, as if to assure her he was conscious of her presence, sensible still of the love she evinced, the agonized solicitude she displayed. Often he murmured one word: by listening attentively she discovered it was "Reginald;" and yet Reginald did not come.

The white line grew whiter round the dying man's mouth, the film was fast obscuring all earthly objects from his view. Constance laid her fingers on his wrist, endeavouring to feel his pulse; but so many nerves were throbbing in her own frame, and life was ebbing so rapidly from his, that the attempt was vain, and she turned her anxious ear to listen for her brother's advent. One moment she strained her senses to

catch the most distant sound of horse's hoof, the next held her breath to hear the faintest sigh which might assure her that the parent she loved so tenderly was still in existence.

At length there arose on the stillness of the night a sound as of some one galloping furiously over the gravelled drive, and Constance arose and listened—oh! how eagerly, ye alone who have watched and waited as she did can tell. It came nearer—nearer; now it ceased altogether:—ah! there it is again. He had merely dashed across the lawn, and so cut off part of the sweep; he was at the very door. It could be no one else but Reginald. She heard him ask one hurried question of the servant who admitted him, as he crossed the hall to the chamber where the General lay.

"Is he—is my father dead?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Thank God I am in time!" he said, and entered the room where he ought to have been days and days before.

In the single stride which sufficed to carry him from the door to the bedside, he had time to see all, to take in with one rapid, agonized glance the actual position of affairs; and, overcome with vehement emotion and self-reproach for his long neglect and continued absence, the impetuous young man flung himself on his knees by the bedside, and taking the attenuated hand, kissed it over and over again, while he exclaimed—

"Father, father, forgive me! Speak but one word—speak to your son, to Reginald; say you forgive me!"

As though the words were a spell which restored him to life and consciousness, the General, who for hours and hours had lain silent, motionless, still almost as a corpse, raised himself in bed, clasped his arms around his son's neck, and cried, in a wild, passionate, entreating voice—oh, how it rang through the hearts of those who heard it!—

"Reginald, my boy, my boy, forgive *me!*"

Could it be that a light from eternity, streaming in on his understanding, had revealed to his alarmed gaze the full extent of the injustice he had done to his second-born? Could it be that, when it was too late for him to undo what he had done, he foresaw the misery his act would entail on his children, the need he had of their forgiveness? Heaven alone, who knows all things, can tell, for as the last word fell on his son's ear, he sank back on the pillow: he had passed to that other land, where is heard no echo from the waves of sorrow which beat perpetually on the shore of life.

Reginald flung himself on the body: he kissed the pale lips, he wept, and sobbed, and moaned; he reproached himself for his absence, for his delay: he was mad with grief, haste, excitement, and the suddenness of the shock, and cried, almost hysterically, like a woman, only with a louder sorrow; whilst Constance, whose tears were either exhausted or choked up, besought him to be calm. She threw her arm on his neck, and pressed her cold cheek to his, and kept on murmuring, over and over again—

"Oh! Reginald, if only for our sake, try to compose yourself. Remember you are all that is left to us; there are only the three of us, and we are women, and stand so much in need of comfort: do be calm. Oh! my brother, my own dear brother! what is this dreadful trial which has befallen us?"

Still he wept and reproached himself, and still she shivered, and spoke she scarcely knew what; only she wanted him to be quiet, for his loud, vehement lamentations terrified her. But at length she desisted from her endeavours, and his grief sank at last to low passionate sobs, mingled occasionally with exclamations of despair. It may have been that both found some relief in that hour; for vehement outbursts of sorrow, though terrible to contemplate, often take a portion of the weight from an almost breaking heart; and Constance felt

she had now some one to lean on, some one from whom she could very shortly claim comfort and support.

How long they might thus have remained she could never tell, when a hand was laid on the young man's shoulder, and a stranger exclaimed—

"Reginald Ireby, be a man; if not for your own, at least for your sisters' sake, rouse yourself: they have need of all the consolation you can afford them; do not add, therefore, to their affliction in this trying hour;—be a man, I say."

Reginald started to his feet, and he and Constance, both turning, beheld an individual of a somewhat stern countenance standing near them, regarding the whole scene with a sad and perturbed expression.

"And who are you, sir?" demanded the young man, dashing the tears from his eyes, and proudly confronting the stranger; "who are you that thus dare intrude on the sanctity of a death-chamber, and presume to dictate to me? who are you?"

"Who am I, boy?" returned the other, speaking calmly and very slowly, that not a syllable might be lost of the information he conveyed. "Your question is easily answered. I am Delavelle Ireby, your elder and only brother."

In this one sentence there was something which caused Reginald instinctively to clasp his sister closer to him, as if to protect her from some threatened danger, that made Constance start and shrink and turn paler even than she had been before, that made her look wildly in the new-comer's face as Reginald repeated after him, "Brother! *my* brother!"

Delavelle Ireby looked for a minute at the pair who confronted him, at the young man whose arm was twined around Constance's waist, at the girl whose small white hand rested on her brother's shoulder. No light of affection or encouragement shone from their dark eyes upon him, the stranger; not even the faintest smile of welcome softened the proud,

haughty expression which sat on their countenances. Their very attitude was repellent and defiant. It seemed to say that though they might be much to each other, they were nothing to him. Nay, more, he felt they would prove hostile to him, whilst they almost unconsciously had a presentiment, undefined, yet not the less powerful, that the man who stood before them was destined ere long to effect some sad alteration in their destinies.

He looked at the brother and sister—at the raven tresses which distinguished both — at their dark eyes, their pallid cheeks, their proud mouths, their stately carriage; then his glance turned as if of necessity to the portrait on the wall they so much resembled; and, lastly, it fell on the corpse lying so near—on the corpse of him who had been his father and theirs; who had been husband to his dead mother, and to the lady who once had called the now orphaned children hers.

He could not look on the dead without feeling softened towards them; his jealous spirit was nearly satisfied with the triumph it had already gained, for he held in his own hand the fates of those who had so long, in his imagination, usurped the place he should have occupied. He now was lord and master of all. In that house, where they had so long been almost rulers, he was chief; in the place where they had dwelt since their birth—where they had grown up, where they had always lived, which they had called by the dear name of "home"—they were now mere cyphers. True, as yet they were unaware of all this, and no one in or about the place knew that he was thenceforth to be sovereign of Briarton; but *he* was perfectly aware of the position he now occupied, and could consequently afford to overlook some faults in them, and condescend to those who were from thenceforward to be dependants on his bounty; besides, there is that about death which softens the hardest hearts, and there was a something very

like remorse for the part he acted towards those who had never wittingly offended him tugging at his conscience; and lastly, he earnestly desired peace to reign amongst them, and for all these reasons he answered Reginald's exclamation of astonishment calmly.

"Yes, Reginald, your brother, who, an outcast from his birth from our father's house, came at the last hour to receive a parent's blessing ere he died; your brother, who, whilst you were surrounded with luxury and affection, was battling for a bare subsistence amongst strangers; your brother, whom you have never previously seen, who never before beheld you, but who would fain be a friend unto you, and who fervently wishes for a place in your affections."

He had addressed his words to Reginald, but his eyes appealed to Constance. Perhaps he imagined the woman's heart would pity his long banishment from home and father: if he did, he was mistaken; something about him repelled the girl; she waited to hear her brother's reply, which rang harshly through the death-chamber, and grated on Delavelle's ear.

"I do not accept for a brother every man who announces himself to be one. Before bestowing my friendship on any man, I should wish to form my own opinion of his character. Before permitting a stranger to serve me, I desire to learn how he proposes to do so, and what motive he may have for wishing to ingratiate himself with me. In one word, sir, your statement sounds so very extraordinary, and is so very unexpected, that I require proofs of your identity before I can receive as a brother one of whom, during the twenty-two years I have lived in daily intercourse with my father, I never heard him speak."

"Proofs you shall have," retorted Delavelle; "proofs that your father recognized my claim; proofs that I have the power to serve you materially, and benefit you considerably;

proofs that you may do well to cultivate my good opinion. But," he added, suddenly checking himself, "let there be unity and peace amongst us; or if we must argue concerning such matters, let it not be in the chamber whence so lately a soul has departed. I came here to try to comfort you—to rouse you from your sorrow—so that you might console those who have much need of sympathy and support.

"Do you think because I cannot weep that I feel no grief? —that the sight of my parent lying dead does not affect me? Look at him; and if relationship cannot make us friends, let a common sympathy and a common trial draw us closer to each other. You called that lady, whose picture hangs so near us, 'mother,' and to me, it is true, she was nothing; but that man who so lately lay there still breathing and suffering, and who is now lifeless, was father to us all. For his sake, in the name of him who was your parent and my parent, I ask you to receive me, if not now as a brother, at least as a friend."

The appeal was not made in vain. Reginald, when he paused, took his proffered hand, and clasped it in his own. Constance held out her hand also, which Delavelle took and retained for a moment, whilst he looked once again earnestly in her face. A gulf yawned between them, he felt. Perhaps conscience whispered this; perhaps he felt their mother's children could never be dear to him; perhaps those dark clear eyes read down into the depths of his soul, and saw something of the thoughts and passions which were dwelling there; at all events, it was with a feeling almost of resentment that he turned from Constance, and left the room. He had chosen a bad time and adopted an unhappy method of announcing his consanguinity. Brother and sister had both felt his presence an intrusion; both had considered his introductory speech presumptuous and unfeeling; peace there was never destined to be between them.

On the threshold he met Marian, slight, fair, and delicate-looking; she had come down to watch, ignorant of her father's death.

Delavelle detained her for a moment. His manner changed completely when addressing her, she seemed so helpless, so fragile; she was so completely unlike her brother, her sister, and the woman he hated. He felt irresistibly drawn towards her.

"Stay," he said in a very low voice. "Stay; you must not go in there."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because you can be of no use there," he answered, hesitatingly; "because——"

"He is dead!" she cried, striving to free herself from his grasp and enter the room.

"He is. You have now no father on earth. But, Marian," he added, almost appealingly, "I am your brother; I will be father, brother, friend, comforter, all in one, if you will let me. Oh! why should there not be union amongst us?"

She made a vain effort to rush forward, but fell fainting into his supporting arms. Tenderly, lovingly, as though she had been his child, he carried her upstairs to her room, and laid her on the bed, where she had so often fallen tranquilly to sleep.

Through the long hours of that weary night Constance Ireby sat by her sister's side, sometimes dozing, sometimes perfectly conscious; but in her troubled dreams one object constantly presented itself—her father's dead body; and as she started from unrefreshing slumber, one sentence—that spoken to Reginald—rang perpetually in her ears—"I am Delavelle Ireby, your elder and only brother."

CHAPTER X.

THE READING OF THE WILL.

To say that Mr. Delavelle Ireby and his brother disagreed during the interval which elapsed from the time of General Ireby's demise to the day of his funeral would be to use a very mild term for the bickerings that incessantly occurred between them. Still, they never actually quarrelled, nor did any open breach take place, for each seemed determined to keep up at least a semblance of good-will towards the other, although, at the same period, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness were dwelling in their bosoms.

The air of superiority with which Delavelle assumed a sort of authority at Briarton irritated Reginald so mightily, that many times he thought of civilly informing the unwelcome intruder that he imagined his absence would be conducive to the comfort of all parties; but respect for his father's memory, a kind of feeling that, until the funeral was over, it would seem premature for him to take the management of affairs solely into his own hands, an unconfessed conviction that, on the whole, his brother had been hardly treated, and, last, a vague dread that his own position was by no means secure, made him resolve to at least *tolerate* Delavelle's presence until after the will was read.

He would not have had the least objection to receiving his newly-found relative as a visitor, a guest, a friend; but his brother was by no means inclined to acquiesce in any such tacit arrangement, and, accordingly, during the interval when Briarton was left without a monarch, these two aspirants to the vacant throne reigned jointly, though it can hardly be added peacefully together.

It must not be imagined, however, that Reginald received

Mr. Delavelle Ireby's claims without first investigating as far as possible the accuracy of the stranger's assertions.

"I do not believe one word of the story," he said to Constance on the morning succeeding the General's death; "I think it is a gross imposition; and if he come back here again, I shall order him out of the house. He shall find me a very different sort of person from my poor father. I am not to be duped or trifled with. I am very sorry I shook hands with him last night, but really I was in such a state of mind I scarcely knew what I was doing or saying; but now I am calm, the case is different. He shall not come here, and I will not be trifled with."

"Dear Reginald, be calm in action as you say you are in feeling. Do not, I implore you, quarrel with this man," remonstrated his sister.

"And pray, why not?" demanded Reginald.

"Because I fear his story is true. I fear he is what he represents himself to be, and that some fresh sorrow is in store for us. I would give anything on earth to be able to believe I had no other brother but you; but I believe that his tale is too true."

"And I do not credit a syllable of it," returned he, pettishly; "and I really cannot see why you should either."

"If you had been here to see all the strange events which occurred from the time of his first visit until last night, you might be less sceptical," she replied; and with the weight of her own heavy sorrow lying at her heart, she told her brother all the facts with which he had been previously unacquainted, and finished by repeating her conviction that "trouble was in store for them."

Reginald was alarmed by her narrative—more alarmed than he cared to confess even to himself. He was angry because he had been in Scotland at the time instead of at Briarton; he was angry because Constance could throw no

certain light on the matter,—angry because he apprehended so much and positively knew so little.

"I do not comprehend why you let him see my father at all," he said angrily. "I think women are little better than idiots. If I had been at home, this fellow should never have crossed the threshold!"

Constance, hurt by his tone and manner, looked gravely in his face, and answered reproachfully—

"And *why* were you not at home, Reginald? Had you come when I first asked you, had you attended to my second letter, had you left orders even for your later correspondence to be forwarded, you might have known all I have told you long ago; but what is the use of talking in this way now? We cannot bring back our poor father, or a single error that may have been committed: do not speak unkindly to me, Reginald, I cannot bear it; think of how very lonely Marian and I are now in the world, and let us resolve, whilst we are all mourning for the loss of the dead, that, let what will come, nothing on earth shall ever have power to divide us or lessen our love for one another."

She was so grievously affected as she spoke, she looked so stricken with terror, she appealed so earnestly to all that was good and tender in her brother, she laid her hand so entreatingly, and yet so confidingly, on his shoulder, that Reginald's irritation vanished in a moment; and he kissed her, and said he would do whatever she chose, and asked what she thought would be his best plan to pursue with regard to this person, who styled himself "Delavelle Ireby, forsooth!"

Constance answered, "She did not know; would it not be better for Reginald to speak quietly to him, or to Mr. Empson, or somebody?" And Reginald, thinking these vague suggestions worthy of attention, held an unsatisfactory conversation with Delavelle, the result of which was that he

dispatched a messenger to Mr. Empson, requesting an immediate interview with that gentleman.

Greatly to Reginald's disappointment, the solicitor either could not or would not comply with his desire; and accordingly the young man wrote a rambling letter to the solicitor, explaining the position in which he had found affairs on his return home; begging to be advised as to the best course for him to pursue under the circumstances, and expressing a wish to have Mr. Empson's opinion as to whether the stranger were really the individual he represented himself to be.

Mr. Empson received this epistle late at night, and thought over its contents for a considerable period; then he, knowing pretty much the actual place which poor Reginald, so proud, so impetuous, was thenceforth to occupy,—not wishing to lead the youth astray, feeling that the past was irremediable and the future almost hopeless,—sat down, and, with a heart brimful of pity for the orphaned girls and their headstrong brother, penned the following formal letter, by way of answer to the unbusiness-like missive the General's younger son had dispatched to him:—

"Brenslow, Oct. 17th, 18—.

"My dear Sir,—In reply to your favour of to-day, I beg to state that, from various circumstances which fell under my own observation, I see no reason to doubt that your father had a son older than yourself, and that the individual calling himself Mr. Delavelle Ireby is the person in question.

"It seems to me your best course to pursue is to treat him as such—to be at least civil in manner, and, if possible, to gain his friendship: family quarrels ought always to be avoided; and if your father have left him any bequest, he will then of course be compelled to prove his legal rights to the same.

"Supposing he should fail to do this, you are not compromised by having received him as your brother, under a misconception; but if (as is most probable) he can prove himself to be your brother, you will be able to arrange your affairs in a much more

satisfactory manner if on a friendly footing with so near a relative than you could do were the reverse the case. I should certainly recommend permitting matters to remain as they are, at least for the present.

"Of course I shall return with you to Briarton after the funeral, as you express a desire to that effect, and in the meantime remain, "Yours faithfully,

"To Reginald Ireby, Esq." "ROBERT EMPSON.

How dark a shadow fell on Reginald's heart as he read the letter; how, as the days wore on, it deepened; how jealously he watched Delavelle's every word and look; how he chafed at his interference; how he strove to bridle his before unbridled temper; how perpetually their ideas and inclinations seemed to clash—it is utterly impossible to record.

The period that intervened before he positively knew his fate, whilst hope and fear alternated in his bosom, whilst he one day imagined Delavelle had, as he mentally expressed it, "done him out of his property," and the next, considered his father would never have dreamt of willing Briarton from him, was a time of racking torture. It is said there is nothing worse than suspense; but God knows there are many realities that are more unendurable than any uncertainty, no matter how wearing, and this simply because they are realities, and no phantoms of the imagination.

The days which elapse between a death and a funeral, weary, heartrending, and heart-sickening as they are, interminable as they seem, must pass away; and at length, when Delavelle's apparent arrogance was becoming almost unendurable, and Reginald's limited stock of patience was well-nigh exhausted, the morning arrived when General Ireby's mortal remains were to be buried, and when those he left behind him were to learn their destiny.

It is not necessary to dwell on the dreary pomp and cir-

cumstance of death; suffice it to say, the General was buried as "became his rank and station." Some friends looked affected as they stood in the church and heard the service for the dead echoing through the little edifice. Delavelle, with compressed lips and pale face, kept his emotions locked within his own bosom; Reginald, always impressible, always impetuous, was so deeply moved as to excite the pity of some, the contempt of others, who deemed his display of feeling either weak or hypocritical. It was all over; dust to dust had returned; and the brothers drove home to Briarton together.

How very lately it had become home to the one; how very soon it was to cease to be home to the other!

Reginald, on his return, found his sisters sitting with their arms twined round each other, looking so sad and lonely that his very soul sank within him as he looked at them.

"You must come," he said, "to—to hear the will read."

"Surely there is no necessity for *us* to go down," pleaded Constance; "we cannot meet strangers."

"It is customary," replied the young man; "and, as all the lawyers are ready, it will not do for you to cause delay."

There was nothing unkind in his tone, though it was impatient. Constance well knew how eager he felt to hear the all-binding document read—perhaps she herself was hardly less anxious to learn its contents—so she rose, without another word, and followed Reginald, who led Marian tenderly downstairs, across the hall, and so into the sitting-room, which once had seemed so pleasant an apartment, but which now appeared like everything else around, gloomy and sad to the young girl's heart.

The occupants of the chamber, all gentlemen, rose as the three entered. They looked with pity on the youngest girl, who, almost bewildered with grief, scarcely appeared to comprehend her situation: there was compassion for the three orphans none withheld sympathy from them, not even

Delavelle, who took Marian by the hand, and placed her in a chair.

Mr. D'Evelyn looked for a moment at Reginald and his sisters, and then turned a glance, half reproachful, half entreating, and whole guilty, on Mr. Ireby.

The younger brother and Constance sat down, side by side, on a couch. There was an awkward silence for a moment; then Mr. Empson broke the stillness by producing a document, handed to him by Reginald—a document purporting to be the last will and testament of "General Delavelle Ireby of Briarton," which he was about to read, when Delavelle interrupted him by inquiring the date of the deed in question.

Mr. Empson read it for his information.

"I believe," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn, "I am in possession of an instrument executed much more recently; it would, therefore, be useless to go through that document, which is, of course, by the later will rendered valueless."

"What is the date of the paper you hold, sir?" interposed Reginald.

The attorney told him.

"Made but a few days before my father's death?" remarked the young man.

"A short period," asserted Mr. D'Evelyn.

"In that case," said Reginald, turning to Mr. Empson, "may I beg you to proceed?"

"It is sheer waste of time," interposed Delavelle.

"Quite useless," said Mr. D'Evelyn, who earnestly desired to get the business—a very unpleasant business he foresaw it was likely to be—over as soon as possible.

"May I beg you to go on, Mr. Empson?" persisted Reginald.

"You had better commence, Mr. D'Evelyn," said Delavelle, who was literally white with excitement.

"Good heavens, sir! do you give counter-orders in *my*

house?" exclaimed his brother. "I have borne much from you, but I will endure no more. I say Mr. Empson *shall* read the deed: let me see the man who will dare to interrupt him. What do you say, Mr. Empson?"

"That I am here to read it or not, precisely as you desire," returned the solicitor, answering Reginald, but somehow addressing himself to the elder brother, who sneered, and turned his head aside with an impatient gesture; whilst Mr. Empson's client, deeply mortified at this negative support, bit his lip, and made a sign for that gentleman to proceed.

Mr. Delavelle Ireby resigned himself to go through this unexpected ordeal with what grace he might; Mr. D'Evelyn occupied himself in screwing up his courage for the task lying before him; Marian tried to suppress her sobs; Constance watched Reginald; and the two or three other persons assembled, regarded the scene with curiosity and interest, and listened somewhat languidly to Mr. Empson, as he wandered through the longest and most unconnected document which any misguided mortal ever deluded himself into believing was a sample of legal correctness.

At last it was all done, even to the half-dozenth codicil. Mr. Empson laid it down; and then Reginald, turning gravely to Mr. D'Evelyn, said—

"Now, sir, will you have the kindness to commence?"

When Mr. Empson concluded, Delaville had, as if unable longer to restrain himself, risen from his seat; but on hearing his brother's words, he resumed it again with a bitter smile; whilst Mr. D'Evelyn did commence as requested, and hurried through the will at railway speed.

There was only one self-possessed man in the room—that man was Delavelle Ireby. He looked once at the portrait on the wall. The glance, rightly interpreted, meant,—"At last my hour is come; now I have my revenge!"

Mr. D'Evelyn, having finished, folded up the will.

"Is that all?" asked Reginald.

"All," agreed Mr. D'Evelyn.

"And you affirm that to be my father's last will and testament?" he proceeded.

"Properly signed and sealed," continued Mr. D'Evelyn, answering, for want of a better reply, in legal jargon.

The young man rose angrily, and made an effort to snatch the document; but his attempt failed, for the solicitor thrust the will hastily into his pocket. Reginald glanced around, as though he wished to tear some one in pieces; as if the inclination to do so existed, though the power did not. The suddenness of the blow seemed to have numbed his bodily strength; even the ability to move, after his first hasty spring, appeared to have deserted him.

His wild manner, deadly pallor, and the excitement which shook his frame, alarmed Constance, who, bewildered like her brother, did not at once comprehend, as he did, the full extent of their calamity.

"Reginald!" she asked, rising, "Reginald! what is the meaning of this?"

"That we are beggars!" he vehemently exclaimed; "that our father has left us without land, money—even a shelter; that Briarton has gone from me; that your portions have been taken from you; that we have been robbed and cheated by *him!*"

He pointed to Delavelle as he spoke. Mr. Empson earnestly entreated him to be calm.

"Calm!" he repeated, laying a hand on his sister's shoulder, as if for support. "Yes, I am quite calm; for a man who has just learned such a pleasant piece of intelligence as Mr. D'Evelyn has communicated, I think I am amazingly calm. But, sir," he added, turning to his brother, "do not imagine I will tamely submit to this villany; you have not a boy or a woman to deal with; you have not a man exhausted by long sickness,

as my poor father was, to dupe or intimidate now. I will speak!"—he said, in answer to Mr. Empson's alarmed gestures,—"and you," he added, turning again towards Delavelle, "shall yet have trouble from me. This will shall be set aside—I will carry it into every Court in England; and if justice be unattainable on earth, we must carry our quarrel before the bar of Heaven, and have it settled by a more righteous Judge than any who will favour you."

"Mr. Ireby, I entreat of you to speak no more at present," urged Mr. Empson. "Miss Constance, will you implore your brother to leave the room?"

"We may leave the house, Constance," said the young man; "it belongs to us no longer: we are intruders here. Good God! to think that we are literally beggars; that I must go forth from my own home to make way for a nameless stranger; that my father could—— Yes, yes," he added, "you are right. I will leave the room, and speak no more till I am calmer. I—I—do not exactly know what I am saying now;" and he laid his hand on his forehead as though some sudden pain had seized him, moved a step or two forward, and then fell heavily on the floor.

Every one present gathered around him: they raised him gently from the ground; they bore him, as he had said, a beggar from the apartment, and laid him on a bed which he might occupy only for a short period, on sufferance; for Delavelle Ireby was now master of Briarton, and the younger brother's home was to be from thenceforth that wide and desolate dwelling-place—the world!

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD FRIEND.

DURING the short time Mr. D'Evelyn had spent at Briarton, on the occasion of his first visit to that place, Mr. Daniel O'Shaughnessy, finding his other avocations by no means pressing, and his engagements to dinner and evening parties very far from frequent, had called almost every day—when, as he informed the servant, "he was just passing through the square"—at his friend's house, to inquire when he was expected home; and thus it chanced that on Mr. D'Evelyn's return it behoved the domestic to inform him of the number of visits a comparative stranger had paid.

"If you please, sir," said she,—Mrs. D'Evelyn having a prejudice against male servants in general, and pages in particular, since the demise of Samuel Snooks, Esquire, none but female domestics had ministered in the household, always excepting the little errand boy, who was a mere nobody, and never rebelled against his mistress on the score of hot joints and beer,—"if you please, sir, there has been a gentleman here almost every day since you went away, wanting to see you."

"Where is his card?" asked the attorney.

"He never had a card, sir; he always said he had forgotten one, and that he had just called when he was passing by, and that it did not matter much, for that he would come again."

"Do you not know who he is? Did you not ask his name?" demanded Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I never saw him until the day but one after you went away, sir; and I did ask him, sir, who I should say had called."

"Well, and who is he?" asked the solicitor, somewhat interested.

"He is sir, Mr.— Mr.— the gentleman with the name, you know, sir. He said you were well acquainted with him," answered the woman.

"Most of the gentlemen I have had the pleasure of meeting in the course of my life have been provided with names; but why you cannot, or will not, tell me his at once, it is beyond my power to imagine."

"Please, sir," said she, "it's so very odd; it's Mr.— Mr. O'Shaw— Oh! I thought, sir, you'd know it quite well when I said he was a friend of yours; it's the gentleman with *the* name."

Mr. D'Evelyn began to entertain a shrewd suspicion of who this perplexing individual was, but still he inquired, "What is he like? Can you not describe him more clearly?"

"Oh, sir! I can't say nothing about him, except that he has such a name, and is Hirish," she answered, pettishly.

"That settles the matter," he remarked: "if you had said at first he was from Ireland, I should have understood you. I suppose it is Mr. O'Shaughnessy?"

"Yes, sir, that is just it; but he said it so differently, so strangely," she replied, as if relieved from some perplexity.

"Oh! I am not competent to pronounce Irish gh's, that is all," answered her master, good-humouredly. "If you cannot manage the name, call him the gentleman from Ireland, and I shall understand you."

And accordingly, on that very afternoon, Mr. O'Shaughnessy, *sans* money, *sans* employment, *sans* card-case, *sans* anything save himself, his name, and his good temper, once more called, "in passing," and was so fortunate as to find his friend at home and at leisure.

"Faith! D'Evelyn, I thought you were either never going to come back, or had given orders I was not to be admitted,"

he said, as he shook the solicitor's hand with Hibernian heartiness.

"Perhaps I thought the first myself," answered Mr. D'Evelyn; "but the latter to you!—no; I always like to see an old friend's face, no matter how battered it may be."

"A most delicate compliment to my physiognomy, truly," returned the Irishman, whose face as well as habiliments were the worse for wear. "It is plain to be seen which side of the Channel owns you; but never mind, I never take offence, and perhaps it is a sort of balance that I often give it. What have you been doing in the country?—fleecing your clients and making a fortune?—eh?"

"Humph! perhaps both," returned Mr. D'Evelyn; "but if I had been doing the latter, it certainly was not for myself. However, as you say, never mind, we will not talk of professional matters now. What are you doing just at present?"

"Listening to you," responded Mr. O'Shaughnessy.

"And when not so engaged?" pursued Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Replying to you," returned the Irishman.

"Pshaw! I mean have you any occupation, any employment? What are you doing in the ordinary sense of the phrase?"

"Nothing—literally nothing," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy, who had evaded answering the straightforward question as long as he could; "in the ordinary sense of the phrase, literally nothing."

"And in the extraordinary, or——?" Mr. D'Evelyn paused.

"Irish," replied the other: "don't be afraid of offending me;—well, very little. I take a turn at anything which presents itself."

"Do you make enough to live?" demanded Mr. D'Evelyn.

"What questions you do ask!" said the other, wincing a

little under the cross-examination. "Live!—how do you mean, live?"

"Do you make enough to live ill, well, or indifferently; in style, or in a garret, or in a second floor? do you make enough, in short, to pay your way?" persisted the attorney.

"No, I don't," retorted Mr. O'Shaughnessy, sulkily.

"Then, how the deuce do you manage to get on?"

"It often puzzles myself," was the candid reply. "Sometimes I have money, and can pay for what I want; sometimes I am so fortunate as to get credit; and frequently I borrow."

"And do you refund?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Oh, dear, no," said his companion, "what would be the use of that? it will all be right in time, when my ship comes home, then I can pay every shilling; but at present, you see, I am a gentleman at large, and can afford to owe."

"And may I ask who is the very wise individual that in the meantime can afford to wait?" said the solicitor.

"The very nicest fellow you ever met," returned Mr. O'Shaughnessy, brightening up at the mere recollection of his acquaintance,—"Martock, a young barrister. I met him one day going down to Greenwich, and we got into conversation, and I told him my story, and we dined together, and we came home together, and, as I had no particular lodgings, we live together."

"And share his fees together?—eh?"

"No, poor devil, he has no fees; he is almost as badly off as I am now,—as you were once, D'Evelyn," answered Mr. O'Shaughnessy; "but when he does get a little money by any means, he shares it with me; and I am to pay him some time, and I will do it, upon my honour I will, if I can."

"A very safe proviso," sneered Mr. D'Evelyn; "but now tell me, do you not desire some settled employment, some permanent situation?"

"I will answer you frankly, old friend, for I see you are going to propose something for my benefit," returned the other. "I am sick of work, toiling endlessly for no result. I laboured here, before I went abroad, like a galley slave; I had been in harness for a while, too, before leaving Ireland; I thought to make a fortune, or at least an independence, in India, where so many from my little green island have won wealth and position. But ill luck followed me there. The only good thing I found at my journey's end was a true-hearted woman, who comforted me for a while, and died. Here I am again, poor as I went away, a little older, a little wiser, greatly shattered in constitution, perfectly hopeless, and utterly careless. All I desire now is to knock over a few more years tolerably easily, fall sick, die, be buried. Faith! D'Evelyn, if I just had enough to keep me going for a little, and to give my father's son a decent funeral, I should live and die, comparatively speaking, happy."

"But you cannot go on for ever drawing on this man's purse, even supposing he could get it replenished *ad lib.*," remonstrated the attorney.

"I have been giving that very idea my serious consideration for two days," confessed the Irishman. "Do not imagine it belongs exclusively to yourself. I am fairly at a loss what to do, for, in the first place, as you say, I cannot go on drawing from him, and in the next he is nearly exhausted."

"Which reason has the greatest weight with you?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn, laughing.

"The last is the most pressing to my body, the first to my mind," retorted his victim.

"Well, well, don't be angry," said the other. "To wind up the business at once, you must do something."

"You have said it; but what?"

"Take a situation. You cannot earn money without occupation of some sort or other."

"Yes, but, you see, I don't want to work. I am, as I said before, fairly sick and tired of it. Perhaps I made a false start in life; perhaps I lacked some essential requisite for money-getting in days gone by; most assuredly it was not industry. There is no use fretting about the river of prosperity having flowed past without bearing my bark with it. I am too old to begin again now; besides, it would be like every other good effort I ever made—a vain one. I cannot and will not labour ever again as I laboured once, for hope, and energy, and everything,—yes, everything which once endued me with the ability to struggle, has left me."

Mr. D'Evelyn looked at him for a moment with a feeling of mingled contempt and compassion; then he said—

"It is impossible for you to starve, however."

"Yes; there is the misery. So long as a man is in the flesh he *must* eat," returned Mr. O'Shaughnessy, with a solemnity which moved his friend's risible muscles. "You must not laugh, D'Evelyn; to me it is no laughing matter. I cannot starve, and I cannot die. If I could do that thing without just going to Blackfriars Bridge and throwing myself into the river, I would."

"And can you do nothing else?"

"No," replied the other, still pursuing the idea of suicide. "Hanging one's self, though preferable to being hung, is not just the way for an Irish gentleman to make his bow; and somehow, latterly, I don't like the smell of gunpowder, and poisoning is reported to be a painful death, and I have an aversion to cold steel. Once indeed I thought of cutting my throat in India, and had the razor across my windpipe, when my servant, a Connaught fellow, came blundering in. 'John,' said I, 'I was just going to finish myself. What is your notion of the matter?' 'I think, sir,' he answered, 'you had betther let it stand over till the morrow, and think about it.' Well, I took his advice, and my courage vanished, and

here I am. If he had stayed away two minutes longer, I should have been——"

"Past advice," interrupted Mr. D'Evelyn. "It seems to me you have arrived at that blessed state without the intervention of a razor. I did not intend, however, to ask if you had thought of no easy mode of getting out of the world, I merely meant was there nothing you could do to make your sojourn in it comfortable? Could you not, as I said before, take a light situation, as you do not incline to over-exertion?"

"Yes; but there is no such thing in London as a light situation to be had. Here everything is toil. They even make pleasure a toil; and as for business! good sooth, it is business in earnest—no child's play—eternal, everlasting, always beginning, never ending; pale faces, tired minds, aching heads: and what is it all for? what is the use of it? what good does it do to individuals? In Ireland the labourers work the life out, as they express it, to keep the life in, and this benefits their employers. Here they do precisely the same thing on a larger scale, and so the country thrives and prospers, and is a glory amongst nations."

"Many amongst its inhabitants, however, contrive to live pretty comfortably," said his friend; "and though I admit that work is a part of the curse, I also affirm it to be the portion which makes the rest of it endurable. If I were forced to work hard, I should be a happier man; if you *would* work, O'Shaughnessy, you might not, perhaps, be better tempered, but you assuredly would be lighter hearted. However, I think I have just what will suit you. I can give you employment for a few hours daily, the toil not being great, neither is the remuneration; but as you merely desire sufficient to supply your most pressing wants, with leisure to amuse yourself, I think you would be very foolish to dream of refusing my offer."

"Refuse your offer!" said O'Shaughnessy, "my dear fellow,

I had no such notion; I shall accept it with thankfulness, providing always I am at liberty to leave when I like."

"When you get anything better," said Mr. D'Evelyn.

"No; when I get tired of this," answered the Irishman, in perfect good faith; whereat his friend laughed, and declared the matter settled, and added an invitation for the following evening, which Mr. O'Shaughnessy accepted with far more pleasure and gratitude than the situation which was to provide him with independent, though very small, means; and as he departed, he said, with a sudden burst of friendship—

"I say, D'Evelyn, cannot you solicitors sometimes put something in the way of barristers? I do wish you would help Martock; he is a real, good, gentlemanlike fellow, though somewhat reserved with new acquaintances."

"Bring him with you to-morrow, at all events," said the solicitor; "that is, if he will come, and let me see him for myself."

Mr. O'Shaughnessy answered, as he descended the steps, that "*that* he would!" and so went home to his lodgings, provided for.

Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn had made acquaintance with him in days when both were poor, hopeful, and young. Perhaps it was for the sake of that past friendship, for the memory of the pleasant companionship which had made some bright spots amidst the weary struggles of earlier times; perhaps it was for these things, and because of a yearning and regret for that period of unappreciated liberty, that the attorney felt a kind of contemptuous affection for O'Shaughnessy, though the Irishman's faults were now clear to his perception as his virtues formerly had been.

In youth, people form attachments from impulse or fancy; in later life they discover how shallow, base, deceitful, or contemptible the beings are whom once they almost wor-

shipped; but still from habit, or some waywardness in human nature, their hearts turn, in after-times, with fond folly to the idol, though they know it to be but of inferior clay; and whilst they entertain for the friends, chosen because possessed of intrinsic merit, a better regard than they can ever feel for the careless associates of earlier days, they have always a more romantic, more forgiving sort of love to bestow on the latter than on the former. They feel, in short, as Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn did, "that a worthier man might have failed to gain so large a portion of his liking and forbearance, though he might possess a treble portion of his esteem."

Nor was this all. If Mr. O'Shaughnessy had, as he said, "seen the river of prosperity flow past without bearing his bark along with it," Mr. D'Evelyn felt he was sailing down the golden tide in the wrong boat, drifting with a most unenviable companion, towards a port called by any name rather than that of happiness. The Irishman had struggled by starts against the stream,—striking out manfully one moment, he had permitted himself the next to be swept shamefully back to shore; or else he had relaxed his exertions, to pause by some bright object glittering near him, which always proved, when caught, to be merely bright, never good; or he ventured too near the rocks and quicksands bordering the wide ocean of life, in order to listen to the songs of the mermaids. At all events, he was so frequently turned from his purpose by fatigue, pleasure, faint-heartedness, or a wayward current, into which he managed perpetually to get, that he was left at last utterly reckless and weary, stranded on the shore of existence, content to sit there; sometimes good-humouredly contemplating the stately vessels wherein more fortunate fellows went cheerily on to port; sometimes, though, to do him justice, more rarely, flinging the little pebbles of his spleen and irritation at the craft which passed him,—pebbles that generally fell short of the object,—and when they did

strike the mark, glanced harmlessly aside, wounding no one, which, in truth, he never intended that they should.

And though Mr. D'Evelyn was sailing along with the rest, the gay colours of competency floating in the wind, he sometimes thought it would be better sport to be able to sit on the bank, like O'Shaughnessy, and fling pebbles in the water; or else go forth, hopeful and free, manfully to breast the tide.

Oh! to be able once again to choose the vessel in which he should make the voyage of existence. If he had but possessed patience and discernment, he might now either have reached some happy haven, or been struggling with a purpose still.

Because they had both been unfortunate, imprudent, he liked Mr. O'Shaughnessy better than a better man; and the Irishman liked him as he might have valued a comfortable winter coat, because he was pleasant and serviceable, and was made of tolerably good stuff after all.

CHAPTER XII.

REGINALD'S RESOLUTION.

When last the reader parted from Mr. Reginald Ireby, he was in that state of unconsciousness from which many, who would fain never open their eyes on this side of eternity again, have, like him, been restored to a knowledge of their actual position, of the impending struggle for which they must brace their nerves, of the endurance and self-denial they will have to practise—to a knowledge of all they have

lost, to an almost maddening sense of their wrongs; ay, and it may be, to a sickening remembrance of their follies also.

Slowly as life comes back to one rescued from drowning, slowly but surely did the recollection of recent events return to Reginald Ireby, and weakly and impotently he struck, in his despair, at surrounding objects. He raised his enfeebled hand, and dashed it, now on the coverlet, now on his aching head; then he suffered it to rest in that of Constance, his sister, for awhile; and then, again, he groaned in bitterness of spirit, and moved uneasily, as if any change of position were a relief to him.

She could not comfort him; she had need of comfort herself. What words, no matter how kind or soothing, could, in truth, make the slightest difference in their unhappy position? What could restore their father to life, or unsign his will? The past was irremediable: no consolation could alter facts; and the blow had been struck so lately that words of hope for the future, of encouragement to struggle, of ability to endure, would but have seemed mockeries; and, under the circumstances, even had there been any injudicious friend near to speak them, would probably have irritated Reginald more than absolute silence.

It was his hour of mortal suffering—of that scorching agony—of that fierce rage which burns perhaps all the fiercer because of its utter impotence—of that hopeless, helpless, yet withal intense and desperate misery, which is harder to bear than any pain of body, no matter how racking or acute. For the latter there is always hope—always some remedy, or at least alleviation; for the former, whilst the fit lasts, it seems as though no time can make life endurable on the terms, as though death alone can give relief to the sufferer.

The day wore on. How wearily the hours lagged, yet how full of painful excitement were they to the orphans! The sun set; twilight came, then night closed over all things.

Once more morning broke, and Reginald was calm. The fever of his mind and the prostration of his body had both passed away; he was now competent to think and act. Under the circumstances his recovery seemed little of a boon; but still it had been granted, and it was his to turn it to good or evil account, to make it either a blessing or a curse.

And so he arose, and went once again into the familiar rooms—his no longer; passed amongst grief-stricken, sympathetic domestics, whom he had no longer a right to command; stood, in fact, in a house where he had once been almost master, which he had regarded almost as his own, which had been his home from boyhood, which he had always expected ultimately to possess; stood amidst the wreck of his household gods, of his proudest anticipations—a man beggared in the very outset of life, without a shilling he could call his own, without a profession, and, now he so much required assistance, almost without friends.

He rose with one resolution; he vowed he would break the will. How this desirable object was to be accomplished was not quite apparent even to him; but he repeated over and over again to Constance, that, come what would, it should be set aside; that even if he got nothing, and the lawyers had the picking of the estate, it would satisfy him: if this man were only dispossessed, he said, he would cheerfully take a pickaxe and work like a slave at a shilling a day.

With his accustomed vehemence he expressed this determination to Mr. Empson, who merely shook his head gravely as he answered—

"Take the pickaxe, young man, if you will; labour with it if you like, and hew out the foundation of a princely fortune. Any one possessed of purpose, energy, and perseverance can do anything. But break this will!—no, trust me, it is beyond the power of living man to do it. It is easy to write

out and perfect such an instrument. It is as easy to fashion as the iron bar which the blacksmith moulds at his pleasure; it is ten times more difficult to break than the cold well-tempered steel that resists the might of the strongest man."

"Ay, but a weak spot might be detected; there is often a place where the file can be used to advantage," replied Reginald, eagerly.

"*Ten* times more difficult, I said," remarked the attorney.

"If it were fifty it shall be done!" exclaimed the young man. "I would ruin myself to ruin him. Alas! what am I saying? I can fall no lower than he has sunk me."

"You can," said Mr. Empson. "Reginald Ireby, listen to my warning voice ere it be too late. Listen to one who has known you from a boy—who has learnt experience—who from long experience is competent to advise and warn. For the sake of two who are very near, and who should be very dear to you, who have now no other stay on earth save yourself, be prudent, make terms with your brother—he will doubtless agree to some arrangement; make terms with him, or——"

"Never!" interposed Reginald; "I will die first. I had rather see my sisters servants—I had, on my honour, Mr. Empson—than have them receive one guinea by way of compensation from the man who has robbed us of our inheritance. No, it shall be dragged from his reluctant grasp; we will take it from him as a right; he shall be forced to disgorge the wealth he has so iniquitously acquired: it is now his hour of triumph; please Heaven, ours shall strike ere long."

"Or," resumed Mr. Empson, commencing once again at the word where Reginald had interrupted him, "if you are too proud to compromise the affair, and you feel yourself strong to endure, to labour, go forth, I say, firm in purpose, valiant in heart, to work out a destiny for yourself. Fling the memory of this will from you; keep your eye steadily

fixed on the future; let Briarton be as though, to you, it had never been. All that man could take from you is gone, I admit; but that wherewith God has gifted you remains,—youth, talent, health, activity: retain everything you now possess except memory, and go forth to struggle and to succeed. With no evil feelings distracting your soul—with no resentments ruffling your temper—with no ignoble end in view, enter the lists where true men are already fighting, and do not fear for the result. 'Fortune favours the brave,' it is said; and, let me add my conviction, that happiness attends the good. If you adopt the line of conduct I have indicated, the result must be satisfactory; but if, on the other hand, you commence life under the insane idea of breaking this will, of wresting Briarton from your brother, the end cannot prove otherwise than disastrous. Keep the memory of your wrongs rankling in your heart, and ere you begin the struggle of existence you are already a doomed man."

"It is easy to talk, hard to practise," answered Reginald, bitterly. "Your advice is good, no doubt, but to me it sounds pretty much as if you were to bid a person suffering from a desperate wound cover it over, and so forget its existence."

"The cases are not analogous," replied the attorney. "The wound it is possible to heal, why therefore conceal it from observation? Your misfortune cannot be repaired, consequently it must prove worse than useless to burden yourself with its stinging memory."

"This is precisely where we disagree," answered Reginald. "Believing the misfortune can at least to some extent be remedied, I am resolved not to bear it patiently."

"Patiently or impatiently, the result with regard to Briarton will be exactly the same; as regards yourself, however, the mode in which you submit to an unavoidable necessity may make or mar your destiny for life."

"The will shall be broken," doggedly persisted Reginald. "You have never heard it read but once. You are not competent upon so short a hearing, without examination, without due thought, to determine whether it is legally executed, whether, because of some informality, it might not, even on that ground alone, be set aside."

"Do you imagine," asked the attorney, "that it was not determined days before your father's death, by competent authorities, that the whole thing was legally drawn out and executed? Recollect, if you are desirous to have it set aside, there are and were others equally desirous it should hold good."

"I have not forgotten that fact," answered Reginald; "and although a hope of a flaw has entered my mind, it has been merely thought of as a possibility, not by any means in the light of a probability. But, supposing the wording to be all right (for the sake of narrowing the question, we will consider the instrument in itself to be perfectly binding), this to my mind is a matter, comparatively speaking, of no consequence. I rely on other circumstances. I am sure I could bring forward sufficient evidence to induce any jury to return a verdict in my favour."

"I am a staunch friend of the family," said Mr. Empson, sadly. "I grieve for your position; I take a deep interest in the matter; you are so young and I am so old, that I feel I need not apologize for taking the friend's privilege of asking questions. What are the circumstances to which you so confidently refer?"

"I should have thought you might have known them," answered the young man, sharply, for his mind was so full of the project he was bent on accomplishing, and so thoroughly convinced of its practicability, that the slightest obstacle pointed out in his path, annoyed and chafed him; "but as you do not see them, or perhaps it were better to say do not seem willing to see them, I will explain what I mean.

"Whilst I am from home, a man, who has never previously made the slightest attempt to see his father (recollect, I am supposing this person to be really Delavelle Ireby—a matter, by the way, which will have to be investigated)—to see his father, as I said before, comes here, insists on an interview, unfortunately obtains it, completely imposes on the understanding of a man wasted by long sickness, and whose mind and body are both in a weak susceptible state; induces him to make a will reversing his previous righteous dispositions, cutting off his younger son, who had always been considered as his heir, and to whom, as is evident by a will executed when he was, comparatively speaking, well, he intended bequeathing Briarton; leaving his daughters penniless; passing, in fact, by every one who had a natural claim on him, to leave everything to a strange son and his stranger children."

"It sounds well," remarked Mr. Empson, as Reginald paused; "but it won't do; take my word for it, it won't do."

"I will take no man's word against the evidence of my own senses," retorted the other.

"But you are not to judge the case; you cannot weigh its merits impartially."

"Heaven grant me patience," interrupted Reginald, "for I have need of it. Do you mean to say I have been justly treated? If you do, if *that* is what you think, pray say so at once: I can bear it."

"Far from it," answered Mr Empson. "I think and am positive you have been wronged—basely, ungenerously; but I also feel you are wronged beyond redress."

"Well, it is a comfort to find you are of opinion I have been cheated out of my inheritance," replied the young man, somewhat mollified. "And now we come back to the point we started from—viz., that your ideas and mine on the subject of redress differ so widely, that I fear they will never agree."

"I hope they may," returned the attorney—"I hope from

my heart they may. I do not despair of yet convincing you of the utter futility of your reasoning. First of all, was your father's former will a just one?"

"His former will! Of course—why not?"

"Supposing, as you say, the stranger's tale to be perfectly true, he had a claim on your parent—he was likewise his child."

"Ah! I see now what you mean," said Reginald; then added, after a moment's reflection, "Well, but my father left him six thousand pounds."

"Granted. Should you have been contented with a similar legacy had your relative positions been reversed?"

"No; but——"

"Both had an equal claim upon him," said Mr. Empson; "both were his sons, both were equally near, both should have been equally dear. I do not mean to speak harshly of the dead when I say *I* consider neither will was just. Let this pass, however, and proceed to the next point, and, as far as I can see, the last one—the point on which, indeed, the whole matter turns. How do you propose to prove your father was coerced into making this disposition of his property? Remember, *I* do not say he was not, but how can you *prove* it to the satisfaction of a jury?"

"Why, everybody knows the state of health my father was in; how utterly prostrated by sickness, how almost incapacitated by long confinement and disease. Then, you see, there is the extreme improbability of a man of his own free will, unbiassed by any interested party, disinheriting a son whom he had always loved, and leaving two young girls literally unprovided for. Besides, he has not left the property, that is, the bulk of it, even to his own son; he has left it all to a grandchild, for whom it was utterly impossible he could entertain the least affection. Pshaw! I might go on for a day bringing forward proofs that it was, in fact,

Delavelle Ireby who made the will, although it was General Ireby who signed it."

"To set aside the deed in question, it will be necessary to have something beyond mere assertion," suggested Mr. Empson.

"Of course. I have evidence——"

"Indeed! That alters the case considerably."

"Yes; I knew I should convince you," exclaimed Reginald.

"I am not convinced; far from it," replied Mr. Empson. "I must hear the evidence, and decide upon its merits, before coming to a conclusion. Who are your witnesses?"

"To begin at the beginning," returned Reginald, "there is the first will, an inanimate, but still conclusive, witness of his former intentions with regard to me and my sisters; there is the doctor, who knows how unfitted he was to understand or attend to business. Constance, and Marian, and the servants can prove how perpetually this man was closeted with my father. Besides, you are aware my mother's fortune was spent in clearing a portion of the mortgage oft Briarton, and it is not fair a stranger should derive the sole benefit from her money; and then also—" He paused and looked wistfully at Mr. Empson, whose face softened as he asked—

"Have you nothing more?"

"Yes; there is what you can say for me, and, in addition, the fact that Mr. D'Evelyn, a friend of Delavelle's, was sent for specially to make the will."

Mr. Empson remained silent for a minute or two; then he said—

"It won't do; as I told you before, it will not do."

"It shall. I will summon you as a witness, D'Evelyn as a witness. Ay, Delavelle himself shall, if need be, give testimony on my side. The whole country round can certify

how I, and I alone, was to be heir till this man stepped between me and my rights," replied Reginald, impetuously.

"If I speak to you plainly of yourself and General Ireby, you will not be offended?" said Mr. Empson in an inquiring tone.

"I cannot promise; I will endeavour to be patient," answered Reginald.

"It does not signify much," returned Mr. Empson, "for, whether offended or not, you *shall* hear me out now; and I have no fear but that your own good sense will overrule your impatience, should you feel any, at hearing the truth from the lips of one whose sole desire is to induce you to pause ere taking a step you might repent through all the subsequent years of your life. It is right you should know on what ground you are standing, and hear the case as others will hear it. You will produce me, you say—to prove what? That previous to Mr. D'Evelyn being sent for I was requested to draw out a will precisely to the effect of the one produced yesterday; that I used every argument to induce your father to deal more justly by all his children; but finding my entreaties vain, I——"

"Refused to be a party to such a transaction," exclaimed Reginald. "Oh! forgive my petulance and impatience. But why did you not tell me this before? Knowing this, could you not have saved us—have made some effort for us ere he died?"

"I did what I could," said Mr. Empson, moved by the young man's tone. "I told your sister to send for you; I bade her spare neither trouble nor expense to hasten your return. Nor did she; but the speed of man was too slow to keep pace with the giant strides of death, and you returned too late. Ah! half the misery this world contains might be expressed in those two words."

"Yes," said his listener, rising, and restlessly pacing up and

down the apartment; "I came too late, and knowledge comes too late, and experience, and everything in life comes too late."

"Save death which ends it," acquiesced the attorney, "and that always seems to come too soon. Weigh my words, so that they, at least, may have been spoken in time."

"Why was I not here before to learn all this?" demanded Reginald, stopping in his hurried walk, and passionately addressing the friend whom so short a time before he had almost regarded as an enemy; "why was I not here ere the period of action was past, past for ever? Oh! Mr. Empson, it seems to me that a few weeks have changed my whole nature, as well as fortune. A fortnight since I was little more than a boy, a youth with large expectations. Expectations, said I? to my mind they were certainties; and now I feel as though years had rolled over my head, and left me a care-worn beggared man. Had I but been here in time to learn this story from you, how different a position mine might now have been!"

"You forget," interposed Mr. Empson, "my lips, so long as your father lived, were sealed. I could not divulge the purport of the interview till it was, comparatively speaking, of no importance who became acquainted with it. In fact, I am even now saying more, perhaps, than is, professionally speaking, quite correct. Had you returned before General Ireby's death, I hoped you might discover for yourself how matters stood, and change them. In the present position of affairs I tell you the burden of our conversation, that you may not blindly venture on a step which would ruin you for life. Make terms with your brother if you can. Whilst you are somewhat averse to an accommodation, he is anxious for it, because it would render his position in the country far pleasanter if, on his first start, he were on friendly terms with you; to use a homely phrase, you had 'better strike while

the iron is hot.' He may listen to reason *now*, but a year or so hence, when he has overcome the many disagreeablenesses of his present situation, and when, perhaps, you would be more desirous for some amicable arrangement, he might not agree to favourable terms. Dismiss in any event, however, the idea of breaking the will from your mind. Do not rely on the testimony Mr. D'Evelyn can give in your behalf; it is most probable anything he could say would be more prejudicial to your cause than favourable. And, with regard to the last witness you spoke of—namely, the 'whole country round,' it has long been taking liberties with your name and that of your deceased father."

"What did they dare to say?" asked Reginald, in an angry tone.

"They said this," answered Mr. Empson: "that General Ireby feared to leave Briarton to you, lest it should be squandered; that if you did come into possession of the estate, it probably would pass out of the family, for that you were extravagant and headstrong; that you and your father disagreed frequently about pecuniary matters. Do not be offended: I determined to speak plainly to you as a friend who desired to serve, not to flatter you; and I have almost finished. In one word, report said that Briarton was the object General Ireby loved best upon earth, and that his thoughts were incessantly turned to the best mode of preserving it from the effects of your prodigality. 'The whole country round' rang with this, before Delavelle Ireby's existence was suspected, before he ever presented himself at Brenslow. Now you know the truth, act as you like: my conscience is easy about the matter, though my heart, I fear, will long be troubled by it.

"My last words to you are, make terms with him if you can; but, in any case, believe me, the will is legally a *good* will, which cannot be broken."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEWS SPREADS.

EVERY one has good things to say concerning the electric telegraph; and yet no one ever thinks of praising a sort of telegraph, quite as incomprehensible in its mode of operation, by the aid of which, particularly in country districts, any peculiarly interesting piece of information or morsel of gossip is circulated and left for consideration in cottage and hall, in an inconceivably short space of time.

The news it conveys is not indeed always correct; but in this respect it resembles the more lauded telegraph of modern invention, which frequently brings us intelligence to-day, apparently for no other purpose than that of contradicting it to-morrow. But occasionally both abruptly announce some unexpected piece of information which is quite true, though at the first we are not inclined to believe its accuracy.

Mr. D'Evelyn had barely finished reading General Ireby's will, ere the servants about the establishment were in possession of every word it contained—ay, and for that matter, of a great many words not written in it. Like fire along a dry gorse hedge the news spread about the place: "Mr. Reginald was disinherited—the stranger had got all."

The mental soil about Briarton, Moreton, and all the country, was scorched and dried up by reason of long dearth of gossip, so any topic of conversation, painful or otherwise, was eagerly received by the thankful natives. It fell amongst them as a thunder-shower descends in summer on the parched ground; and as the earth gratefully drinks in the refreshing fluid, so in like manner did the human clay imbibe the nourishment supplied to it by poor Reginald's misfortune.

The intelligence created an immense sensation: labourers

left their work, servants their pots and pans, mothers their screaming infants, husbands their dinners, children their play, to gather around the village green whereon the whole affair was being discussed. The clergyman inquired the cause of the unwonted excitement from the sexton, who told him, "Mr. Reginald Ireby had been done out of his rights, and was going first to shoot his brother and then hisself." The squire paused by the parson's gate to talk the matter over with him; the labourers spent the whole evening drinking beer, and wondering what the upshot of the business would be. In one word, throughout the parish there was one incessant murmur of pity for the "young gentleman who had lost his own."

Twilight was at hand, when Mr. Delavelle Ireby, now Mr. Ireby, the head of the family, the owner of Briarton, drove out of the gates of that place in company with Mr. D'Evelyn, "the man," it was bruited about, "as had made the will;" and it chanced that in the very centre of the road along which the carriage had to proceed, were collected a number of boys and young men and aged sires.

The way was narrow, and the crowd great, so the driver pulled up and told them to "make way;" an order they obeyed with much reluctance, retiring in lines to each side of the road, and staring with dark gloomy faces at the occupants of the carriage.

"Three groans, my lads, for the interloper!" said one black-browed youth, as he caught sight of the stranger's face; "three groans, and give 'em hearty!"

The youngest and the oldest alike responded to the appeal. Some stooped for stones, others threateningly raised sticks, to fling after Delavelle; all joined in a prolonged hiss, which smote on his ear and made his face turn a degree paler than it had previously been. His presence of mind did not desert him, however: the whole thing was but the affair of a

minute, but he had prepared himself for something of the sort. Here was a golden opportunity, and he resolved not to let it pass.

"Three groans, my lads, for the interloper!" were the words which greeted him; "three groans, and give 'em hearty!"

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Ireby to the coachman, in a voice heard above the clamour of hissing tongues. "You groan well, my fine fellows," he continued, addressing the excited group; "now let me hear how you can cheer," and a perfect shower of silver fell amongst them as he spoke the last words.

For a moment there was silence; then a memory of how liberally, had such an affront been offered to him, Reginald would have used his horsewhip, flashed along the line: there was a sudden move, a scrambling for sixpences and shillings, a hearty laugh, and, as Mr. Ireby drove off, a hearty cheer.

Who compared popular opinion to a weathercock, and libelled the latter by so doing? Why, it requires a breeze to alter its position; and the faintest breath can, for the time, change the current of human feelings, produce blessings instead of curses, smiles in lieu of frowns.

Thus Delavelle Ireby took his first public step in a strange place, and passed his degree with applause amongst the humbler inhabitants of Moreton. Mr. D'Evelyn sneeringly congratulated him on this great triumph, and added a jesting hope that, as he was so evidently a master of arts, he would also prove a master of hearts.

But the new owner of Briarton only laughed in reply. He had passed a day of intense and painful excitement, it is true; he had buried his father; he had gone through the first and greatest trial he fancied fate could hold in store for him—hearing the will read; but he had braved all out, he had vanquished the prejudice against him, he had hushed the

first cry of indignation, he had won the stake he had played for; and that evening he retired to rest with a smile on his lip, whilst tears dimmed soft eyes at Briarton, and his brother lay in a state of frenzy, counting the silent hours of misery, as they struck solemnly on the ears of those who mourned through the weary watches of the night for their dead parent and their lost home.

How quickly the news sped to Delavelle Ireby's temporary abode in London! How his wife's cheek flushed as she caught her eldest son to her heart, and proudly thought of the fine inheritance his grandfather had left him! And whilst she rejoiced at the tide of fortune which swept so goodly a waif towards the child, she had no thought to spare for those who were reduced to penury that her son might be so unjustly enriched.

Could she have looked into the depths of her husband's heart at that time, and, still more, could she have foreseen what was to pass there in future years, her cheek, now so flushed with pride, might have paled with terror. She saw nothing of all the thoughts and passions which disturbed him. How could she? he was miles away; and she knew nothing of a little scene that was being enacted under the same roof with herself, when the nurse of the two children stood by their bedsides, regarding, in troubled silence, the heir apparent and the heir contingent—the boy Henry and the infant Dalavelle.

She looked long and earnestly into the face of the former; she scanned every feature with eagerness and avidity. She parted the hair on the white brow, touched the thin cheek, looked at the dark lines around the eyes, the wasted little hands; and then she kissed the sleeping child, and murmured—

"Never to you, never! He who said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' has destined that you should be better

provided for. There is a quieter and a lowlier home in store for you than Briarton; you will never own that fine house; you will never be master there. No, it will never come to you, child of the loving heart and tender soul; never to you,—no, never."

There was a something amounting almost to wildness in the tone the woman pronounced these words, and in the way she turned abruptly from the side of the eldest child, and leant over the cradle where he lay.

"And then it will come to you," she said. "They tell me it will come to you,—three thousand pounds a year that you never worked for,—three thousand pounds a year which your father never made for you,—three thousand pounds a year left to you by a man who forgot his own children to make you great in the land; who passed by those near and dear to him to leave all to a baby he had never looked upon but once. God help us all to think of it!" And then sinking on her knees, she burst into a passionate flood of tears, and, raising her hands clasped towards heaven, exclaimed, "And, oh! God help me, and keep me from my own bad thoughts."

Silence and darkness closed over the house, but still the woman remained in the attitude of despairing supplication she had thus assumed. Morning's light broke in on the occupants of the chamber, and found her still crouching on the floor; but then she rose apparently calm. She discharged all her accustomed duties as usual; she tended gently to the wants of the delicate elder son, who was dear to her heart as some prized but drooping plant. And days and days went by; days became weeks, weeks months, months almost a year; and then the child fell, as she had predicted he would, quietly into that long sleep which knows no waking, and was borne to the family vault at Moreton, and buried there. Delavelle Ireby once had asked himself concerning that vault the question, "Who next?" The little coffin, which

the bearers laid beside that of General Ireby, sadly responded, "Your first-born;" and for a time the father's soul was sad within him, and his mother was inconsolable, and the nurse's heart was troubled. But an heir to the property still remained, who grew up a healthy, fair-haired, blue-eyed child; and as he advanced into years, people traced a likeness betwixt him and Marian Ireby; and Delavelle sometimes liked to think so too; and his mother considered him the loveliest boy that ever existed; and perhaps, indeed, he was, for strangers paused on the roads to look after him, and wherever he went he was an object of curiosity, as being the little creature who had cut out Reginald, the General's youngest son. The boy was so handsome, people forgot how little right he had to so much property, and openly hoped prosperity would attend his footsteps, and that in after-years he might have much comfort and enjoyment out of his fine estate.

And Marian, whom it was said he resembled, where was she? and Reginald, who, that he might become so much, had been made nothing, and Constance, ah! where were they? In what column of the world's wide directory might their names be searched for, and in what corner of the earth had they hid their griefs, their resentments, and their wrongs? Delavelle Ireby and his family now resided at Briarton, and where the younger brother and his sisters once had dwelt they abode no longer. Comparative strangers occupied the rooms they once had occupied, unfamiliar faces worshipped in the village church, unknown voices made echoes in their old haunts. And they, they had gone forth to a strange home, in a strange place, amongst strange people. But kindness and friendship are to met with everywhere; and in all their troubles, and amidst all their changes, one support remained to them still, for it was the same God who watched over their steps in the town as in the country: others might forget, be cold, be prudent, but His eye rested on them still.

And this conviction comforted the hearts of the girls in times of heavy sorrow, and enabled them to endure the load with which it had seemed good unto Him to burden them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DISINHERITED.

PERHAPS there never was a legal story yet which did not also involve a love tale; perhaps there rarely ever occurred a death which did not somehow lead either to the celebration of a marriage or the stopping of a wedding; at any rate, the Irebys proved no exceptions to the above rule.

Notwithstanding the many purely personal considerations which agitated and perplexed him, Reginald contrived to devote a few moments to reflecting upon his sister's position with regard to the nephew of Lord Bethers, to whom, as General Ireby had asserted, she was positively engaged; and being not only very proud and honourable, but also rash and impetuous, and having no great friendship for the gentleman in question, he speedily arrived at the conclusion that it would be only right and proper for Constance, in her altered circumstances, to release Mr. Montray from an engagement which he had entered into when an union with her would have been a decidedly more prudent step than, in a wordly point of view, it could be considered since her parent's death. Having thought, he spoke; whilst Constance, who in silence had reflected about the matter ever since the will was read, listened quietly to him, and answered in a low husky voice—

"I would have him to be free as the winds of heaven, Reginald; I have thought it all over, and am more than willing to release him if he wish the engagement to be at an end."

"I cannot tell how he will act," said her brother; "he may not care for money, but he may; at all events, dear——"

"Yes, yes!" she interrupted; "I know all you would say, and I again reply I am ready to do as you think best, only do not let us speak more on the subject at present. Reginald, I know you never liked him; I feel sure in your heart you are wronging him even now: I am certain he is not mercenary; but still, I repeat, do as you like—I, at least, will never wrong him by a doubt."

"If," pursued Reginald, "he still desire the engagement to continue, I, standing in your father's place to you, will not say nay; but if, on the other hand, he manifest the least wavering on the subject, if he show the smallest desire to be free, you must forget him, Constance. Do not look so wretched," he continued, kindly, taking both her hands in his. "This thing, painful as it is, must be done; for I know you too well to imagine for a moment you would force him into marrying you."

"Not to give you back Briarton," she answered, whilst the blood mounted to her temples. "I am proud as you are; but still I feel as you cannot do: you do not understand all I endure at this moment—how should you? We will talk no more about it: but do what you think right; I shall be resigned, no matter what may befall."

"I greatly fear you are deceiving yourself," he replied, gently.

"No, Reginald, I am not," she returned. "I said before I would not wrong him by a doubt; but as you seem to imagine the change in my position may have changed his feelings towards me, I answer, that should such prove to be

the case—should he desire to leave me, because it seems even my own father forgot his child, I will say, 'go,' if my heart break whilst speaking the sentence. But I am sure he is not what you imagine; I am certain you will find him what I always said he was—noble, and generous, and true."

"I trust I may, Constance," replied her brother; "I hope and trust I may."

Days passed by—they always do this somehow, no matter how impatient, or weary, or anxious, or sorrowful our hearts may be—and Reginald attended to his business, and Constance and Marian moved quietly about the house; and a sort of storm hung suspended over the place, destined soon to burst upon their heads, and which, meanwhile, oppressed their spirits.

During this period messengers were constantly passing and repassing from Brenslow to Briarton.

Delavelle and his brother corresponded for some time incessantly; for Reginald, moved by Mr. Empson's remonstrances, proposed a sort of compromise, to which Delavelle professed himself unable, as the property was left to his children, to accede. Then the elder brother grew haughty, and the younger furious and desperate, and all negotiation suddenly ceased between them. And Reginald once again reverted to his original idea, which he said he was grieved he had ever suffered himself to be persuaded to lay aside for a moment; and it became necessary for some decided step to be taken. And still no answer came from Mr. Montray, and even Constance began to waver in her faith.

Matters were in this state, when one day it was announced to Mr. Reginald Ireby that Mr. D'Evelyn desired a few minutes' conversation with him.

Reginald, at this piece of intelligence, went into the room where the solicitor waited for him, bowed stiffly, and demanded if he came from Mr. Delavelle Ireby.

"No," returned the other, "I come from myself."

"In that case," replied the young man, "will you do me the favour to sit down? Had you come with any message from Mr. Ireby, I must have declined receiving it, for I am resolved to hold no further communication with him on any subject, and never again to be turned by any consideration of interest or prudence from my fixed determination of breaking the will."

"I desire to speak to you of the will," began Mr. D'Evelyn, "not as a solicitor speaking on behalf of a client, not as a person interested or biassed either towards one side or another, but simply as one sensible, unprejudiced man might talk to another, on a matter of vital consequence to some, at least, of the parties concerned."

"Pray proceed," said Reginald, as the other paused for an answer. "It is most probable we shall disagree on the subject; but as long as you distinctly state you come neither directly nor indirectly from the individual who has injured me, I am not only willing patiently to listen to anything you may have to say, but shall feel obliged by any suggestions your experience can afford to guide my future course."

"I feel interested about this will——"

"Naturally," interrupted Reginald, with a slight touch of sarcasm, "as you made it."

The attorney bit his lips, but answered—

"Pardon me, I did not——"

"Indeed!" said Reginald, incredulously.

"I drew it out, but I am thankful to say the making of such a document does not rest on my conscience," was the reply.

"Who then did make it?" demanded Reginald, so eagerly that the drift of his question was at once apparent to Mr. D'Evelyn, who returned—

"Your father, of course; and when he desired to leave al

his property to a mere infant, it was no business of mine to prevent his doing so. At his request I put his wishes into words, clad them, so to speak, in a legal garment, read the instrument over to him: he approved and signed it, died happily, was buried, and the will—a most unjust one, I admit—stands."

"It will not do so for long," retorted Reginald.

"It will do so for ever," maintained Mr. D'Evelyn. "I drew it out, but I cannot undraw it; your father perfected it, and he alone could alter his own free act. But he has passed to a land where wills are not; and, as we cannot bring him back here, the next best thing for us to do is to make the best of matters as they stand."

"When you admit the disposition of his property to be unjust, why did you assist him so to devise it?" demanded Reginald.

"Because it was my business," replied Mr. D'Evelyn, coolly. "If he had told me to write out a document leaving Briarton to the Queen of Otaheite or the Emperor of China, I should have complied with his desire."

"Yet you call yours an honest profession," remarked Reginald.

"My dear sir, when did you ever hear me make any such assertion? it is just as honest as other professions, but that, I admit, is saying very little for it. However, I did not come here to talk about anything but yourself, your sisters, your present and your future. Mr. Ireby will not, I understand, come to terms."

"He will not agree to my terms, and I cannot come in to his," replied Reginald.

"Will he not portion your sisters?"

"He did not say 'No,' but he did not say 'Yes;' and I required something more explicit," was the answer.

"And what did he offer you?" asked the attorney.

"His patronage," replied Reginald, with a bitter smile.

"I see. And now what do you mean to do? Pray excuse my abrupt form of questioning."

"Do not apologize; I like it," returned the young man. "I intend breaking the will."

"If you can, I suppose," said the visitor.

"Of course I can."

"Humph! There is a diversity of opinions upon that point. My own is, that you cannot; that you had better turn your energies to better account. You will do well to look before you leap."

"I will throw the whole affair into Chancery. I can surely do that, at all events," urged Reginald.

"Perhaps; but it will cost money, and can result in no possible advantage to you."

"I do not think it could cost much. For what sum would it be possible to put the case there?"

"It is impossible to say precisely. However, if Briarton were thrown into Chancery, the expense of putting it there might not, as you say, be deadly, but the great difficulty would be to get it out again."

"But I should not care if it stayed there throughout eternity," returned Reginald. "All I desire is, that neither Delavelle nor his children shall derive any benefit from it If I were sure the lawyers would not leave him a penny, should bid good bye to Briarton a light-hearted man."

"A Christian as well as natural feeling; but if I were you, I should not let the lawyers finger the property."

"Why should I not? It does not belong to me," asked Reginald.

"I know it does not," replied Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I have no interest in it," pursued the other.

The attorney remained silent.

"*Have* I an interest?" demanded Reginald, starting up.

"Only prove to me that I have an interest in it, and I will follow your advice, whatever it may be; show me a chance by which I may obtain the property, wrest it from Delavelle, and stand again as once I stood, and I will live for you; nay, if need were, die for you."

"You can never wrest it from him," answered the attorney; "yet, I repeat, if I were you, I would not permit the lawyers to pocket one shilling of the rent-roll."

"Then I have an interest in it?—what sort of an interest?—what are the chances in my favour?"

"I never said you had any interest in it," said Mr. D'Evelyn.

"No; yet you seemed to imply it," said Reginald, hopelessly. "However, I suppose I must have mistaken your meaning, for Briarton is, alas! nothing now to me."

"An indisputable fact," acquiesced Mr. D'Evelyn.

"And no time can make it otherwise," said poor Reginald, reflecting on his future fortunes.

"No, surely," said the attorney, but with a tone and manner which somehow conveyed the idea once again to Reginald that he spoke ironically.

"Because, you see, even if these children were dead, the place goes to Delavelle; and it is not likely he would leave it to me," pursued the young man.

"You might make an affidavit to that effect with a safe conscience," was the reply. "But pshaw! enough of this nonsense," he continued. "I came here desiring to serve you; I have a feeling on my mind that I perhaps ought to help you, if it be possible for the enemy's solicitor to do so: I think, if you were tractable, I could get your sisters comfortably provided for. If Mr. Ireby pay down the portion of your eldest sister now, and enter into an agreement to lodge Miss Marian's in sufficient security for her sole use, will you be reasonable, or at least disinterested, and cease all hostilities against your brother?"

"Did he send you here to propose such an arrangement?" demanded Reginald.

"He did not; but I know—that is, I have reason to believe, he could be induced to accede to it. My plan for you would be briefly this: ride over to Brenslow, shake hands with Mr. Ireby, say you want nothing for yourself if your sisters be provided for: get fortunes for both whilst you can; let Miss Ireby marry Mr. Montray, and the youngest daughter reside with her brother and his wife, or her sister and her husband, while you try to make a fortune for yourself. Remember your sisters cannot work and struggle, but you can; therefore, fling all considerations of self overboard, and think of their interests, and their interests alone."

There was a long pause, and then Reginald Ireby, raising his head, which he had bent in silent thought, answered the solicitor.

"If you have come here honestly intending to benefit me, I thank you for your kindness; if, on the other hand, you have had any other purpose beyond that which you profess, I trust you may be forgiven for your hypocrisy: whether true or false, well meaning or evil designing, your conduct is, however, precisely the same to me, for my decision is taken. If the will can be broken, it shall; if not, I must bend to fate, and make my own way and fortune. With regard to my eldest sister, Mr. Montray shall either marry her dowerless or not at all: if he adopt the former course, I trust they will be happy; if he choose the latter, I intend to support both her and Marian. I will either have a fortune by law or by labour; and my sisters must trust for their portions to the same source. We are about to leave Briarton; I desire to inhabit no man's house on sufferance. Delavelle Ireby has rejected my proposals. I would not accept the best terms from him now; I only regret I was ever induced to offer any.

"My final resolve is neither to take anything from him

myself, nor to permit my sisters to do so, as a favour. If we can regain our rights from him by law, it is altogether a different affair; and, further," he added, "I wish to hold no communication with him on any subject whatever."

"I am not his ambassador," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn; "as I already informed you, I came here on my own account, not his."

"I feel grateful for the visit," said Reginald.

"Do you not believe me?" asked the attorney, somewhat irritated by his tone.

"I cannot doubt your word," was the reply.

And thus they parted coldly; and as soon as Mr. D'Evelyn was gone, Reginald mounted his horse and galloped over to Brenslow to speak to Mr. Empson, but that gentleman was from home, and not expected to return for a week; so he sullenly turned his face homeward, and rode slowly, for the last time, through the quiet streets of the ancient cathedral town. As he passed the "Bishop's Arms," he noticed, what in his former haste he had failed to observe, namely, a groom holding a couple of horses outside the inn. The moment his eye fell on the man, Reginald drew bridle, sprang from his saddle, gave the animal in charge to an ostler, who stood conversing with the groom, and, without uttering a word, entered the hotel, his cheek perfectly livid with intense excitement.

"Show me Mr. Delavelle Ireby's room," he said to the landlord.

"Certainly, sir; pray just walk in here, sir, for one moment; I believe he will be at liberty almost immediately," answered the obsequious host, flinging open the door of a private apartment for Reginald to enter.

"My business is urgent," said the latter, sternly.

"There is a gentleman with him just at present, who will be gone directly," was the reply.

"Show me his room, or I will find it for myself!" said Reginald, in so angry a voice, that the landlord was reluctantly constrained to conduct him to Delavelle's apartment, the door of which the visitor opened for himself; the portly proprietor of the "Bishop's Arms" closed it behind him, and then cautiously applied his ear to the keyhole. There was little occasion for him to do so, the conversation which ensued being of the loudest and most vehement description.

"I have come, sir," said Reginald, addressing Mr. Montray, who, together with Delavelle and Mr. D'Evelyn, rose from their seats at sight of the new-comer, "to give an answer personally to the question you desire to have decided. Constance Ireby will be a poor bride. I would rather see her in her grave than wedded to you, after what I have this day learnt of your character; we both release you from the engagement entered into in more prosperous times, and tell you to consider yourself as free as though you had never met the girl you once professed to love."

"Sit down and calm yourself," urged Delavelle.

"Listen to reason," remonstrated Mr. D'Evelyn; "and—"

"Pray hear me for a moment!" exclaimed Mr. Montray, in a nervous manner; but Reginald answered none of them, except Mr. Montray, to whom he said—

"I wish to hear nothing from you but a reply to one simple question. Do you wish your engagement cancelled?"

"I—I am much attached to Miss Ireby," murmured Mr. Montray, glancing towards Mr. D'Evelyn for assistance.

"You are!" sneered Reginald; "well, well, suppose you are, prove it,—she has not a shilling in the world—marry her!"

"I am quite willing to stand by my engagement," replied Mr. Montray, growing bolder as his fear decreased; "but at present my means are small, and——"

"Your bride must have a fortune," supplied Reginald.

'Well, my sister has none, and she and I tell you to consider yourself at liberty to choose a wealthier wife. If you begged for her now on your knees, no sister of mine should ever marry you. I have almost done, my last words to you being, that I believe you to be a villain and a coward!"

He was gone ere another syllable could be spoken. He descended the stairs in mad haste, left the inn, seized his horse's bridle from the man who held it, and before the trio whom he had interrupted in their consultation had half recovered from the consternation into which his abrupt entrance, and still more abrupt exit, had thrown them, he was half-way back to Briarton.

Long and earnestly did he talk to Constance; sad were the words that passed between them, tender the consolation he tried to give her. Night came—how frequently latterly it had come, bringing with it no repose for mind or body, no peace, no rest, to the orphans!

"You will try and sleep," said Reginald, as he bade his sister good night, "you will try for my sake; for oh! how desolate we all are now!"

Constance put her arms around his neck, and burst into tears; it was the first time he had seen her shed them so abundantly for many days.

"I will be calm—indeed, indeed I will—but how I loved that man, how I loved him!"

A few days more passed away, and Briarton was empty; the coach which passed its gates had borne all the sorrow it so lately contained to London, whither Reginald accompanied his sisters, firmly resolved to make a fortune and to break the will.

CHAPTER XV.

WALTER MARTOCK.

WALTER MARTOCK sat alone in his chambers, waiting for the briefs that never came. Lawyers and bankers possess in common a peculiarly penetrating expression of eye, the wide difference between them, however, being, that whilst the latter have the appearance of men who, though they observe keenly, keep the knowledge thus acquired wrapped up in their own bosoms, the former seem to be gaining information for the sole purpose of making that information public at some future time.

Thus the banker appears to be eternally considering whether the notes and the men presented to him are genuine; and the lawyer, not so much whether the human coin is good or bad, but what he can get out of it; and, whether good, bad, or indifferent, he can gain anything likely—Heaven knows how many years after—to be useful to himself or a client.

The young man was reading law books, not human faces, on the evening in question: he had read, and thought, and studied, till his brain was weary and his heart sick; he longed, with a painful yearning, for the hour to arrive when he might begin that other study, which some say is the finest in the world; not that Walter agreed with those who affirm such to be the case, but that he knew it would bring him guineas, and perhaps fame, and of both these articles he was lamentably in want; his purse craving the former, his ambitious spirit the latter.

He was industrious, patient, "a good opinion," a clever man; but "what did it all avail?" he thought, as he glanced sadly at the dreary pages he was so little inclined to peruse men with half his abilities had passed him in the race; they

had been pushed forward; he had no one to help him. Other men had relations or friends, who stretched forth willing hands to aid the adventurer on; if once he could get the step,—ay, there was the difficulty. When he was just starting in life, a hopeful country friend had cheerily quoted the old French proverb, "*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte;* and now, with a slight variation, the young lawyer murmured it,—but that variation, trifling as it was, made all the difference: the one spoke so encouragingly to the heart, the other sounded like a warning in his ear. "*C'est le premier pas qui coûte*, indeed," he said, despondingly.

"Shall I ever be able to take it? Some are aided in their first endeavour, some are retarded by men or circumstances, some stumble and never rise again in the attempt, some are never able to attempt at all.

"Those who, having made that one stride triumphantly, and risen thereby to fortune and fame, may exclaim, '*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte;*' but men who, like myself, stand almost hopeless in the world's highway, alone can tell how difficult that first step is to take at all, alone can see how few take it so successfully as to be able to reach the second. What will my lot be?—to go on thus for ever, or to turn to something better; or, after having just made enough to keep soul and body together through unprofitable years, die, as many a cleverer man has done, disappointed and broken-hearted? How will it be with me, I wonder?" And the tired head dropped on the prosy book. He had gone through all the drudgery of his profession, was he never to enter on the more encouraging and exciting portion of it?

His reverie was suddenly interrupted by the abrupt opening of his door, and as, surprised and startled, he looked hastily up, he beheld before him a man, some seven or eight years his junior, evidently belonging to the upper ranks of society, but apparently labouring under the influence of some strong

emotion, which rendered him, for the time being, perfectly careless or forgetful of the ordinary etiquette and customs of society.

Permitting the door to slam behind him as he entered, he advanced, with one or two rapid strides, to the spot where Walter stood wondering, whilst his dark eyes flashed, and gleamed, and dilated, and his wan cheek looked doubly pale in the gaslight; he said—

"You are Mr. Martock, I believe?"

The barrister bowed in assent, and begged his visitor to be seated.

"You must excuse me if I seem abrupt," said the newcomer. "I am an almost desperate man. I have been cruelly wronged, and I come to ask your help, as my last hope of obtaining redress."

"The man is mad," thought Mr. Martock; then added audibly—

"I shall be happy to assist you by any means in my power. Perhaps you will explain yourself a little more fully. At present I have not even the pleasure of knowing your name."

"I am Reginald Ireby," said that young man; and forthwith he rose from his chair, and, standing with one arm resting on the old-fashioned chimneypiece, he poured out the whole story of his wrongs as it has been already told in these pages. To every word of his rhapsody—for no other word can convey an idea of the style in which he stated his case—the barrister listened patiently; but when Reginald had quite finished, he said—

"It is a very sad narrative. I assure you I sympathize with you from my heart. As matters stand at present, however, I cannot give or form an opinion on the matter. The best course for you to pursue is to consult a good solicitor, and let him take counsel's advice on the case."

"Do you know why I came to you?" asked Reginald.

"I really cannot form the slightest idea," was the reply.

"Because I have not a friend left in the world at once able and willing to assist me. My father's solicitor is as kind a man as ever breathed, but he is old-fashioned and prejudiced, and cannot see things except from one point of view—his own. Of course I know there is some regular routine usually gone through before a barrister's opinion can be obtained; but Bernard, your old college friend, told me he thought you would waive all that ceremony, and give me as good advice as I could obtain if I were a millionaire. If you can win this case for me, ask what you like. I will give it willingly—thankfully, with a bounding heart; but if, on the contrary, I lose, I can promise nothing, for I shall have nothing. Can you, will you, undertake a case on such terms?"

"May I beg you to be seated?" said the barrister in a voice so calm, that it seemed to affect Reginald like the touch of an icy hand. He started, coloured, and took possession of a chair opposite the man who was to tell him in that clear, cold tone whether he was to be a beggar or no; whether life was to be to him a bright, pleasant scene, or a long weary struggle.

Mr. Martock, outwardly self-possessed, also resumed the seat from which he had risen when his client entered; and then, still speaking in the dry, professional tone which seemed so chilling, said—

"It is necessary for you to tell me precisely how you are situated, what your views are, and what you wish me to do for you, before I can possibly answer your question."

"With regard to the first," replied Reginald, "I have told you before, that at present I am a beggar: my views are to have justice done to me and mine; and in reference to the third point on which you desire to be informed, I wish you to obtain that justice for me."

"Obtain justice!" repeated the lawyer; "that is a vague expression. How can I obtain it for you?"

"That was what I came here to learn," retorted the other: "I expected to receive legal information, not to have to give it."

"If you will have the kindness to tell me the point on which you require information, shall be happy to afford it," said Mr. Martock, soothingly. "Of course it is impossible for me to tell by intuition exactly how you are situated."

"True," remarked Reginald, as if speaking to himself; then he continued, drawing out two documents and presenting one to Martock, "will you read that will?"

"Certainly," said the other: "this is coming to business;" and he commenced—

"I, Delavelle Ireby,——"

"My father," remarked his visitor. Upon receiving which piece of intelligence, Mr. Martock bowed and proceeded, murmuring over the preamble of the General's first will, merely raising his voice when some name, or subject, on which he desired additional light to be thrown, attracted him.

"To my beloved son, Reginald Ireby——" Martock looked up: "You, I presume," he said; and having received an answer in the affirmative, made a note on the margin, and proceeded: "the property called Briarton, together with——" here his voice sank to a whisper, so faint, that even Reginald could scarcely follow him; "subject to the following legacies and annuities: six thousand pounds to my daughter Constance——"

"My eldest sister," explained the young man, and once again a hasty note was jotted on the margin.

"To be lodged by my said executors in good and sufficient securities for the exclusive use and benefit of my said daughter," continued the lawyer, glancing over a few lines more of legal

technicalities; "and a like sum of six thousand pounds to Marian Augusta——"

"My youngest sister," said Reginald.

"Only the two?" asked Mr. Martock.

"Better, as matters stand, there had been none," replied the young man, who had by this time risen from his chair again.

"I likewise—" resumed the barrister, running over a fresh sentence, but then pausing, read the latter portion of it over again, and this time aloud—"Devise to my eldest son, Delavelle Ireby, if alive, the sum of six thousand pounds."

"Son by a former marriage," explained Reginald, in answer to the inquiring look turned on him by Mr. Martock, who asked—

"*Is* he alive?"

"I wish you could prove he was not," replied the client; and, as though that name had completely exhausted his small stock of patience, he added hurriedly—

"You have read enough of that to comprehend pretty much how matters stood; this is how they stand at present," he said, giving him another will, short and concise as the former was long and prosy.

"Now, what I want to know is, can this be broken?"

Once again the keen eyes went to work. Reginald sat quietly down, and watched him as he read. The unfortunate young man, with his elbow resting on his knee, and his hand supporting his head, tried to fathom the barrister's face, as the latter perused the paper—tried to fathom that unfathomable countenance, and learn his fate more quickly from its expression than by the slow medium of words; but in vain, so he gave up the attempt, and strove to wait patiently for an answer. It seemed to him, so great was his anxiety, that the throbbings of his heart would distract the other's attention, so he laid his hand on his breast as if to still its beating.

At last Mr. Martock finished.

"The wills are not in the same handwriting," he remarked.

"No, the first was drawn out by my father," replied Reginald.

"And the last?"

"By an attorney," was the answer.

"His own solicitor?" pursued Mr. Martock.

"No, by a Mr. D'Evelyn," answered the client. "Now, can that will be broken?"

"What were the exact circumstances under which this deed was executed?" asked Mr. Martock.

Reginald briefly narrated most of the circumstances, with which the reader is already acquainted; when he had ended, the lawyer remained silent for so long a time that at length Reginald exclaimed—

"What is your opinion?"

"Of the will?" inquired the other. "It does not appear a fair one, certainly, but I fear it will nevertheless hold good in law."

"And in equity?" demanded Reginald.

"Ah! that is quite a different affair," was the reply; "one, in fact, with which at present I have nothing to do. There is nothing more difficult than to get a will set aside; you see, a man has clearly a right to do what he likes with his own."

"I am not so sure of that," exclaimed Reginald. "The law insists that a man shall support his children during his lifetime; why, then, in Heaven's name, should it give him power to leave them beggars at his death? If I were a king, I would enact a statute compelling every man to leave his property equally and fairly amongst his rightful heirs."

"Half the lawyers in England might then starve," remarked Martock, with a smile.

"Half their present clients would then live better," retorted

his visitor. "Such an arrangement might, I admit, occasionally prove prejudicial, but much more frequently it would be quite the reverse; however," he added, "I did not come here to discuss an abstract question, but one of vital importance to me—this will."

"Suppose, for an instant," said the other—who apparently conceived that if Reginald could be induced to discuss the abstract question quietly, he might then be led to speak of the vital one rationally—"suppose, for an instant, that this estate had been entailed; that, as you seemed to desire just now, the power to will had been taken altogether out of your father's hands; your brother would then have inherited the property in spite of him, in spite of you, in spite of anybody."

"True," was the reply; "but in that case I should have been prepared for the event; I should have been differently educated; my prospects would have been moderate, my expectations and desires likewise: knowing the property could not be mine, I should now have been serving my king and country in some way or other; at all events, I should have been brought up to do *something*. As it is, until the night my father died I was unaware even of Delavelle's existence; I fancied myself sure of Briarton, and thought to live and die an independent country gentleman."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Martock, abandoning the argument, "it seems to me your father desired to place his eldest son precisely in the same position as that he occupied."

"Yes; he has given him the power to make or unmake us," answered Reginald, bitterly; "to leave us penniless; to dole out our daily bread with a generous or a niggard hand; to render us dependent on him for the common necessaries of life; to make me a hanger-on of his bounty; to make my sisters heiresses or beggars. He has placed him, as you say, precisely in his own position, but without the feelings and affections which render the relations between parent and child

endurable. Had the estate been entailed, I should have had a younger son's portion, and my sisters would have been dowered according to their station; but as it is, the fortune my mother received after her marriage, the small sum in ready money my father left behind him, the estate of Briarton, the chattels, the lands—everything, go to enrich this man, and this man's children;" and as he concluded, Reginald covered his face with his hands: had pride and shame not restrained him, he could have wept, so full was his heart of rage and disappointment, at the recital of how much he had lost, of how much Delavelle had gained.

Mr. Martock looked at him in silence for a moment; an expression of pity flitted over his countenance as he did so, but it was gone when he asked—

"Have you had any communication with your brother on the subject?"

"Yes, there are letters enough to start a case," said Reginald. "When I found I had so near a relative living, and that he had persuaded my father to disinherit me, I wrote, proposing either that he should destroy the objectionable document, in which case I would increase the six thousand pounds, mentioned in the first deed, to twenty, to be paid over to him at once; or that he and I should equally share the Briarton estate, and that my sisters' portions should be secured as directed in the former will."

"He could not do as you suggested," said Mr. Martock; "but what was his reply?"

"You will see from the letters," explained Reginald, "that he proposes most kindly and condescendingly to stand in my father's place towards all of us; wishes Constance and Marian to reside with him; expresses a desire for me to continue to do so for the present; for him, in one brief word, to be grand seignior, and for us to be humble, thankful dependants, for——"

"And you?" interposed the barrister, breaking across the tirade he foresaw commencing.

"I told him," said Reginald, rising and striking the table with his clenched hand, "that if there were such a thing as justice in England, I would have it; that I would break the will; that I would carry the case into every Court; that——"

"Very foolish of you," once again interrupted the other. "And your sisters?"

"Think as I do, and have left the house," said the young man.

"Then you have all quarrelled?" remarked Mr. Martock.

"Of course. After such a will, was it likely we should do otherwise?"

"Not likely, perhaps," said the lawyer, "but desirable. I am afraid," he continued, "I cannot help you much, for no one can bring back the dead to life; and the hand that signed this will is cold, as yours is fevered. If I can help you I will; if not, you must submit. I will look over these papers and see what can be done, but I greatly fear the will is too well made for us to be able to pick a flaw in it. However, it is impossible for me to tell until I have had leisure to examine it more attentively. Meantime, promise me to take no further steps in the matter, and avoid all occasion of quarrelling with your brother. You may rely on my best energies being exerted in your behalf."

There was a something so earnest in Mr. Martock's voice, there was a softness in his tone so different from the formal manner in which their conversation had opened, that Reginald felt touched, and, as he rose to go, eagerly extended his hand and inquired when he should call again.

"If you are passing to-morrow, you might come in," said the other;—"or, stay—give me your address and I will write. You are in London, I presume?"

Yes; he and his sisters were lodging near the Strand.

And after he had told the name of the street and the number of the house, Reginald departed, leaving Mr. Martock with ample food for unselfish meditation.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARTOCK CONSULTS A SOLICITOR.

THE departure of his brother and sisters from Briarton greatly annoyed Delavelle Ireby. It is true his benevolent intentions with regard to the children of his father's second marriage had cooled by imperceptible degrees, until, as Mr. D'Evelyn ascertained, they died out almost entirely; but yet he desired, if possible, that, for some time at least, a semblance of friendly feeling should prevail between them.

When he came to reflect on his position, he soon perceived that, after all, *he* was only a moderate gainer by the deed his father had executed; for if his son were handsomely provided for, still it was only his son, not himself, and for nearly twenty years very little profit would actually accrue to any member of his family from Briarton; whilst from the moment the mode in which the General had bequeathed his property was known, he fancied a certain degree of censure must rest upon him.

If, therefore, he could have induced Reginald and his sisters to reside with him until the storm had blown over, he would willingly have yielded so far as to make some provision for Constance and Marian; but he speedily discovered they were so entirely guided by their brother, that no com-

promise could be effected without his concurrence; while the terms Reginald individually proposed were impracticable.

In vain Delavelle explained that Briarton belonged to his son, not to himself; that he individually had no more right or title to it than Reginald: his brother treated these assertions as mere evasions or contemptible quibbles. In vain he offered a home to the two orphaned girls, and his assistance to the man who, because of him, had lost his all. Reginald said, "the half of Briarton or nothing;" and Constance affirming she was willing to starve with her brother, and Marian murmuring she would go wherever Constance went, the trio one morning departed from Briarton.

At first Mr. Ireby thought of returning to London for the winter: it seemed impossible to brave all the indignation and contempt which he dreaded would meet him at every step: he feared the gentry would slight, the middle ranks condemn, and the poor dislike him; for he was a stranger amongst strange people; he had taken a property from those who had been known from childhood to all the neighbourhood. Reginald by his conduct had placed the matter as if they had been driven from their paternal home; whilst, in truth, the most ardent desire of Delavelle's heart was that they should continue to occupy it for some time longer, perhaps—conjointly with himself and family—always; and accordingly he hated Reginald with an intensity quite proportionate to the injury he had inflicted upon him.

His first impulse, then, as has been already said, was to leave the place for a time; but with reflection came greater courage, and he resolved to face the higher and middle classes as he had faced the rabble of Moreton, and to see if it were not possible to gain their favour by a liberal display of that commodity which had turned the hisses of disapprobation into grateful cheers.

And accordingly, having arrived at the sensible determina-

tion of fighting the matter out at once, he made arrangements for his wife and children to join him at Briarton, where he took up his own abode a few days after it had been vacated by its previous occupants.

He speedily found that his fears and perhaps his conscience had greatly exaggerated the difficulties he fancied he should have to encounter, for the gentry proved even more manageable than the rabble, inasmuch as he had to give the latter money, whilst he had only to show it to the former.

"Gold makes the man, the want of it the fellow," said Mr. D'Evelyn, parodying the good old proverb relating to a far more sterling commodity, when Mr. Ireby told him how men of large estates and ancient family had hastened to grasp him by the hand, and welcome him to his inheritance. The truth is, that, backed by Mr. Montray, who declared he had been only too kind to Reginald, supported, for numerous reasons, by Lord Bethers, and, above all, with the reputation of being a millionaire, Delavelle discovered he could carry the county before him.

Who amongst us may despise wealth when we see all it can purchase—ease, luxury, the power of being useful to our fellows, the good opinion of the world, its kindly feeling, its sweetest smiles? Who would not eagerly snatch riches, were they within his grasp, when they have power to bring sunshine into dark places, to turn sadness into mirth, to wash the blackness from a questionable act, and make it white as snow?

There are many who rail at "filthy lucre," as they term it; but there are very few who would not stoop to pick up ever so little money, even though they should soil not only fingers, but soul, in the attempt to obtain it.

Was gold the screw by which Archimedes meant to turn the world? If so, in these later days his invention has been fully carried out, for now it does govern all the earth: by it

what we call society "lives, and moves, and has its being;" and when once a man ceases to be possessed of it, he becomes, to all intents and purposes, dead. How many a slighted, neglected heart may fervently thank God that it has power to turn no world save this; and that, in the other, lying in the distance before all mankind, it, because of His great mercy, availeth nothing!

Many, it is true, condemned the conduct of their new neighbour in private, and a few weak and inanimate words of compassion were accorded to the three who had gone so sadly out into the struggle of life; but what did this matter to Delavelle, so long as no sound of this almost lifeless pity reached his ear; so long as no sentence, save what was flattering, was spoken in his presence; so long as he was received as a guest and a friend by those who, a short time previously, had in like manner held out the right hand of fellowship to his near relations?

As his standing grew firmer, Delavelle felt his dislike for Reginald Ireby, and the few men who persisted in taking part with the younger brother, grow stronger; and whilst the former lorded it in great state and majesty at Briarton, the latter was struggling to obtain the barest necessaries of life for himself and those who depended on him. Of the rich there is little to write; of the poor there is much, for it is they who suffer the trials that render a story interesting; for which reason we must turn for a period from the prosperous brother to see how it fared with those whose very names seemed almost to have been swallowed up in that ever-flowing human tide which ebbs and flows through the streets of England's metropolis—whither?

Ay, reader, stand on London Bridge, and note the thousands of your fellow-creatures pushing and elbowing their way across it incessantly, even as the river ceaselessly glides on beneath it. Look at the eager faces, the sunken eyes,

the tired limbs, the emaciated bodies, the weary or joyful expressions of countenance, in the endless crowds who pass you by. Think of the vanity and vexation of spirit, the evil designs, the disappointed hopes, that must each day be carried in the bosoms of individuals over that little portion of a mighty city; think that this goes on from hour to hour, from day to day, and so from year to year, and then return home and ask—whither?

Oh! how marvellous it is to consider that in half a century all those who push and crush their way along the city streets will have passed away, will be at rest! How solemn a thing it is to think that swiftly, surely as the river seeks the main, so man is rushing onward to the grave; that as the water we gaze on now will soon be lost in the mighty ocean, so the human stream perpetually sweeping by us is tending ever to eternity, which will speedily swallow up all that to-day plans, rejoices, and sorrows!

Let it pass; for this tale is of a man who stood not regarding the tide flowing by him. He had chosen, blindly, it might be, his lot; and having once plunged in, there was nothing for it but to battle bravely with and like the rest.

He had not patience to wait for Mr. Martock's promised letter, but on the second day proceeded to the barrister's chambers, anxious to learn his opinion on the subject. The latter was not within; but surmising possibly that his client would call, and sympathizing with his eagerness, he had left, ere he went out, a message for Mr. Ireby, to the effect that he was "reading through the papers, and would give him an answer on the morrow."

It is difficult to say what prompted the boy who repeated the above to Reginald to substitute the word "wading" for "reading;" which alteration sent the irritable youth home in no enviable frame of mind, and caused him, during long sleepless hours, to curse his destiny, and wish for money,

which would give him the wherewithal to pay people handsomely, in which case he knew they would not talk of "wading" through writings on which, as he fancied, his future hung suspended. The doom Mr. Empson had predicted was already upon him; it was still in his power to avert it, to ward it off even at the eleventh hour, were he so inclined; but he fancied the bane was the antidote, and under this delusion repeated the dose, and imagined it would cure him.

Whilst he was mentally accusing Mr. Martock of neglect, that gentleman was in fact doing all which in him lay to get full particulars of his case. He read the wills over carefully; smiled sadly at poor Reginald's angry, diffuse epistles; and considered, word by word, his brother's replies. He went out, endeavouring to meet Mr. D'Evelyn in some of his accustomed haunts, that he might casually learn more of the story from him; but, failing in this attempt, he sought him at his own house.

"I am willing to do anything I can for him," said the attorney, pettishly; "but if he pushes assistance from him, and declines advice, and persists in being a hotbrained idiot, how is it possible to help him? I did not serve my time to Snooks only to make a will which he could set aside; so he may give that notion up. If he would only have been reasonable, I could have got something for his sisters. I do not say it was possible to make his brother treat him justly; still, if the young ladies had been comfortably provided for, matters would have been better than they are. As it is, here he, unfitted to do anything but spend money, comes to London, where he has not a friend, with a few sovereigns in his pocket, and a couple of girls to support. *I* cannot help his folly; thank Heaven! I am not answerable for that."

"What does he mean to do?" asked Mr. Martock.

"Put the question to him, and he will say, 'Break the last

will and testament of General Delavelle Ireby;' put it to me, and I answer, 'Nothing.'"

"But he must do something——"

"He cannot, I repeat: he cannot work; he will not beg; he would not be supported; he must not starve: in one word, he is impracticable; and I, for one, am tired of the business and of the family, and never wish to hear or see more of them again."

"Perhaps—" commenced Mr. Martock; but then stopped.

"Yes, I know what you mean,—it might have been better had they never seen me; but it would have just come to the same thing in the end. General Ireby insisted on leaving his property absurdly; or perhaps it were better to say unjustly, for more absurdly than to Reginald, his youngest son, he could not possibly devise it. In one word, father, first-born, second-born, and, for aught I know to the contrary, grandchildren, are all alike, haughty, and yet still unsteady. Possessed with one leading notion—Briarton—they think it is the only thing worth having or keeping in life. Briarton was the General's mania; it is now his son's. I felt once, as you do now, interested in and grieved for him; but you will find your client unruly and rebellious, and foolish as an over-grown, over-indulged schoolboy. Mr. Ireby declares his eldest sister is his feminine facsimile; and as for the other, she is a child, and does what the other two tell her. There you have the family group; what do you think of it?"

"That it is a mournful and wellnigh hopeless picture; but still I am interested, as you have said. I could not look upon him without feeling grieved to think of such a blight having fallen upon him just in the very outset of life; he is so young, so apparently unfitted, by education and early training, to settle down into a counting-house hack, or——"

"In short, he is unfitted to make money, to have it, or to live without it," interrupted Mr. D'Evelyn: "he cannot do

anything for himself, and he will permit no one else to do anything for him. I am older than you, Mr. Martock, and can assure you it will never do for you to start in your profession possessed with the idea that you must pity your clients, and do more for them than they are able or willing to do for themselves. I departed from my usual rule in favour of this Reginald Ireby, and I did try with all my soul to get matters made easy for him; and when I found that to be impossible, for his sisters. But you might as well hope to reason with the winds. I left my business in town here to take care of itself for days, solely that I might do something for these three foolish young people. I could not be their attorney and Mr. Ireby's also, it is true, but did what in me lay to work fairly for and by both. And what is the result?—what thanks do I get for all my pains and trouble? The one brother treats me like a hypocrite, whilst the other insinuates I am prejudiced in favour of Reginald. Let them get on as they can, I say now; and if you follow my advice, you will say the same."

"And suppose I answer, that although a lawyer, I am still a man," asked Mr. Martock, "and cannot feel the indifference you affect; what then?"

"Why, then you had better relinquish your profession," answered the other; "for, you may take my word for it, fine feelings and clever lawyership are incompatible."

"You do not act up to your theory," replied Mr. Martock; "you provided for O'Shaughnessy."

"He is a sort of chief charge upon me," returned Mr. D'Evelyn; "I had a kind of right to do what I could for him in memory of early times. With you the case was different, and yet you took him home to your chambers."

"Nay, good truth," answered the other, "he came to me, and I did not object."

"But you lent him money which might have been devoted

to some better purpose. I have known him for years, and feel convinced giving him bank notes is about as wise as throwing water into the sea."

"I have very little money to lend or give to any one," replied Mr. Martock. "As to Mr. O'Shaughnessy, we met at Greenwich. Somehow his mood suited mine, for I was not happy at the period, and I thought he was a——"

"Kindred soul," suggested Mr. D'Evelyn, smiling; whereat the barrister winced a little, but proceeded—

"I thought he was a man whom the world had not treated over-kindly, and yet who still turned a smiling and forgiving face towards it. I envied him the power, and hoped he might teach me the art."

"It seems to me you have acquired it without his assistance," said Mr. D'Evelyn, half pettishly. "Pray do not be offended at my plain speaking; I mean it for your own good, for I am convinced you will get on much better if on your first start in life you lay aside sentimentality; ay, and if it be possible, common sympathy with your fellows. If you can get rid of these incumbrances, your success is certain; if not——"

"I must fail," said Mr. Martock, with a faint laugh. "Well, be it so. I fear I shall never gain the smiles of fortune, if they are only to be bought at such a price. I feel obliged for your advice; but still, being in the condition of the man who was convinced against his will, I do not yet despair of doing something both for myself and this young Ireby."

"I defy you to find a flaw in his father's will," returned Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I am inclined to agree with you there," replied the other; "but it would be doing him good service to convince him of the utter impossibility of setting it aside."

"It is concise, explicit, and binding," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn. "I rather pique myself on these points being united."

"Very important points, truly; yet it seems to me, in your designs on Briarton and against Mr. Reginald Ireby, you overlooked one trifling contingency."

"Ay! and what may that be?"

Mr. Martock looked at Mr. D'Evelyn, but did not otherwise answer the question. Each gazed steadily at the other; then, as the barrister turned from his scrutiny with a smile, Mr. D'Evelyn said—

"To tell you the truth, the idea never occurred to me until after the document was signed; and then, as I had done all which either General Ireby or his eldest son expressly required, I thought there was no use in having the whole thing upset merely to cut him—Reginald, I mean—out altogether. If I could have informed him of this fact, I think he might have been brought to terms long ago."

"Perhaps," was the doubtful reply; "but I do not mean to acquaint him with it."

"Well, probably it is a prudent resolution; but he will soon find it out for himself. However, I am now tolerably clear of the business, and, destiny permitting, I mean to keep myself so."

"And whenever you think about this will being unjust, you can solace yourself with the reflection, that, after all, there is a screw loose in the everlasting tying-up of Briarton," remarked Mr. Martock.

"A screw which I expect will never come out," retorted the other; "at least, not in my time; and if not in my time, why, as I said before, never: and now, if you please, we will drop this subject, not to take it up again. Only one word more: remember what I told you a little time since, and avoid taking too deep an interest in, or feeling too much sympathy for, all those who require your professional assistance. If you take my advice you may yet sit on the bench, or, indeed, for that matter, on the woolsack."

CHAPTER XVII.

WALTER FALLS IN LOVE.

To PROVE the gratitude he felt for Mr. D'Evelyn's advice, Mr. Martock, on the following morning, having nothing particular to detain him in his chambers, left them with the intention of seeking Reginald Ireby.

When gazing in the faces of some people, it seems comparatively easy to form a mental sketch of their future. To one we allot strange adventures, great vicissitudes; to another quietness, content, inaction. We fancy one man will dawdle and lounge through life, and find himself at the close pretty near the point he started from; whilst his neighbour makes a fortune and a reputation. And although experience daily convinces us how incorrect our surmises frequently are, still we go on, through all the years of our sojourn here, reading physiognomies as we do books, wondering what their ends will prove, and feeling annoyed when the result is different from what our imaginations had induced us to believe they would be.

Walter Martock's was not a face concerning which it was easy to form an opinion as to what it might look like at the close of existence. It was possible to imagine old, keen, narrow-hearted barristers having once resembled him; and yet, on the other hand, it seemed more natural to fancy him expanding into a quiet, noiseless philanthropist, modestly forwarding every good and noble work, silently pursuing the narrow path to heaven, and tenderly pointing it out to any poor sinner who had strayed from, or never been directed towards, the road the Christian travels. He was occasionally so reserved, and his countenance then assumed such an icy expression, that one would almost have supposed he must

eventually become a misanthrope; when he relaxed, he thawed so completely, that it was easy to believe he could only prove a blessing and a benefactor to mankind.

Naturally somewhat shy and retiring, he had cultivated a professional manner and expression, which he assumed and discarded as the mood was on him; and it was this peculiarity and variation both of countenance and demeanour that rendered him a mystery to many persons; amongst others, to Reginald Ireby.

During the first portion of their preliminary interview, the young man could have strangled him; ere it was ended, he felt he had done him great injustice. Then again, as he turned disappointed from his chambers, the old impression came back with greater force than ever. He spent a sleepless night in accusing the barrister of all manner of sins both of omission and commission; and in this pleasant mood of mind, and thus inclined to judge him, Mr. Martock found his client.

Reginald coldly introduced him to his sisters, then begged him to be seated. The lawyer marvelled exceedingly at his reception, but said quietly—

"I was sorry I was out yesterday when you called. I left a message for you, however."

"Yes, I received it safely," returned Reginald. "The lad told me you were wading through the papers. Have you yet finished the task?"

"Reading was the word I employed," said Mr. Martock, who perceived at once the annoyance the mistake had occasioned, notwithstanding the attempt, the very lame attempt, Reginald made to appear indifferent on the matter. "Reading was the word I employed. I have gone over the papers several times, and——"

"Pray proceed; do not mind my sisters," said Reginald, as Mr. Martock hesitated: "we are all fellow-sufferers; why

should we not be fellow-listeners? You have perused the documents, and——"

"I regret to say nothing can be done in the affair.

"Nothing!" repeated Reginald.

Mr. Martock gravely bowed his head in assent.

"Are you quite certain there is not a single word in the will which might be made available?" asked the young man, after a dreary pause.

"It is a perfect instrument in its way," returned the other; "short, binding, and perspicuous;—nothing can shake it."

Dead silence reigned for a moment; then Reginald Ireby suddenly inquired—

"Then what am I to do?"

"Did you come to London with no definite plan for the future?" demanded Mr. Martock.

"I came here to seek for justice," said the young man, in an excited tone; "for what apparently is not to be had on earth! I came here to do something, and I don't exactly see what I am fit for; and I believe I shall go mad!"

"Sit down," entreated Mr. Martock; for Reginald had risen, and was rapidly striding up and down the apartment; "sit down, and let us talk reasonably concerning this business. I should only be protracting your anxiety, were I to hold out any hope of the will being ultimately broken. That point settled, we have only to consider the next best thing to do under the circumstances. If you are willing to accept my slight services, I shall be happy to do anything I can to forward your wishes. The experience I possess may prove useful; at all events, we can consult together concerning your future plans."

The young man vouchsafed no answer to Mr. Martock; and his eldest sister, feeling the awkwardness of their position, and a little irritated, perhaps, by the petulance her brother had for some days evinced, exclaimed hastily—

"Reginald, why do you not reply?"

"I will tell you, Constance," he said vehemently. "It is because I believe there is a conspiracy against me; because I can get no one to listen properly to my story, or to agree with my ideas on the subject. It is because every one says what I want is impracticable, that I affirm there is no use in talking any more about it. If I were rich, people would form a different opinion on the merits of my case."

"If you had twenty thousand a year it could not alter the legal accuracy of the will," returned Mr. Martock. "Were you possessed of that amount of money, indeed, you *might* be able to bring the matter into a Court of law; you might satisfy yourself as to the impracticability of your scheme by hearing a verdict pronounced against you. It is just possible you could do this; but what good could accrue to you, or any one else, from it, I cannot see."

"You cannot, or will not, understand what I want," said Reginald, doggedly. "I desire to throw the whole thing into Chancery, so that Delavelle Ireby may never get a shilling out of the property."

"Well, but you cannot accomplish your desire; therefore why not relinquish the idea at once?"

"Because I think I can accomplish it," replied Reginald. "Mr. D'Evelyn said the difficulty was not to get it there, but to get it out again. Now, I do not want it out; I only want it in. If once it goes there, it may stay there."

"It will do that without your permission," observed Mr. Martock. "Mr. D'Evelyn was wrong, however;—it is difficult to get it there; impossible to drag it out again. But supposing the case were in Chancery, what good would result to you? How should you contrive to exist upon the fact of Briarton being in such safe custody?"

"I could not exist on it, I suppose," answered Reginald, pettishly; "but it would be a satisfaction to me, for all that."

"Yes, but you should chalk out some plan of employment for yourself. You cannot spend the best part of your life dreaming about this unhappy property; you must do something—what shall it be?"

"I am not in a position to answer such a question at present," replied Reginald.

Mr. Martock, in spite of his amiability, felt himself growing angry at the pertinacity with which the young man rejected all advice, all attempts at rational conversation on the subject of his future plans. He did not consider that the accidental substitution of one word for another justified such excessive ill-humour and incivility. He began to believe Mr. D'Evelyn's view of Reginald was correct; and feeling it hopeless to endeavour to serve a man who repulsed all overtures of friendship, he arose, and said—

"If there is nothing further I can do for you, I presume it will be the best for me to return your papers: I can have them left here at any time."

"Thank you," returned Reginald, coldly; "I need not trouble you; I can send for them."

Mr. Martock looked angry at the absurdity of the young man; but the feeling yielded speedily to compassion. He could make some allowance for his irritation; he could sympathize to a certain degree with the disappointed hopes, and vain desire for justice, and resentment against those who had injured him; and besides all this, he foresaw the suffering which must come to such an one in his struggle for a mere subsistence. He pitied the poor foolish youth; but still thinking he could be of no further service to him, he rose to take his leave, when Constance Ireby interposed.

"Mr. Martock," she said, "will you remain for a few minutes longer, until my brother is a little more collected?"

"With pleasure," he answered, resuming the chair he had just vacated; whilst Reginald, looking by turns sulky and

angry, and directing anything but loving glances towards his sister, said coldly—

"You should remember, Constance, this gentleman's time is precious; we have no right to intrude upon it."

"Mr. Martock expresses a desire to assist us," she replied; "and you know as well or better than I how much we require advice and assistance from some one."

"I can do nothing more than I have already done," he returned, with much vehemence both of tone and manner. "I was brought up to no profession or business. Taught to expect a handsome property, of course I never turned my attention to the best means of earning a livelihood. My father disinherits me; he leaves you nothing. I propose terms to my brother, which he declines. I come to London, hoping to meet with justice, and fail to obtain it. Having no one from whom I can expect assistance, I seek for employment of any kind—beg and strive for it as I might in former days have begged and striven for some great prize. I spend weary days walking from office to office asking for employment, offering to do *anything* which will only bring in enough to support us, and what is the result? One man objects to me because I am too young to fill the vacant situation; another says I am too old; a third rejects me because I cannot undertake to keep his confounded books, as if I had been brought up to be a merchant's drudge; a fourth fears I should not be steady, and would soon tire of business; a fifth demurs, unless I make some sort of terms with Mr. Delavelle Ireby, whom, it seems, he knows; and a sixth won't employ me because I am a gentleman, and he does not like gentlemen. Thus they all go on. The pretexts for saying 'No' are different, but the result is still the same. Take me they will not, and I cannot make them do it; so there is no use in discussing the question further, Constance. It is impossible for me to do more than I have already done,

as I said long ago; so if you like to go back to Briarton, and see if your other brother possesses the will to serve you as I do, though I lack the ability, I beg you will not remain here on my account. As for me, I can live in any place or no place. It matters very little what becomes of such a beggared wretch."

As he concluded his despairing speech, Marian Ireby stood beside him. For the moment she forgot the presence of a stranger, so full was her heart of love and sympathy for the sorrow of her brother. She laid her hand on his shoulder and said, very gently—

"Reginald, I think I was more grieved to leave home than either you or Constance, but if I were fifty times fonder of it than I am, I would not leave you. No; we will always stay together. We shall yet be happy. You must not give up so soon."

The young man was softened. That which no remonstrance or reasoning had been able to effect was accomplished by a few words spoken from the heart, and appealing directly to it. Tears sprang to his eyes; and when Mr. Martock exclaimed, "Your sister is right, Mr. Ireby; you must not give up so soon; there are bright days in store for you yet; let me help you, for I know I can;" Reginald turned almost gratefully towards him, and declared his willingness to do anything which he suggested.

And thus Mr. Martock carried his point. If he did not follow Mr. D'Evelyn's counsel, he gratified himself by comforting others; and when he spoke to Reginald Ireby of his position, his prospects, his abilities, the result was that the younger brother readily promised to accept and try to retain any situation the other might be fortunate enough to obtain for him; having obtained which promise, Mr. Martock departed.

He did not on the morning in question do one single thing

Mr. D'Evelyn would have approved; but he did several which few persons would have thought, considering his peculiar position, rational.

He proffered advice to a man who detested counsel, save when it jumped with his own ideas,—assistance to an individual who merely accepted it because he could not possibly live without it;—he undertook to find employment for a man who had never known other control than that of his own whims and fancies; who had come and gone as he listed; who had never spent one day in the whole of his life in real, earnest exertion, save in the pursuit of pleasure; who knew nothing of business or its duties, but who only felt a sort of contempt for and distaste to it.

All this was bad enough, and for a lawyer, or indeed for any one, most imprudent; but had he stopped even here, he would have been, comparatively speaking, safe. And what more could he do? some curious reader inquires.

Why, he came into the temporary home of the Ireby's, a disengaged, and consequently almost happy man, and departed from it so deeply in love, that had Mr. D'Evelyn been in the slightest degree aware of the nature of his feelings, he would never have dreamt of sending a case to him.

But if shy, reserved persons love, as they always do, intensely, they also love quietly; and, accordingly, no one ever imagined Mr. Martock had added to all his other troubles an attachment for a woman. Mr. D'Evelyn might, perhaps, have forgiven him the folly had he lost his heart to Constance Ireby, Reginald's handsome, stately sister; but the barrister had his own ideas on the subject of angels; and from the moment his eye rested on Marian,—she whom her father had left dowerless, she whom Mr. D'Evelyn called a child, and was indeed little more than a child, she who was so fragile,—he firmly believed he had met with one, and worshipped her accordingly.

One would have imagined he was already provided with an abundant store of anxieties; but he, being of a different opinion, added yet another to the list, and left the house over head and ears in love.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REGINALD GETS EMPLOYMENT.

THERE were, in fact, very few situations which Mr. Reginald Ireby was qualified to fill.

For one he was not fitted because the managing partner in the establishment was domineering and impatient, and Mr. Martock well knew Reginald, under such a chief, would speedily wax rebellious; another seemed too sedentary; the next he was, because of his utter want of knowledge, incompetent to accept. His new friend passed by several apparently desirable vacancies, because they were of such a character as would have forced Reginald to mix amongst low, purse-proud persons, who measured a man's worth by the number of sovereigns he could count down at any given place or period. In short, Mr. Martock experienced great trouble in endeavouring to find some tolerably lucrative situation which Reginald was competent to fill, and yet which should not prove too galling to his fiery spirit.

The young man professed himself willing to do anything. Money was growing so scarce that Reginald was becoming quite tractable; but Mr. Martock, believing this state of comparative tranquillity would only last until he obtained relief from his most pressing necessities, deemed it best to

make such a selection at once as might render further change unnecessary; and, accordingly, some little time elapsed ere Reginald was finally installed as "traveller" to a leading London firm.

The post did not suit his pride; what subordinate one would?—but it did his pocket and his abilities. He wanted money to provide shelter, and food, and raiment for his sisters; and the Messrs. Holinsfern required a person of good address and gentlemanlike manners to solicit orders from country and town customers for their "extraordinarily pure and moderate-priced oils!"

With them Reginald Ireby was placed. He said so little on the subject, he made so few complaints respecting his position, he seemed altogether for a time so changed a person, that Walter Martock imagined he was satisfied, and wondered at, whilst he admired, the manner in which the young man bore his reverse of fortune.

For a few weeks, also, his taciturnity and apparent resignation deceived even his sisters; but it was the lull before the storm, the stillness before an earthquake. One evening his real feeling found vent; it was on the occasion of Constance asking him how he liked his situation.

"Oh! it does very well," returned Reginald.

"And the Messrs. Holinsfern,—what sort of persons are they?" she pursued.

"Oh! for employers, and men who have not an idea beyond sperm and olive oil, they are very well too."

"So that, on the whole, you are contented and tolerably happy?" she continued, doubtfully.

"No, I am not," he replied, sullenly; "I am neither contented nor happy, and never expect to be so again."

"Dear Reginald, do not speak so," urged his sister. "Let us think if nothing else can be done. Tell me what distresses you. Are these gentlemen unkind?"

"No, they are kind enough; but they are not gentlemen, Constance, and I wish you would call them by some other name: I am one, and yet they consider they are conferring a compliment, because they pay me a paltry salary in return for my services."

"But, Reginald, you were very glad to get the situation," she said.

"Well, and in one sense I am very glad to keep it," he retorted; "because, on the whole, it is a degree better than begging. But why on earth I should have been sent into the world to lead such a life, it is beyond me to conceive."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed his sister; "our destinies are all allotted to——"

"Now, Constance, don't begin to preach, because I am not in a mood to bear it. It is all very easy to talk of destinies being allotted, Providence providing for us, and so on; but I never meet with people who carry what they speak so glibly about into practice. When the tempers of Christians are tried, the flesh proves too strong for the spirit, and they just grumble and repine like their neighbours. If either you or Marian were in my place, you would just feel as I feel,—that it would be fifty times better to be dead than to go on with no prospect in life excepting that of earning enough to purchase our daily bread."

Marian sighed, as she remarked, "We all must believe that whatever trial comes to us is for our ultimate good; but I agree with you, Reginald, it is very, very hard to feel this, and harder still to carry the feeling into practice."

"I do believe, Marian, you have more sense than Constance, after all," said her brother. "*You* do not think I have any mighty reason to be satisfied with my position, at any rate."

"It seems very dreadful to have no prospect——"

"Yes," interposed Constance; "but that is what I cannot see."

"What is beyond your range of vision?" demanded Reginald, with some irritation.

"Why, you can have no prospect in life, excepting that of earning money enough to purchase our daily bread. Other men have made fortunes; why should not you? Other men have lost an inheritance, and regained it; is it impossible for you to do likewise? Other men have started at the very lowest rung of fortune's ladder, and climbed to the top; shall I not see you there in happier years to come?"

"It is very easy to talk," returned he.

"Yes, and very difficult to act," she assented; "but still, what others have done you can do: make some object for yourself, and all the rest will seem easy. It will enable you to endure fatigue, vexation, and even impertinence; it will prove the loadstar guiding you to competence: only fix on some one thing in life as worth striving for, and you will not be wretched. What shall it be?"

"To make money enough to keep us from starving," he answered, bitterly.

"No; that is a low motive for exertion," she returned.

"It is a powerful one, at all events," he said.

"You might surely have a higher aim," she exclaimed. "Were I in your place, I would resolve to win an independence, somehow, for myself; I would make a name, a position. Could you not do this? I think, I believe you might."

"Might! on a salary which does not leave sixpence in my hands after defraying our expenses. Might, indeed! Much you know of the world, Constance, or of the difficulty of gaining even a livelihood in it. Might! Only show me how, and I am willing to win a fortune, and all the other pleasant things you spoke of, even now!"

"Will your salary never increase?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, with a contemptuous sneer; "if I 'give satisfaction' in three or four years more I may obtain an ad-

vance of ten, or twenty, or fifty pounds per annum. But do not let us speak more of this: the thought of the same weary drudgery going on from youth to age; the consideration of how long I may have to endure this existence, totally unfit me for the duties I must discharge ere I receive remuneration for them. I never think about the matter if I can help it, and I do not want to talk of it. I must work; so there is an end of our argument."

An end to the conversation there certainly was, but never to the thoughts and feelings which had been awakened. Reginald reflected often upon his sister's words; in fact, her ideas accorded perfectly with his own; and it was chiefly because he saw no prospect of making those ideas realities that he spoke so despondingly of his present and future lot.

His income barely sufficed to meet all the claims against it: a few days' sickness, an accident, the merest chance or trifle, might, he clearly perceived, bring himself and sisters to the very verge of actual starvation. His pride and his sensitiveness alike revolted from his subordinate situation, and yet he saw no means of extricating himself from it, or rather, of placing himself in a better. He had only been in his situation for a few weeks, and yet his soul loathed the occupation. The pride of birth and early training was perpetually jarring against the pride of money and business knowledge: in one word, he despised men who had grown rich in trade; whilst they, in their turn, looked down on him, to whom, though born a gentleman, nothing remained to tell of his origin, save the signs and tokens which told the contempt wherewith they inspired him from whose abundance he was forced to accept the wherewithal, as he said, "to buy his daily bread."

"If I had the hope of ever getting rid of this," he mentally murmured, "I could, I think, endure the life patiently for a time; but as it is—those girls! those girls!" And he

reflected, as he retraced his steps homewards, how unfortunate a thing it was that three persons could not live for the same amount as one.

Women, if they cannot act as well and rapidly as men, are capable of thinking, perhaps twice as much and twice as quickly. It is what, in fact, they are perpetually doing; and Constance Ireby, being no exception to the general rule, thought long and earnestly concerning their position, and determined to try to mend it. Accordingly, when she said one day to her brother, "Reginald, I intend to become a governess," she really meant that such was her design, and that she purposed carrying it into execution.

"Are you speaking seriously?" he demanded.

"Perfectly. I do not consider it right for both Marian and myself to remain burdens upon you. She is too young and delicate to attempt anything of the sort, but I can surely do something to add to our income. At all events, I intend to make the attempt."

"My sister a governess!" exclaimed Reginald; "General Ireby's daughter a governess!"

"And why not?" she asked. "Ladies of higher rank than I, who once possessed larger fortunes than I ever expected would be mine, have done the same thing. Why should I waste my time in idleness when I might be earning some money? No employment can in reality lower me. If we are always to remain poor, why, the trifle I can make will add a little to our means. If you gain a fortune, I shall still be as much a gentlewoman, I hope, as if we had never left Briarton. Who will then remember your sister ever was a teacher? And if any one have a recollection of the fact, what will it signify to us?"

"I cannot conceive," said her brother, "who or what has put such an idea into your mind; but as it seems somehow to have got there, all I can or will say on the subject is,

that I am able and desirous to provide for you and Marian, and that I will never give my consent to any plan of the kind." And Reginald stalked out of the room as though he were master of five thousand a year, leaving Constance in possession of the apartment and her own opinion.

From that day forth the brother and sister never discussed the subject, but Constance did not relinquish the idea, the bare mention of which so irritated Reginald.

Christmas came. What a mournful Christmas it was to them! what a landmark to remind them of their sorrows! how thankful they all felt when the day was over! The only thing it brought with it to them was the necessity for giving, out of their scanty means, presents to all who had the most indirect claims on their generosity.

Immediately after the new year commenced Reginald was to leave town on business for a fortnight, the longest period he had yet remained absent from his sisters. The weather was wretched. Money could scarcely become more difficult to obtain. Their expenses, instead of lessening, appeared to increase every week; their condition seemed almost incapable of changing for the worse; and Reginald's brow day by day grew darker and sadder, and Constance felt it was quite needful for some fresh exertion to be made, and resolved that she would be the one to make it.

But if Reginald had found a situation in a merchant's office difficult to obtain, Constance discovered it would be next to an impossibility for her to meet with any desirable family with whom she could think of placing herself. Precisely the same objections militated against her as those which had so discouraged Reginald. And, further, where five eager men waited for a vacant clerkship, fifty helpless, reduced, and it might be clever women were ready to snatch the post of governess whenever such should present itself.

"Had Miss Ireby ever filled a similar situation?"

"No."

"Had she any peculiar method of instruction? had she a taste for it? or had she been educated with a view towards ultimately training youth?"

"No; circumstances, not choice, rendered it desirable for her to add to a limited income."

"Should she object to overlook the servants in an establishment where the lady of the house was delicate? Could she undertake to do this and control the children?"

"She felt incapable of incurring such a responsibility."

"Would Miss Ireby be competent to 'finish' young ladies without the assistance of masters?"

"She feared not."

Such were a few of the questions she was asked; in short, it was the story her brother had told repeated once again. Families who desired a lady for their daughters' instructress, and who were willing to pay a large salary, naturally wished for a person of experience, many accomplishments, and mature judgment. Others, whose expectations and pay were more moderate, feared Miss Ireby would not like their style of living,—did not, in fact, think a General's daughter the best person in the world to introduce into their quiet homes. One imagined she was too young to obtain any control over her daughters; another said she was too old to become nursery governess to her three little girls; one Church of England lady feared, from her face, she was not sufficiently "serious" to guide her children to heaven; whilst a Dissenter objected to receiving her, lest she should seek to convert the household generally to Rome. A clever *bas-bleu* thought it ridiculous for any one to pretend she was competent to teach music who was yet ignorant of thorough bass; and her neighbour, who detested useless accomplishments, at the head of which she placed music, refused to listen to Constance Ireby's

appeal when she discovered she was incapable of instructing her awkward daughters how to make a plum-pudding.

And thus each fashionable, or Christian, or managing mother found some insuperable fault in the trembling lady-like applicant who desired, oh! how earnestly, to reduce, by ever so small an amount, their expenditure. It was heart-sickening work, this being repulsed by people so far her inferiors in almost every respect. After a few weeks' experience of the difficulties of "getting on in the world" she abandoned herself to despair, and thought, as Reginald had also thought concerning himself, that her position was hopeless; that she might give up, at once and for ever, the idea of being useful either to herself or those dear to her heart.

She was in this state of despair, when one morning her eye fell on an advertisement, setting forth to ladies in search of situations that the proprietress of a country school desired to meet with a gentlewoman of education, refinement, and strictly Christian principles, to assist in her establishment. The amount of salary to be expected was left a matter of uncertainty; but any lady wishing further information could obtain it by applying personally to Mrs. St. George, Grosvenor Square.

Mrs. St. George's husband was, as Constance Ireby ascertained, a doctor, not of divinity, not of medicine, but of law. And to his house the sisters repaired, for Marian was now almost as desirous as Constance that some effort should be made to relieve Reginald, who, they both perceived, was suffering from that most deadly of all mental maladies, despondency.

They were faintly aware of the misery which such a step involved: the utter loneliness of the one, the vexation of spirit of the other; the life of perfect desolation lying before Marian; the lot of submissive slavery or perpetual irritation stretching drearily in the future of Constance's existence.

But they had no idea of what a dreadful reality their separation would prove; for the elder had yet to learn what a bitter draught that of servitude, let it be called by what name it will, too frequently is; and the younger was still ignorant of how weary a thing it is to spend days, weeks, months, apart from one who has shared the cares, and the anxieties, and the joys of years.

Very sadly, notwithstanding, they bent their steps towards Mrs. St. George's house; sadly, because, whether their application were successful or the reverse, the result must still be painful; and so engrossed were they in the consideration of their own peculiar position, that they had no space left to wonder how many besides themselves had paced through that very square, paused by the same door, been admitted into the same house, bound on a similar errand to their own.

I wonder if many a father in this mighty city of London, who inhabits a fine house in a fashionable square, who is waited on by obsequious servants, who drives in the parks, who gives large dinner parties, has a box at the opera, and lives, in short, up to the extreme verge of his income, be that income made at the Bar, on the Exchange, by trade, religion, a fair medical practice, or the now much-used pen,—I wonder, I repeat, if such an one could only know how many ladies answer every advertisement relating to a vacant situation, how many offer to fill any post, no matter how menial, for the lowest remuneration, how many amongst the eager group were brought up in the lap of luxury, as his daughters have been, and left, as his daughters most probably will be, penniless,—whether he would not be possessed of such manly and paternal feeling as might induce him to give notice to his landlord on the following day, sell his horses, dismiss half his domestics, discontinue his grand, comfortless parties, and devote at least a portion of the amount he spends in useless extravagance to providing fortunes for his girls, ere the evil

hour comes upon them, so that those who have been tenderly nurtured may never be exposed to the petty annoyances, and impertinences, which embitter the lives and sour the tempers of one-half of those who perform the noble but arduous task of instructing children in their duty to God and to man?

Twenty besides Constance had already been subjected to the ordeal of cross-examination which Mrs. Dr. St. George, as she styled herself, deemed needful for all applicants to undergo; twenty had come, been admitted, questioned, found wanting, and been rejected; yet the new-comer was thought graciously of by the lady, who pronounced she "would do."

Miss Ireby did not seem quite so enchanted at this intelligence as might have been anticipated. She desired to discover if Mrs. Macintyre were a person likely to suit her; and accordingly, somewhat to Mrs. St. George's surprise, she said—

"Do you know Mrs. Macintyre intimately?"

"I feel towards her as though she were my sister," was the reply; "and my greatest regret in being childless is, that I have no daughter to place under her charge."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Constance; "then you really think I shall find it a desirable home? I ask you the question thus straightforwardly because, owing to peculiarly unfortunate circumstances,"—here the girl's voice trembled and faltered, whilst Marian's eyes filled with tears,—"I am very destitute of friends to advise me."

"Were you my sister, I should send you there without a moment's hesitation," answered Mrs. St. George. "Mrs. Macintyre is a most amiable, ladylike, pious, Christian, estimable person. If you desire to place yourself in a comfortable situation, with a kind-hearted, religious person, I should say to you, secure this place without delay—in one word, go to Donleigh. I could say no more in praise of my friend if I spoke for ever."

And Mrs. St. George felt like a barrister who has concluded a brilliant peroration, or a clergyman who has delivered an eloquent sermon; she had finished her speech, and recommended Mrs. Macintyre to admiration, and accordingly she leant back in her chair, and half closed her eyes, as if about to rest after her labours, which she fondly hoped were concluded for the day.

Constance accepted this as a hint to go; there were a few questions she could have wished answered ere she went; a little more information concerning Mrs. Macintyre would have been most acceptable; but the queries died away on her lips; she felt she could scarcely ask Mrs. St. George to trouble herself further concerning a stranger, and so she arose to depart.

But before she did finally leave the house it was settled that she was to write to Mrs. Macintyre when that lady might expect to meet her; and Mrs. St. George added—

"The sooner the better, Miss Ireby, you understand."

Reginald was from home; but Constance hurried forward her preparations as though the matter were one of life and death. She desired to be gone ere he returned. She knew he would object; she feared to lose the first chance which had yet presented itself; she wished to be doing something that might at once banish thought and gain money; and accordingly she wrote to Mrs. Macintyre the day previous to her intended departure, stating she should leave London by the day mail, and requesting that some one might meet her at Donleigh.

This was done in compliance with the directions she had received from Mrs. St. George, so her mind was easy on that score, otherwise it was full of grief to overflowing, for the parting from Marian was near at hand.

The younger sister had a few sovereigns still remaining in her purse; these she handed to Constance without a syllable

on the morning of her departure: it was all they had to defray the expenses of travelling to Donleigh, and the would-be governess took the little store with a trembling hand, and tried to say cheerfully, "Marian, they will be more when you see me again;" but somehow the words were spoken in a voice so choked with sobs, that neither derived any consolation from them; though they found it clasped in each other's arms, giving free vent to that woman's specific for all manner of mental diseases—tears.

At length Constance released herself from the detaining embrace, and ran hastily down the stairs. Once she looked back, and beheld her sister leaning on the baluster, her face buried in her hands, weeping convulsively. She dared not return to her, but resolutely went forward to the open door; she heard Marian faintly, yet imploringly, call on her name, but the cry was unheeded: a fair slight figure sprang to the steps and looked out, though her eyes were clouded by blinding tears.

Constance was gone: a cab was just turning the corner of the street; she was in it, going forth to take her part in the turmoil of existence; and Marian Ireby remained alone, to weep and pray.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONSTANCE'S FELLOW-TRAVELLER.

SEVEN hours of weary travelling in winter weather, cooped up inside a dreary stage coach, with stupid companions, who seemed to be possessed of no ideas beyond those of sleeping,

eating, and yawning,—seven hours of jingling along country roads and stopping to change horses, of feeing surly coachmen, and seeing tired animals led away, and fresh ones harnessed to the vehicle; seven hours of this, and Constance Ireby had only sixty minutes more of journeying looming before her, when the coach stopped at the large market town of Polbroke, and deposited there all the inside passengers save the girl travelling to become a governess.

She had barely time, however, to congratulate herself on this deliverance, ere, by the light of a lantern held in the hand of an ostler, she perceived a common sort of woman, dressed in deep mourning, approaching the vehicle, accompanied by a miserable-looking little girl and a diminutive boy, both of whom she unceremoniously pushed into the coach, bringing up the rear in person.

"Cold night, ma'am," she remarked, when she had settled herself in a comfortable attitude, and shaken the children into place, addressing the dark bundle, which she conjectured to be something of the feminine description, that occupied one corner of the coach; "cold night, ma'am."

"Very," answered the lady, dryly.

"You have travelled far, I dare say?" she resumed.

"Yes, rather," agreed Constance; and even as she spoke the guard slammed the door, the horn sounded, the horses' hoofs went echoing hollowly down the deserted street, where the soft snow lay, according to the common expression, "waiting for more;" and a chill cold feeling, colder than the bitter winter's night, more chill than the snowy air, struck to the girl's heart. It was their last stage, but that thought brought no comfort to her mind, busying itself with asking what would her new home resemble? what sort of person would this first task-mistress prove?

"Are you going much farther?" asked her companion.

"Only to Donleigh," was the reply which had almost

escaped her lips, but she repressed it, for she was proud, and pride sometimes teaches us what experience always does, that the less communicative we are with strangers the better, so she answered, carelessly—

"Oh, no; not any great distance."

"I am thankful *I* get out at Donleigh," said the other, "for it is an awful night, and I have five long miles to drive after I get there. I went over to Polbroke yesterday evening to meet a pupil, missed the early mail I had intended returning by, and so am all astray in my calculations."

Here she produced a little bottle which Constance could only dimly see, but the fumes from which rendered the close coach doubly close and disagreeable; and after solacing herself with a portion of its contents, passed it on to her travelling companion, who, however, declined the proffered civility. Finding her offer thus slighted, she administered a small dose to each of her charges, remarking at the same time "how beneficial a little brandy proved on such a night to keep the cold out and the heat in;" then corking the bottle up again, and putting it safely in her basket, she resumed the conversation, if conversation it could be termed, wherein all the talking which was performed was done by herself.

"Yes; I live five miles out of Donleigh, in a pretty sort of a village. I have a large school, the finest school in all the neighbourhood—thirty pupils. This will be thirty-one," she said, patting the little girl who had sat in the dark corner opposite to Constance, crying and sneezing ever since they left Polbroke. And thus the insufferable woman proceeded; whilst the chill crept so suddenly over Constance's heart as for the moment almost, so it seemed to her, to stop its pulsation, and a terror so great seized upon her as to make her tongue refuse its office.

But it was necessary to know more about this dreadful

companion. Was she—good heavens! could this possibly be Mrs. Macintyre?—the clever, pious woman, the exemplary Christian, the conscientious, indefatigable schoolmistress, to whom she was journeying, to whom she was *engaged?*

Yes, it might be, for piety and dram-drinking are sometimes not considered incompatible, and vulgarity and the power of making money frequently go hand in hand along the road of life together.

How much more rapidly and correctly we arrive at conclusions in moments of sudden surprise or fear than when we have leisure to devote hours to the consideration of a subject! How unhappily true our first surmises frequently are! How much safer and more accurate a guide instinct often proves than calm, sober reason is willing to admit!

Quick as lightning it flashed on the mind of Constance Ireby that Mrs. Macintyre indeed sat beside her; that this intensely common, low-bred woman was the individual whom she had bound herself to serve for twenty pounds per annum, whose mandates she should have to obey, whose manners she should be compelled to tolerate, and to whose whims and caprices she should meekly have to submit. Could she do this? could she endure this yoke which she had thoughtlessly bound around her neck? could she think even for a moment of dooming herself to such a servitude? No; there was not a nerve, not a pulse of her heart which did not throb "No" in answer to the hurried question she asked herself. Her pride, her sensibility, her refinement, her reason alike told her if this were really Mrs. Macintyre, they could never live an hour under the same roof, they could never be more to each other than strangers, who met and parted as such in a jolting stage coach. It was absolutely necessary, however, for her positively to ascertain the truth or falsehood of her suspicions, to settle immediately the question once and for ever. She had formed no definite plan with regard

to her future movements, supposing this were really the person who had been so highly recommended to her, but she was firmly resolved on one thing—namely, that governess in her house she would never be.

"You have a great number of pupils," she remarked, after a short silence and in as indifferent a tone as she could assume; "you must be kept very busy."

"Work like a slave, ma'am," said the other, greatly delighted that at length her fellow-traveller had vouchsafed a remark; "work like a slave; thirty-one scholars, three servants, and two teachers to look after and keep in order: very often when I go to bed at night I can scarcely close my eyes, I am so tired. And children are so ungrateful,—and for that matter, parents too. Just let them try the life of a schoolmistress for a little while, that's all, I say." And she once again produced the bottle, refreshed herself with some of its contents, and then corked it up violently, as though she were settling a refractory pupil.

"I am sure it must be a weary life," remarked Constance, (perhaps she thought mentally of her own). "You have two governesses to assist you, however, I think you said?"

"Well, I always keep two; though, as for assistance, I often think and say they are more plague than profit; but one is obliged to have them for the look of the thing. Parents imagine their children are better taught when there are plenty of teachers, but I think just the reverse. I had a German for the music and French, and that sort of thing, last half, but she left me before Christmas. She cost a deal of money."

"I suppose you experience a difficulty in supplying her place?" observed Constance.

"Well, yes: you see, one can get plenty; but then, though so many are glad enough to come, there are very few I should like to take. Let me see, I had ten applications myself, never to speak of those in London, after she went; but now

I hope I am suited: there is a lady, reduced, you know, coming to me, most highly connected, who has moved in the first circles, and is compelled to take a situation. I expect she will, perhaps, answer me; but there is one great objection to these sort of people, they give themselves airs, a thing I cannot pretend to tolerate, and so I always tell them; but you see, the parents like the governesses to be ladies,—real ladies,—and I can only do the best I can."

"Of course," faintly acquiesced Constance.

"I don't know if you ever heard of her family,—I believe it is a most respectable one,—the Irebys of Briarton, near Brenslow, in ——shire. She is daughter of the late General Ireby." And the worthy and pious Mrs. Macintyre closed her lips with peculiar gusto on the name, as if it rejoiced her soul to think she should so soon have the daughter of a field officer to domineer over at discretion.

"I think," answered her companion, "I have heard something of them." In after times, Constance often marvelled at the calmness with which she uttered the above remark, at the hypocrisy she was enabled to practise.

Whilst Mrs. Macintyre kindly undertook to inform Constance of some of the particulars of her own story, she had leisure rapidly to survey her position, and consider what, under the circumstances, she ought to do. It was evident the friend Mrs. St. George prized so highly, and had recommended an orphan girl to go to "without a scruple," must have been from home when Constance's letter reached it,—that letter which probably was now awaiting Mrs. Macintyre's return,—that letter which announced the speedy arrival of the writer at a house she had now firmly resolved never to enter. There was still time for her to escape the destiny she had so heedlessly rushed into; indeed, from the moment she discovered Mrs. St. George's pious friend and her illiterate, common-minded travelling companion to be one and the

same person, she had never dreamt of anything excepting flight; the only difficulty was as to the means.

The coach stopped ere she had fixed on any definite plan; but Mrs. Macintyre unconsciously settled the matter by saying—

"Do you get out here, ma'am? this is Donleigh."

"No," returned Constance, boldly; "I go on to the next town."

"To Jonesford?" inquired Mrs. Macintyre; and her companion, now for the first time hearing the name of the place whither she proposed journeying, answered "Yes."

"Well, then, ma'am, I bid you good night, and hope you'll have a pleasant journey; and if you have any friends who want to have their children brought up in a strictly Christian school, conducted on sound principles, à line directed to Mrs. Macintyre, Dillsend, near Donleigh, will always find me."

Constance assured her, with more truth than perhaps the worthy woman imagined, "she should not forget her address;" whereat Mrs. Macintyre was so pleased, that she shook hands with her fellow-passenger, and then pushing the little girl and boy (who, it seemed, was her nephew) out before her, after the same fashion in which she had hurried their ingress, she departed.

"Do you get out here, ma'am?" asked the guard of Constance, whilst Mrs. Macintyre was making her adieux; and as the latter set foot on the snowy ground, she heard the young lady promptly answer—

"No; I go on to Jonesford."

"All right!" said the man; and in a few minutes more Constance Ireby found herself, for the first time in her life, travelling she knew not whither, most truly "a stranger in a strange land."

As she sat brooding over her position, it struck her that she was a wanderer, almost penniless; what should she do?

what must she do? The girl bent her head on her hands, and, almost in distraction, considered where she was to stay until morning, and how she was to return to London. She had been ill before leaving Marian, but they both hoped the change of air would prove beneficial: now, however, owing to the length of the journey, the cold of the weather, and the shock she had experienced in meeting Mrs. Macintyre, it seemed as though all strength were deserting her frame, as if every sense, save that of pain, had suddenly become benumbed. Necessity, however, compelled her to think; she calculated how much of Marian's slender store still remained, and, to her horror, found she had not sufficient to pay the full fare back to town. Thither, however, she was determined to proceed, and with a whirling brain she considered by what means it would be possible for her to effect her object. She had no thought then of relieving Reginald, of assisting their limited income, of adding to poor Marian's stock of sovereigns; no, if she could only get home to the room she had thought so mean, and close, and small—home, to lay her burning brow on her young sister's shoulder, it appeared as though her present idea of earthly happiness would be attained. Oh, with what eagerness the inexperienced bird had winged her flight forth into the lonely world; and with what tenfold eagerness it panted to return to the humble shelter she had so recently quitted full of high hopes of bettering their condition, or at least of providing for herself, and thus taking some harass from her brother!

She had talked to him of the comparative ease by which, if he only made an object to strive for, a fortune might be gained; she had also spoken of enduring the annoyances of his position with a brave and manly heart; she had thought he was too easily discouraged, that he suffered the habits and education of more prosperous times to hold too much dominion over him; she had said and thought all this—she had ad-

vised, dictated; she had now tasted some portion of the cup he was forced daily to drink, and at the first drop she flung it away, thinking nought so bitter could be endured by mortal lips. These considerations rushed through her mind: she had been harsh and inconsiderate towards him, she mentally exclaimed; and in her agony of fear and self-reproach she murmured, "Ah! coward that I am, how could I ever feel so little for him? I never knew before how much he was called on to bear: and what am I that I should ever have spoken to him as I did, when he was doing all he could, and suffering in silence?"

Once again the vehicle stopped; how often had it paused on that weary day which brought so much of practical knowledge to Constance Ireby! once again the guard got down, the horses were unharnessed, the door was opened, and she alighted, for this was Jonesford.

They laid her luggage in the hall of the little inn as she requested. She paid her extra fare, saw the coach drive off, and stood pale and shivering alone in a small country hotel, nearly nine hours' journey from the only place she had now any title to call "*home;*" surrounded by persons unknown to her, and, what was worse still, insufficiently provided with money.

She stood on the door-step, gazing out at the winter night, asking herself what course she ought to adopt, when the landlady's inquiry "if she would not come in?" roused her from her reverie.

"Yes—no, thank you," she vaguely returned, starting at the question. "When does the coach pass here for London?"

"It is gone, miss," replied the woman, glancing curiously at the slight though stately figure that repeated in a hopeless tone, "Gone!"

"Did you want to go back to-night, ma'am?" asked the landlady in blank amazement, for she knew the stranger had arrived but a few minutes before, and her eye turned in-

stinctively towards the boxes ranged along the side of the passage.

Constance noticed the glance: somehow it seemed completely to steady her senses and restore her presence of mind; and as she answered, she moved close to her luggage and commenced tearing off the direction cards, and pulling them hastily to pieces.

"Yes, I must go to London as soon as possible; it is necessary for me to be there to-morrow. You are quite sure the coach has gone?"

"Quite, ma'am—that is, the direct mail has passed; but there is another leaves here at nine o'clock that meets the Brenslow coach at Polbroke. It is a little of a round; but still——"

"Can I go by it?" eagerly demanded her listener.

"Certainly; but if you were to remain here for the night, I would do all I could to make you comfortable."

"It is necessary for me to return to London," said Constance.

"It is very severe weather and a long journey; if you rested for a few hours and then took the first morning coach, I think, ma'am, though it may seem bold in me to advise, you would do better to stay."

"I cannot!" she answered; "I cannot indeed! I wish I could!" And it was true, for rest seemed then about the greatest boon which could be granted to her, rest of body if not tranquillity of mind.

"Will you not walk in, ma'am, and sit by the fire?" asked the hostess, interested by the youth and beauty of the solitary traveller.

"Yes, till the coach comes," said Constance, "if I can be alone."

"There is no one in the room," was the reply. "May I not bring you some refreshment?"

"I am ill, thank you, and cannot eat," she answered; and it was true, for illness of body, anxiety of mind, and the dreary malady of a rapidly sinking purse oppressed her. So the landlady, finding she could neither be of service to nor make money out of this strange visitor, left her to her own reflections, and went to wait upon more profitable guests; whilst Constance remained alone, shivering, though the fire was piled high and burnt brightly.

So she remained for nearly an hour, sometimes restlessly pushing back the curtains and looking out into the dark, desolate night—sometimes sitting quietly, sometimes walking backwards and forwards, measuring with her uneven steps that little apartment, the air of which seemed to choke her. It appeared as if this was to go on for ever, as if the coach never would arrive, as if nine o'clock never would come—when the landlady entered and civilly requested permission "for a gentleman to remain in the room till the coach for Polbroke should arrive."

CHAPTER XX.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

HAD the gentleman referred to in the worthy hostess's apologetic speech been aware of how strongly inclined Constance Ireby felt either to say "No," by way of reply to the not unreasonable request, or else to walk out into the snow, sooner than be at the moment tormented with any companion, he would have felt anything rather than flattered,

but as he knew nothing of what was passing in the young lady's mind when she answered with what grace she might in the affirmative, he entered the apartment and walked close up to the fire, which, considering he was an Englishman, and that Englishmen are usually not very demonstrative, he really appeared exceedingly glad to see.

The previous occupant of the room pushed back her chair to permit him to enjoy the full benefit derivable on a raw winter's night from the blazing coals, and remained looking at the bright flame, whilst he rubbed his hands and warmed his gloves, and held up first the sole of one boot and then the other to the genial glow, looking between times at her.

Whatever conclusions these stray glances caused him to form concerning the lady who was, as the landlady had casually informed him, "a-going for to travel to London," they at least produced one certain effect, namely, that of unlocking his lips, for after some deliberation betwixt himself and the fire, he at length ventured to remark on the excessive cold of the weather.

Constance looked at him as she answered. He was a man of perhaps double her own age, who had the appearance of being even older than he actually was, not singularly handsome, nor especially plain; who spoke the king's English in a clear honest voice, with an accent which would have passed in any rank, and that yet seemed to belong exclusively to none.

Somehow he gave Constance an idea of a person who, although possessed of the power of rendering himself polite and agreeable, very rarely exerted himself to appear to advantage. As to position, he might have been anything or nothing—the idle inheritor of a banker's wealth, the impoverished descendant of a once powerful family, a country squire living carelessly and comfortably on a few hundreds per annum, or a person filling some extremely easy situation

under government, which, without any great exertion on his part, enabled him to get through life in a quiet, unexciting sort of way.

His manner was by no means fascinating, but it was gentlemanlike, and, if anything, kind; therefore Miss Ireby felt herself constrained to utter the monosyllable "Yes," in a courteous tone, by way of reply to his observation previously mentioned.

He looked for a moment at the pale proud face—that face which so resembled Reginald's—ere he turned once again towards his admiring contemplation of the fire; perhaps the latter furnished him with a new idea, for he shortly afterwards addressed to Constance a second remark, perfectly equal in point of novelty and imagination to that regarding the weather; to which she again assented by uttering that single word, "Yes," which is never heard spoken in perfection anywhere beyond the shores of "merry" England, as the matter-of-fact, hard-working little island is facetiously termed.

Having thus fairly broken the ice of conversation, he found himself so much at home, that he absolutely drew a chair near to the fender, ceased regarding the blaze with such rapt attention, though he occasionally glanced affectionately towards it, and commenced talking to Constance, on whose eager ear other sounds were falling—the to her now welcome roll of the approaching stage coach.

"Are you going to London?" asked the stranger when she rose.

"I believe so," was the reply, and as he raised a bundle of greatcoats and travelling gear from the table, where on his entrance he had thrown them, he, to her dismay, said—

"So am I."

Shivering, she passed out of the warm room into the cold night air. The gentleman flung a lingering look full of

regret and fondness at the fire he was leaving, and expressed a wish that he could have remained beside it.

Constance only smiled dolefully in reply, but inwardly mourned his desire appeared incapable of fulfilment.

"Allow me," he said, politely opening the coach door. "What will you do?" he suddenly added, "there is not a vacant place."

"I—I can go outside," she stammered.

"Outside! impossible!" he exclaimed, then proceeded, "Is there no gentleman here who will give up his seat to a lady till we reach Polbroke?" But there either was no one so chivalrously disposed inside of the vehicle, or else all the passengers were, like Constance herself, arrayed in bonnets. Finding he received no satisfactory answer, the stranger turned once again to her and demanded what she would do.

"Go outside," she repeated in a much firmer voice than formerly, for it seemed now as though want of space, not want of money, compelled her to this course, and we all know scarcity of cash is about the very last thing on earth any one likes to acknowledge: therefore, the moment she positively ascertained there was nothing for it, rich or poor, but to travel per force economically, her powers of speech were restored to her, and for the time she felt, comparatively speaking, happy, and answered, as above recorded, most resolutely, "Go outside."

"On such a night!" said the gentleman, who, perhaps by virtue of his years, more probably in consequence of a certain degree of firmness in his character, apparently considered he had a right to advise her: "it is quite impossible. An early mail passes here for London,—take my advice, wait for it: you will be certain to get an inside place: it is never full."

"I must go now," persisted Constance.

"Surely a few hours cannot make any material difference, excepting to your health," he urged.

"You can travel outside, why not I?" she returned, almost irritated by the opposition. "Were the night twice as cold, I must go to London."

"Have you any friend at the point of death in that place?" he inquired.

"No, but there are reasons quite as pressing which force me to hurry there," she replied.

"Well," he said, in a perplexed manner, "if you *will* kill yourself, I do not see exactly how I can prevent you. Perhaps we can find an inside seat for you at Polbroke." And there the discussion ended, Constance carrying her point, and the traveller, greatly against his inclination, assisting her to the most comfortable place he could select.

He was either so much offended or astonished at her obstinacy, that he never spoke a single syllable during the long drive from Jonesford to Donleigh, excepting when he inquired if she felt very cold, to which she uniformly answered, "No, thank you, very warm;" which reply, although he had half smothered her with cloaks, he considered to be a decided fib, and just on a piece with her pertinacity in coming out on such a night.

Such a night indeed! for it was now snowing, and the half-frozen flakes, beating in the faces of the passengers, caused even men to wish they were within sight of shelter, and to grumble not a little concerning the English climate in general, and the weather that especial night in particular.

Two miles after the coach passed Donleigh a fat old lady was deposited at the gate of a snug parsonage house; and as this left one place vacant inside, the stranger, addressing Constance, said—

"You can change your seat now."

"I do not wish to do so," she responded.

Every gentleman on the roof, the coachman on the box, the guard on the back seat, entreated her to yield: they

said it was going to be an "awful night;" one nautical traveller declared "she would never be able to weather the storm;" and a young doctor affirmed, if she stayed outside, she would be a hopeless "case" in an hour.

"I cannot go inside," she pleaded, "it makes my head ache. I would indeed do what you wish, if I could, and it is very kind of you all; but indeed I had much rather stay where I am." And as their vehement expostulations on her folly still continued, she added, appealingly, "Do not ask me to change my place, I am very comfortable here, and travelling inside makes me feel so ill."

Ill enough she had indeed been coming from London, but she was cognizant of a more pressing reason, and perhaps her companion guessed it, for he hastily interposed with—

"Well, gentlemen, as the young lady is resolved to brave the snow-storm, all we can do is to make her as comfortable as circumstances will permit;" and he flung a huge horse-cloth, which the guard handed him, over all the other mufflings he had previously heaped upon her, and then again asked "If she were cold?"

"No," said Constance, "not at all; but will you not take the vacant seat inside?"

"I? why should I?" he asked.

"Because you seem to think it so severe a night."

"You can travel outside, why not I?" he answered, retorting her former reply; then added, "No, I am an old traveller, and have often faced such weather as this; but I think *you* never have."

Constance made no answer to this remark, and the snow beginning to fall more rapidly, her companion drew the horse-cloth completely over her bonnet, and relapsed into silence, little dreaming of all the thoughts that were rushing through the brain of the girl who sat beside him; all the sorrowful

reproaches, all the better resolves for the future; all the uncertainty, the grief, the terror, which dwelt within her heart.

How little we know of each other, even of those most closely connected with us by ties of relationship or friendship! We dwell in the same house, with an apparently frank individual, on terms, as we imagine, of the most unreserved and confidential intimacy, and think, or rather take it for granted, that we know him and his history thoroughly.

And how much do we know of him? Why, perhaps as much as he knows of us, and that is pretty nearly nothing. We fancy he tells us everything, and what does he tell? just as much as suits himself, and not an iota more; which confidence we return in kind. It is well, perhaps, for human beings to believe they know the secret histories and feelings of their fellows, for the delusion keeps alive sympathy, which otherwise might perish altogether for want of aliment; but often it seems curious to pause and reflect on our utter ignorance of what a world of sensations may be peopling the heart of our nearest friend, whilst we are all unconscious of the fact.

One man may meet another daily, eat with him, converse with him, and give and receive such confidence as persons do give and take in their passage through life, and still know nothing of him. The scenes he has witnessed, the words he has uttered, the accents that have fallen on his ear, the passions, agonies, and hopes which have disturbed his soul, the friends he once prized who are friends no longer, the wrongs he has experienced, the touching kindnesses that have melted his heart, the loves that made life seem for a time a Paradise, the ties broken, the relatives estranged, the affections he cherishes, the projects he entertains, the graves he sickens to think of,—all these things, or at least the greater number of them, are as dead letters, as an unopened book, an invisible writing, an unrevealed story, to the other who calls him friend

and says he is cognizant of the story of his existence; and who, in like manner, carries his experience about with him, and communicates the whole of it to no mortal listener.

How interesting many a stupid companion would become if he could only be induced to speak frankly of all he has seen, felt, heard, suffered! and how coldly many a now affectionate heart would turn aside from its allegiance if it were aware of how much the object of its fondest devotion withholds from it, and means to withhold for ever!

Constance Ireby remained a mystery to her companion, who marvelled much concerning the cause of her long, hurried journey, her evident deficiency of money, her apparent scarcity of friends. He did not dream of the story she could have told; thought, perhaps, that because she was so young, it was hardly probable there was one connected with her name worth listening to, as if sorrow does not come as soon to the hearts of some as the knowledge of happiness arrives late to those of others. He felt, however, there was something singular about her, and so sat quietly, silently puzzling himself concerning the individual fate had decided he should journey to London with;—musing about her and the weather, and how desperately cold he was, and carrying his own especial store and stock of knowledge under his hat to England's metropolis with him, just as in like manner Miss Ireby conveyed hers to the same place beneath her black crape bonnet.

He did not ask her to change her mind and go inside when they reached Polbroke; but when she declined entering the hotel and taking any refreshment, he arranged the mufflings more to his satisfaction round her, got another horsecloth from the new guard, buttoned his numerous coats up to his throat, and prepared his philosophy to encounter what he feared lay before him.

Perhaps Constance Ireby, before and after, passed nights

full of more mental agony than the one in question, but she never spent one so fraught with pain of body and wounded pride and anxious forebodings as that, which she never subsequently forgot, when she travelled from Jonesford to London through the snow of a bitter January storm.

The cold was so intense that it penetrated through the cloaks and coats enveloping her, seeming to enter her very bones and stay there. She could not avoid trembling, she felt so chilled; her teeth chattered, she experienced a curious sort of sensation as though her body were becoming benumbed by inches; in fact, the night was an awful one, so everybody said, and, what was of more consequence, so everybody knew.

When they paused for a few minutes to change horses at a little wayside inn, the stranger descended, and in about a minute returned to Constance, bearing in his hand a cup of tea, which, he said, he prided himself on having carried to her without spilling a drop.

"You must take it," he said; "it is the only warm thing I have seen since we left that fine fire behind us at Jonesford."

"You do not seem to have yet recovered from the pain of that parting," remarked Constance, as she took the tea, and eagerly drank it, whilst he answered—

"I am like other people, I suppose, who recollect and sigh for good and true friends from whom they are divided, until they meet with new ones equally if not more agreeable. When we get sight of another bright fire, I promise not to regret the capital one I found you in possession of before we commenced our travels."

And as he ended this sentence, he took the cup from Constance's hand, and gave it to the landlord with a pleasant "Thank you."

"I have not paid for it," remarked Constance, in an embarrassed tone, drawing out her purse.

He gently pulled the cloaks around her, and so covered

the hand containing her limited store of money, as he laughingly answered—

"You heard what I gave for it,—'Thank you,'—and, if I am not mistaken, you said that to me before I discharged my debt to the landlord. The fact is, I travel this road frequently, and know all the hosts and hostesses tolerably well; so, when I went in to see what I could get for you, and beheld a tea-pot on the table, I said to Mrs. Melville, that I wanted a cup of tea for a young lady who was nearly dead with cold; whereupon she gave me it scalding hot, and I hope I brought it to you in a similar condition."

This sentence was spoken as they drove along the snowy road; it was uttered carelessly, yet kindly, and somehow affected Constance Ireby so much that her reply was scarcely audible through the gusts of wind which now began to rush past them, chasing the snow-clouds from before the face of the pallid moon, that looked down coldly on the white earth and bare trees, and the desolate hedgerows between which the coach proceeded towards its destination.

For many miles they remained silent, Constance becoming momentarily more ill and unhappy; her companion occupied with his own reflections, and really at a loss what to say to the reserved girl. Meantime, the night, or rather the morning, became finer, if not warmer; the moon rose higher into the heavens, a few stars peeped forth, the snow commenced freezing under the horses' feet, and the young traveller really began to think she should die of cold before she reached London.

"Look," said the stranger, at length, "does not that place stand out well in this light?"

And at the exclamation, Constance flung back the mufflings from her face, and did look earnestly—at Briarton.

There was the house she had dwelt in: she saw a light faintly glimmering in one of the upper chambers—it had once

been Marian's room; the white snow lay thick over the lawns, the parterres, the avenues; the evergreens were laden with it, and appeared to the gazer strangely beautiful. How well she knew each shrub, each tree, each plant; how often she had paced those walks, how happy she had once been in that place, which was now pointed out to her as though she had never previously beheld it. Oh! how she strained her eyes to take in at one hurried glance the whole scene; how her gaze lingered on that quiet English home from which she and hers had gone out into the world wanderers and orphans; how calm and beautiful it looked, surrounded by the encircling woods! On every bough of the trees, and sprig, and branch, the snow shone pure and bright! The scene was a peaceful and picturesque one,—an artist might have looked on it admiringly; but, oh! what a deadly pain it sent quivering through Constance's heart! She gazed on it silently for a minute or two, but then a turn of the road shut it out from view, and Briarton, home no longer, was left far behind for the second time.

It still lay tranquilly sleeping in the rays of the bright queen of night, cold and quiet and calm, whilst she who formerly resided within its walls went on her way with an agony of bitterness swelling in her breast.

Her companion had seen her long look over the prospect, he beheld her head droop as the coach swept by, and when by the moonlight he looked cautiously into her face at Brenslow, he found that she was weeping silently.

When next he addressed her, it was in the grey of a winter's morning, whilst the coach rolled noisily over the London streets.

"They have had snow here too, I see," he remarked.

"Oh! yes," she replied with a start; "a great deal had fallen here yesterday morning."

"Yesterday morning!" he repeated; "why, you don't mean

to say you have travelled to Jonesford and back since then?"

"I do, indeed." The answer was frank enough, but the tone seemed to entreat no further questioning; and a few minutes elasped before he inquired if she expected any one to meet her.

"No," she answered; then added, after a pause, "My friends do not know I am coming."

"Of course not," he answered, as if to relieve her embarrassment, "or they would be here waiting for you."

"I—I did not anticipate returning so soon," explained Constance, and as she uttered the last word, the coachman drew rein, and her journey at length was finished.

The gentleman arranged her luggage properly for her, marvelling not a little at its amount, and the absence of any name or address on the boxes. He asked if he should tell the cabman where to drive; and as Constance Ireby held out her almost numbed hand and thanked him for his kindness, she answered—

"To the Strand, if you please, and then I can direct him."

No one was stirring at the lodgings when she reached them; but one who loved her tenderly had not slept. A slight form started up at the sound of the driver's impatient knock, looked for a moment out into the dim street, then hurriedly ran down and opened the door for Constance.

"I expected you," she said, as she drew her into the sitting-room, and kissed her sister's cold cheek over and over again.

The man laid the boxes down in the passage, Constance paid him, and he departed: then the two ascended the stairs together.

"Marian," said the poor frightened girl, "can you forgive me? the money is all wasted. I could not go to Mrs. Macintyre—I have come home again to be a burden upon Reginald."

Once again the loving arms encircled her, and tears of joy moistened Marian's face as she replied—

"Oh! Constance, what does it matter about the little trifle? besides, did it not belong to both of us? it was yours as much as mine, and I am so glad to see you, I can think of nothing else, except how tired and ill you look."

"I am nearly dead," she replied; "but if I can get a few hours' sleep I shall be well again."

But the sleep which was to restore health and strength did not visit her eyelids then nor for many a long day afterwards; shivering-fits, then restlessness, then fever shook her system; but ere the last stage of delirium came, she murmured earnestly, "Marian, you must not tell Reginald—remember, he is never to know this. I rely on your not telling Reginald."

And long after Reginald had returned home and stood in person by her bedside, she still continued repeating that one sentence, which seemed to have taken firm possession of her:

"Marian, I rely on your not telling Reginald—promise me you never will."

CHAPTER XXI.

REGINALD'S NEW HOPES.

THERE never was, perhaps, on earth a home in which greater confidence reigned than in that of the Irebys; and accordingly Marian, unheeding her sister's half-delirious request, told Reginald all she knew of the affair, and when Constance became convalescent she informed him of the rest.

Lying on a sofa, the closed curtains shutting out the sight of the world, if not knowledge of its cares, the bright firelight falling on her sunken cheek, her hand clasped in that

of her brother, Constance told the story of her journey to Donleigh.

With many tears and self-reproaches for not having at least tried Mrs. Macintyre for a time, asking forgiveness of Marian and Reginald for having wasted any money uselessly, and bringing on such a long and expensive illness, bitterly acknowledging how bravely in theory she had spoken to her brother, how easy it seemed to act, how impossible she found it to bear, how much less heartily she had pitied and admired her dear Reginald than she should have pitied and admired him; in one word, humbly and sadly affirming she had done what she ought not to have done, she recounted every incident that befell her, every feeling that had agitated her during the course of that weary day and night.

She spoke of the glimpse she caught of Briarton, of her thankfulness to reach home again—home, humble as it was; but she added, ere she concluded, an earnest hope that Reginald, notwithstanding the failure of the first attempt, would let her "try again" with more strength, greater caution, and, she trusted, better success.

Well and tenderly as her brother loved Marian, much as he would have relinquished for the sake of the fair-haired girl who had been her father's darling, there was no doubt but that Constance was his favourite sister.

The human heart appears incapable of loving two things equally in a similar way. It can entertain as many different shades and sorts of affection as of dislikes and hatreds; it can love a mother, sister, wife, friend, precisely as much, though with different sorts of sensations; but no one ever met a man who felt the same extent and degree of regard for his two sisters, for his first and second wife, for all of his friends; and therefore, though Marian was dear to Reginald's heart, Constance was and had always been more to him than the other could ever by possibility become.

How this happened it is difficult to say. Reginald himself, when once questioned on the subject, said that, although "Marian had the fewest faults, Constance had the greatest virtues." Perhaps he understood better his own meaning than most other persons would be likely to do; for if it be not a virtue in a woman to bear without repining, to endure with a trustful and a gentle heart, to suffer quietly and without complaint, the common ideas prevalent with regard to feminine perfection must be sadly incorrect.

Most probably it was because her faults most resembled her brother's that Constance Ireby possessed so large a portion of his affections, and because Marian was really better than either of them that her sister loved her so devotedly, and Reginald felt he somehow did not quite understand her; still, though there were different degrees of regard in the little circle, enough sincere attachment dwelt among the members of it to have lighted half-a-dozen dreary homes where discord and contending interests destroyed domestic peace.

So Marian murmured softly, that so long as Constance was spared to them nothing else could seem a trial, nothing else ought to be thought of, and Reginald repeated the same words.

"As to the rest, Con, keep yourself quiet now; we will talk of it when you are better."

And thus time went on, and the invalid grew stronger, slowly but surely, and at length she was quite recovered, able to walk about, and talk, and think, and, if need were, to act.

Mrs. St. George had driven over in the carriage of her husband, the LL.D., from Grosvenor Square to the dingy street off the Strand, where the pious, humble Christian wondered any "lady" could breathe, in order to inquire *why* Miss Ireby had not fulfilled her engagement with Mrs.

Macintyre. It was on the third day of her sister's illness; and Marian, with eyes swelled with crying, came down to tell the person who had been more than half the cause of this fresh misfortune, that Constance was "so ill she feared she would die."

"Then, of course, she cannot go to my friend?"

"Oh! no; even if she recover, I am sure she will never be able to accept a situation," said Marian, in all sincerity.

"Dear me, how provoking!" remarked the lady. "Well, I suppose I must just look out for some one else. You should have written to me at once. Your sister's illness is a great trouble to me and inconvenience to Mrs. Macintyre," she added, in a really injured tone; whereupon Marian ventured to suggest it was quite as great a trouble to her and to Constance as it could possibly be to either of them.

Mrs. St. George stared at this remark, and then, with a petulant "Don't talk to me, child," departed, was assisted into her carriage by a demure footman, and drove comfortably off through the London streets, as she sincerely believed, "*en route* for heaven." For Mrs. Macintyre, when Mrs. St. George was, on one occasion, enjoying the pleasures of country life in a small but very genteel lodging at Dillsend, had, with the aid of sundry tracts, and the assistance of the Reverend Ezekiel Michael Straightpath, to say nothing of her own astounding eloquence, convinced the doctor's wife of the utter futility of the faith in which she had been reared, induced her to renounce it, and receive the sacrament from the hands of Mr. Straightpath, who called her his "sister," and a "brand rescued from the burning," and a "shining light," and a "flower gathered into the nosegay of souls, he trusted he should be permitted to present to the Lord in Paradise."

And accordingly, Mrs. St. George returned to London as serious a lady as she had left it a fashionable one, and the

LL.D., finding the new mania not at all more expensive than the old, allowed her to attend what "tabernacle" she chose, and let her subscribe to "Missions to the North Pole," and the "Straightpath Conversion Society," and a host of similar institutions; and he looked anxiously to see if her change of religion would effect any amendment in her temper; but to his chagrin he found that, as she had merely exchanged the garment of frivolity for that of sanctity, her real character remained just the same, though the external covering might be different. Mrs. St. George herself, however, was satisfied that, let who else be wrong, she was right, and that she was just as sure of reaching heaven as others who preferred continuing in the bosom of the Established Church were of arriving at a very different destination.

Without her sympathy or assistance, however, Constance Ireby recovered, and one evening in the spring-time of the year, whenMarian, having a cold, could not accompany them, Reginald and she went out for a walk together while they discussed their future plans.

"Do you remember," said he, "telling me, in days that were most mournful and weary, to make an object for myself, —to fix on some one thing worth striving for?"

"Yes," she returned.

"You said if once this were done, all the rest would seem easy. I thought your words foolish then; but I have, as you advised, thought since what I should determine to win, and find working for it almost easy, if not pleasant."

"And what have you determined to win, Reginald?"

"Briarton," he responded.

"How?"

"I have resolved, I have sworn it in my heart, that Briarton shall be mine before I die. Poor as I now am, it is, I see, clearly impossible for me to set aside our father's cruel and unnatural will, made at the instigation of a wily and a

clever man; but I am young; years of life and health lie before me. I will make money, struggle and strive for it like the veriest slave that ever existed: when rich, I will have the business thoroughly investigated, and if it still prove impossible for me to win the place by law from Delavelle, why, I will by money."

"But, Reginald, perhaps he would not sell it."

"Pshaw! I did not mean Delavelle, but his son. Whichever of the boys inherits it will be glad enough to get a handsome sum for the property; and thus, in either case, I am sure of it."

"And how are you to make such a fortune?"

"By working for it. In fifteen or twenty years I ought surely to be able to do something. Others have made fortunes in much less time; and I have as good abilities and prospects as they had. So we will yet regain our rights somehow. I feel now endowed with energy to struggle, and patience to wait, and hope to lighten my toil, and faith sufficient to feel confident of success. The end may be distant, but the result is sure; and I am strong, and brave, and almost happy in my earnest purpose."

"And may I not help you, Reginald?"

"In what way?" he demanded.

"Let me try again. As I said before, guided by past experience, let me strive to assist you, and ease my own heart in the endeavour."

"You shall, by words of hope when I am desponding; of counsel when I do not clearly see my way. You shall aid me, Constance, as you have always done, and remain the true dear sister you have ever been."

"I would fain do something more," she said.

"It is enough," he answered. "It is all a woman can do; it is, moreover, all she ought to attempt."

"Some attempt more, and gain their end," she returned.

"When I was ill, I thought, through long sleepless hours, of our position; and I reflected (as I have begun to speak, it is right to tell all, just as it occurred to me) if you were to be stricken with grievous sickness, or even—which may God avert!—disabled or killed by any accident, that I should have to employ my energies for Marian's support and my own. I consider that, situated as we are, every one of us who can contribute to the general fund ought to do so, not as a matter of choice or fancy, but as one of duty and prudence. Therefore, Reginald, what I formerly proposed from impulse I now repeat because I feel it to be imperatively necessary. I will endeavour to provide for myself, at least, and, if possible, assist your design."

"By entreating Mrs. Macintyre to receive you into her Christian and select establishment as head teacher and head slave!" he bitterly remarked.

"No; not with such a person as that would I propose earning my bread; but in the house of a well-born, well-educated English lady, who has studied the Scriptures to more purpose than Mrs. St. George, and learnt to do unto others as she would be done by, I think I should feel comfortable, and tolerably happy. Only let me try if I cannot meet with something likely to suit. I promise you not to take a decided step again without your consent and approbation. All I ask at present is that you will not say 'No.'"

They found themselves at the door of their lodgings as she concluded, and Reginald, whilst he knocked for admittance, answered—

"I do not say 'No,' Constance, but neither, most assuredly, can I say 'Yes.' I think you had better remain, to encourage me and take care of Marian."

This was, perhaps, the first time in his life that Reginald Ireby had not confided fully in his sister,—that he was conscious of withholding something from her knowledge, *the*

something, in fact, which had raised his spirits so miraculously, and caused him to look more hopefully and pleasantly on the world at large and his own peculiar position.

The truth is, knowledge had suddenly arrived to him; long reflection had at length revealed a mystery unto his mind. For months and months he had pondered concerning the faint hints Mr. D'Evelyn had thrown out—hints which sometimes he fancied contained some meaning, and which again he considered were mere deceptions, or words of little import to him.

One day, during the period of Constance's convalescence, when he was hurrying along the Strand, a light dawned on his understanding. The fact Mr. D'Evelyn did not, and Mr. Martock would not, tell him, struck suddenly on his soul. In that place, of all others apparently so unfavourable for reflection or the working out of any mental problem, the solution to that which had so long perplexed his intellect presented itself: amidst the roll of carts, and the crush of omnibuses, and the clattering of cabs, and the din of traffic, knowledge, which he had sought for in vain in the calm of the country, in the silence of night, in the quiet counting-house, came to him; and oh! with what wild joy he greeted its approach! How, for a moment, the street reeled before his eyes, so dazzled were they with the new light, which almost blinded him; how eagerly, after a moment's pause, he sped onwards to learn the accuracy of his surmises! How earnestly he desired to hear that was true which it would have been well for him he had never guessed at!

He sped on, then, as has been said, but never turned aside to consult Mr. Martock on the subject.

"No," he murmured, "I will go to some one who, knowing nothing of the case, can have no interest to deceive me." So he passed the Temple, and wended his way to Clifford's Inn in search of a solicitor.

"It matters very little whom," he thought, pausing at almost the first office he reached, and, reading "Jackson and French" on the brass door-plate, he entered the place where all the legal information he at the moment required was to be obtained for something under a sovereign.

"Can I see either Mr. Jackson or his partner?" he demanded of a very consequential-looking clerk; who answered,

"Mr. French is disengaged, I believe;—who shall I say wishes to see him?"

"As I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance," returned Reginald, "my card can be of little service. I come solely on business."

"So I presume," persisted the other; "but still we generally inform him *who* desires an interview."

Reginald looked daggers at the young clerk, who kept him at bay, and answered—

"If you get *a* name, I suppose it does not much matter what letters compose it. You can therefore, if you please, as it seems announcing me will afford you some gratification, say Mr. James Thompson requests a few minutes' conversation with Mr. French."

"Mr. James Thompson," repeated the clerk, writing down the name as deliberately as though he had believed it to be Reginald's actual appellation; and having finished, he swaggered out of the office, leaving the visitor, who mentally devoted him to the infernal gods, to his own impatient reflections.

The embryo attorney, having conceived a mortal antipathy to their new client, was so long in obtaining a definitive answer from Mr. French, or rather of seeking that gentleman at all, that Reginald had reached the door on his way out ere the clerk returned.

"Please to walk upstairs," said he; "Mr. French can see you now."

"If he, or rather you, had detained me another minute, you might have looked for me in the nearest solicitor's office," returned Mr. Ireby, angrily; but as he ascended the flight of steps leading to Mr. French's room, the youth, decked with rings, perfumed with eau de Cologne, and redolent of Macassar oil, informed him, "It was a house he did not visit at."

Reginald found not only Mr. French, but also his partner disengaged. The former was a middle-aged gentleman; the latter, one verging towards the "sere and yellow leaf," who stuck close by the fire and warmed his hands, and regarded Mr. Ireby intently whilst the visitor proceeded to ask the question he had come to have answered.

"You wished to speak to me, sir?" said Mr. French, with much urbanity. "Will you have the kindness to be seated?"

"Thank you," replied Reginald, taking possession of one of those wretchedly uncomfortable chairs never to be seen now-a-days anywhere excepting in an old-fashioned solicitor's office—chairs that seem hundreds of years behind the age, which are devoted exclusively to clients, which appear full of sense and legal knowledge, and have a gnarled, professional, crooked sort of look that might, one would think, warn any sensible man of the dangers and expenses he may and surely will incur by occupying them frequently.

"It was merely with regard to a matter of succession I desired to be informed," said the visitor, with what indifference he could assume.

"Precisely," assented Mr. French, as Reginald paused, and Mr. Jackson nodded his head, as if he were noting down and checking off the conversation in his brain.

"I had better state the particulars," said their client; whereupon the one partner replied, "If you will have the goodness," and the other mentally wrote both observations on the tablets of his legal memory.

"Suppose," commenced Reginald, and then he stopped, considering how he should proceed.

Mr. French, by way of encouraging him, said—

"I see."

"Suppose I,—suppose you——"

"Exactly so," remarked the attorney.

"Suppose *any* man," exclaimed the client, as if he had at last got over the difficulty, "possessed of property, say of the value of from five to six hundred per annum, and having two sons, bequeathed the freehold to the child of the eldest one, that child being a boy and a minor; suppose he were to die before attaining his majority, who would come in as heir-at-law?"

"His father, if alive," promptly responded Mr. French; and Mr. Jackson opened his lips and said, "Of course."

"But supposing his father were *not* alive?" demanded Reginald.

"Not alive?" repeated Mr. French, not precisely understanding the nature of the question; "why, I suppose his mother, or brothers, or sisters, or——"

"No," interposed Mr. Jackson, with a quiet smile, "you have not quite caught this gentleman's meaning. We will put the case thus," and he settled himself with much satisfaction in his easy chair to elucidate the matter to both his auditors: "Our client's father, Mr. Thompson, having two sons, devises the sum of five hundred pounds sterling a year, arising from freehold property, to his grandson, the child of the elder brother, this gentleman's nephew, in short. Am I not putting the case correctly?" he added, looking at Reginald, who returned—

"If you choose to state it in that form, it will do as well as any other."

"Better," remarked Mr. Jackson, dryly. "Now what you want to know is this—(for we have before seen that the

father, if alive, succeeds to the property if the child die before attaining his majority)—suppose the father to expire first, and the boy to do so likewise without coming of age—(for if he were one-and-twenty, of course any one to whom he willed the property would come in before you)—supposing, as I said before, these two dead in the order of decease just indicated, Mr. Thompson wishes to know if he would succeed to the freehold." The latter portion of the speech was addressed to his partner.

"This gentleman?" inquired Mr. French. "What do you say?"

"That he most undoubtedly would," responded Mr. Jackson, rising and standing triumphantly before the fire; "that is, always supposing there is no nearer male relative."

"To be sure," acquiesced Mr. French; "I did not quite understand our client's meaning at the first. Yes, of course, he succeeds; it is quite clear—it is an incontrovertible fact."

"Concerning which there could, in the case Mr. Jackson has imagined, be no dispute?" asked Reginald.

"None whatever: it is as certain as that when the owner of a freehold estate dies intestate, his eldest son inherits the property."

"Then you are quite satisfied that if the father die before the son, and the son before attaining the age of twenty-one, the uncle steps in as heir?" said Reginald, desiring to condense the case, and so put the accuracy of the answer beyond a doubt.

"It is as plain as the sun in heaven," affirmed Mr. Jackson; whereupon Mr. French facetiously observed, "That was saying little in favour of their client's cause;" to which the other partner replied, "As the sun was wont to be when I was a younger man,"—on the strength of which assurance Reginald went away.

The General's youngest son never mentioned this inter-

view to any one. Perhaps he dreaded lest Delavelle might find means to destroy this last hope if he imagined his brother were aware of its existence; perhaps he felt ashamed to whisper even audibly to himself that he was calculating on and wishing for the death of three fellow-creatures. Be that as it may, he never told Mr. Martock of this visit to Clifford's Inn, nor of the knowledge he had acquired, but went about his business with a lighter and more courageous, though, it may be safely declared, not with a purer heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONSTANCE'S SECOND VENTURE.

MONTHS passed away; the soft spring faded into summer, resplendent with sunshine and beauty, which in its turn merged into autumn—glorious season, when the whole glad earth seems but one rich garden filled with gorgeous flowers and abundant fruits, and yellow corn and golden sheaves; autumn, with its many-tinted trees, and sparkling streams, and calm bright waters, and balmy breath, radiant with a brilliant flush, which, like the deceitful colour on the cheek of a consumptive patient, almost deludes the ignorant into a fond belief that many days of loveliness may yet be enjoyed ere the dreary winter comes; but which, to the more experienced eye, speaks surely of death and decay.

But oh! short-lived though the golden splendour may be, is it not beautiful?—beautiful even because it is so very fleeting; beautiful because we feel it is fading away almost whilst

we gaze; surpassingly beautiful in contrast to what comes after,—the dark, dull November days, and cutting winds of bleak December, and the stinging frosts and snows of the succeeding months. Is it not beautiful? Oh! who has not acknowledged that it is so, and uttered a murmuring assent to the exclamation, "There is no time in all the year so lovely, so transitory as this!"

How weary a thing it is to be pent up amid houses, and the endless inventions and devices of man, in such a season, when one might be wandering through green fields, listening to the voices of God's own choristers,—hearkening to the soaring lark as it rises higher and higher, and seems almost to be seeking the very gates of heaven,—to the deep thrilling notes of the blackbird's song,—to the gushing melody of the thrush;—when one might be straying through sweet-scented pine woods, or gazing at the busy reapers, or idly gathering sweet though common flowers; and gaining, as one saunters slowly along under the deep blue sky, health, and peace, and strength, and feeling nearer to God, and more loving and forgiving towards man, and leaving care and selfishness and all worldly turmoil aside for a season.

To the Irebys how sadly that summer passed away! The previous one had seen them in a fine large country house, surrounded by trees, and flowers, and fair lawns; and this they spent in a small close London room,—a room where dust and flies covered every article of furniture it contained; in a room adorned with a few miserable plants,—wretched substitutes for, or rather mockeries of, those they had left behind in the conservatory at Briarton,—plants which drooped and pined, like their owners, for purer air and greater space, and which, though tended, only drooped the more because of the care bestowed on them.

Sometimes, for an instant, in the parks or larger squares, a feeling of the country came over their hearts; but, as a whole,

the summer and its golden pageant swept by without their deriving other benefit from its transit than the dust which choked them; and the brilliant autumn came and passed, and at length Constance Ireby found, through the instrumentality of Mr. Empson, what she had so long been seeking, a home where she could work and support herself.

It was an unexceptionable offer,—as companion to an only daughter, in a house where the lady was amiable and gentle, where means were ample and remuneration liberal.

Reginald did not like the project, but he saw, as Constance saw, that the step was unavoidable; so, though he did not give his consent, he said she might do as she pleased; and the girl, if it did not *please* her to do her duty, thought it right to accept the offer, and for the second time went to see what sort of abiding-place fortune had found for her.

The expense of going by water to Plymouth, near which town the Honourable Mrs. Ashton resided, was much less than that of travelling thither by any other route; besides which Constance thought that, of two evils, lying at peace in her berth till she reached her destination would be preferable to another such journey as that she had previously undertaken; so Mrs. Ashton arranged to have her met at the steamer, and Reginald and Marian saw her on board the vessel which was to convey her, for so long a period, from the only two on earth who really fondly loved and clung to her.

If the old proverb relative to weather and cards had been founded even on a shadow of truth, Constance Ireby should have been the most fortunate of mortals, inasmuch as if there were a shower, or snow, or frost abroad, she was sure to get the full benefit of it; and accordingly the steamer was hardly out at sea before there arose such a storm as in the autumn of the year we are occasionally, though, happily, not very frequently, treated to.

Through the long hours of that awful night Constance Ireby lay, with clasped hands and quivering lips, listening to the wind howling through the rigging, to the torrents of rain deluging the deck, to the trampling of many feet overhead, to the voice of the captain, as it rose even above the din of the tempest—lay and listened to all these sounds, and thought of death.

To die thus—amidst that wild, maddening uproar, to be launched into the raging sea, which seemed chafing and eager for its prey—thus, far away from Reginald and Marian —was this to be the end of all?—the end of the story which had left her and hers to the mercies of the world?

Constance fancied that home or friends she was never to see again; that even thus she was to die, and be—oh! no, never forgotten whilst Reginald or Marian lived, but wept and lamented for, as many a pure and gentle soul is sorrowed for, even on this sordid earth of ours: thoughts vague and terrible swept across her heart. When the storm lulled, hopes of life, the wild desire for it, the yearning to behold those dear to her, a longing to breathe her last with some friend near to soothe that time of mortal agony,—all came swelling up in the girl's breast; but when the howling wind rocked the vessel in its mighty arms, and seemed bearing it down into the raging abyss that threatened to engulph it, terror once again usurped possession over her mind; and though she tried to pray for strength and resignation—though she strove to murmur those words that thousands have uttered in voices choked with sobs, "God's will be done!" yet fear and horror caused the accents to die away, almost unspoken, on her lips, whilst her face grew more pallid, and her heart failed her, as the sound of the rushing waters, and of the awful breeze and the driving rain, smote on her ear.

Other hearts than hers quailed that night before the overpowering violence of the storm; many of the seamen, the

business of whose lives it was thus perpetually to face the grim king of terrors, breathed a gruff prayer, as the billows raged around them; women spent the night, some on their knees in earnest supplication to Him who alone could hear or heed them, some adding to the universal din by vehement lamentations; while one or two, like Constance, silently, though not perhaps the less fearfully, awaited their doom.

Morning at length dawned, and the vessel was still safe. Oh! how dull eyes brightened, and pale cheeks flushed, and hearts joyfully throbbed, as the wind lulled and the sea grew calm! How thankful all felt that life was not yet past, that the struggle, and the pleasure, and the pain, were to continue still for a brief space longer; that time was left to work out, as they conceived, all the thousand projects which people and distract the brain; that fond ties remained unsnapped by death — destined perchance to be severed by change, coldness, or the lapse of years! Constance Ireby, after hours of silence, turned to the stewardess, and saying, "I never thought to see morning again," was answered by the woman with the words, "Nor I, miss;"—words that spoke more of the actual danger and anxiety she had endured than a volume uttered by more timid lips could have done.

"Are we near Plymouth?" asked Constance, as the dread of death faded away, and life, with its cares and hopes, came fluttering back. "Are we near Plymouth?"

"No, miss," was the reluctant reply.

"Shall we soon be?" she pursued.

Once again came a reply in the negative.

"Where, then, are we?"

"Off the coast of France," said the stewardess. "It will be night before we get to port."

Night! it was almost morning again before the long-looked-for haven was gained. Constance counted every weary hour, as it crawled along, whilst the vessel made head against wind

and tide. She wondered, as darkness closed, if any one would meet her at this unseasonable time; but at length her doubts were solved, for all the passengers had homes to hurry to, or anxious friends waiting to meet them, all had some place to go to, some one to greet them, all save Constance, whose two first experiences had proved so unfortunate.

"Is Miss Ireby on board?" at length cried a hoarse voice down the cabin stairs.

"Yes, yes; I am she," exclaimed Constance, eagerly, expecting and hoping that an end would thus be put to her difficulties; but it was only a note—a few hurried lines from Mrs. Ashton, stating that her conveyance had waited several hours for the arrival of the steamer; that it was supposed to have either not left at the appointed time, or else to have put back, and was certainly not expected that night; but, lest it should reach the harbour, she had desired the note to be left with one of the dock watchmen, advising Miss Ireby to remain on board until the next morning, when some one would go the first thing to Plymouth, and see if the vessel had arrived, and whether Miss Ireby had ventured in it.

Acting on Mrs. Ashton's advice, Constance begged to be allowed to resume her berth; but captain and stewardess both said it was impossible: the vessel was to sail again next morning, and it must be clear of all who were not going farther. In one word, "go she must, willing or not." The negative was politely given, certainly; but the civility did not seem to Constance to make her position at all more satisfactory, for where was she to go, and what was she to do?

It certainly was just possible for her to hire a conveyance, and drive, worn out as she was, several miles to Mrs. Ashton's abode, to disturb the household at that unseasonable hour, and make her *début* amongst strangers, tired and haggard; it was just possible for her to do this, but it was a course she had not the slightest wish to pursue if any other presented itself.

"I know a place, ma'am," said the stewardess, noticing her hesitation, "where you could stay and be very comfortable till your friends meet you."

"Do you?" returned Constance, eagerly. "It is not an hotel, I hope."

"No, ma'am; it is a private house, kept by a widow, a relation of my own. I will take you there now, if you think you could make it do: it is not very grand, but clean and quiet, and I think you would do better to stay there and take a sleep than go so far into the country at this time of night."

"Decidedly," remarked the captain; whereupon Constance exclaimed—

"We can set off at once;" and, leaving the bulk of her luggage on board the steamer, and a note to inform whoever came to meet her in the morning of her whereabouts, she and her guide left the vessel, to walk through the strange streets of a before untrodden town in the starlight of a clear October night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW HOME.

Mrs. Ashton was a widow, "slight, dark, and forty," and her youngest brother, Mr. George Alfred Ernehulst, who was her junior by a couple or so of years, declared there never existed on earth so thoroughly amiable, loveable a woman as his sister Margaret; whilst she, in her turn, believed he was the cleverest and best amongst men.

Accordingly, though he had a nominal home of his own, he resided certainly three days out of the seven under Mrs.

Ashton's roof, was cognizant of all that occurred there, was consulted concerning every new arrangement which might be mooted in the domestic circle, and, in short, enjoyed in his sister's establishment all those comforts and quiet pleasures he might have possessed if happily married; whilst, on the other hand, being still free, and unfettered either by the bonds of love or matrimony, he led a careless, easy, contented sort of bachelor existence, which appeared to suit his temperament and disposition admirably.

On the night when Constance Ireby was approaching the harbour of Plymouth, Mr. Ernehulst walked leisurely home to his sister's house, after enjoying the hospitalities of Sir Jasper Monkston, Knight, first through the grounds encircling that gentleman's house, and subsequently through those appertaining to his nephew, Captain Montague Ashton, who, at this period, was spending his time at Malta, smoking cigars and flirting with any good-looking lady, English, French, Spanish, or Maltese, whom fate threw in his way, for he was at that age when smoking and flirting are deemed the business of life. Later on, fair faces lose their attractions, and cigars become doubly fascinating: it is for those who have tried both expedients for killing time, who have passed through the one stage and arrived at the other, to say which is the more happy and successful. Captain Ashton, being only two-and-twenty, thought his own state the best, and pitied his uncle, who, he declared, had reached a point whence nothing looked bright or lovely; the young man when at home rallied and compassionated his senior, because Mr. Ernehulst thought balls a bore, and dancing a folly, and women not worth a second thought, and took the rough and the smooth of life just as each came, with an undisturbed face and an equable heart. And if all Captain Ashton advanced concerning that same age of forty, which his uncle was nearing, were true, who is there that would cast from the

tranquil eminence thus attained one look of regret back at youth, which, after all, is a brief, unsatisfactory dream.

Did Thomas Moore, I wonder, really believe, when he said

"For its clouds and its mists are worth evening's best light,"

that such was actually the case?

Perhaps he did; for poets do not view matters of fact like prosaic mortals, who deem that to feel happy is better by far than to dream of being so.

Mr. Ernehulst, however, denied having arrived at the state his nephew insisted he had reached, but told Captain Ashton if he were only as well satisfied with men, and things, and the world in general, twenty years hence, as his uncle, he might consider himself a fortunate individual,—"like myself," added Mr. Ernehulst, with a curl of his lip; whereupon the young man laughed, and declared the two last words spoilt the whole previous portion of the homily.

The time occupied in this digression was sufficient to bring the subject of it into his sister's drawing-room near the witching hour; and as he entered, almost the first question he asked was—

"Well, Margaret, what about Miss Ireby?"

"Not come," returned the lady.

"Ah! how does that happen?" he demanded.

"The steamer has not arrived."

"Not yet? Impossible; there must be some mistake," he answered.

"No; I sent down three times to-day, to see if it were within sight; and as John told me the owners thought, most probably, it had not sailed at the hour appointed, or had put back, and would not be in till morning, I wrote a note to be given to Miss Ireby in case she should arrive after all, advising her to remain on board for a few hours, and saying I would have some one to meet her first thing to-morrow morning."

"I fancy the steamer is in, Margaret."

"John said no one expected it for several hours," she replied.

"John did not want to keep a vigil himself, or to make his horses do so either," returned Mr. Ernehulst. "I should receive his testimony with considerable hesitation, and shall accordingly take my own cab, and that horse of mine, which has done nothing all day, and drive over to Plymouth. If the vessel be not arrived, or if the young lady have not ventured in it, why, I shall go home to my lodgings, and stay there. If Miss Ireby is to be found, I will bring her here, which will be a great deal pleasanter for her than staying one minute longer than can be avoided in that vile steamer."

"But, George," exclaimed his sister, "consider how very late it is, that Miss Ireby may not have arrived, and that even if she have, it would be almost better for her to remain in her berth for a few hours than drive out here after such a voyage."

"And consider what a pleasant feeling it would be to her, sister mine, to find on reaching harbour that she has no place to go to; for though your plan of staying in the steamer sounds very well, and may be practicable, I greatly doubt the fact."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"That I do not think she could do so: as a general rule, passengers are required to depart from a vessel when their destination is reached, just as from a mail coach."

"But in a peculiar case like this?" urged Mrs. Ashton.

"I fancy Miss Ireby will either have to remain for the night at an hotel, or come out here as best she can," he replied; "wherefore, as I said before, I shall drive to Plymouth, and ascertain how matters stand for myself. Only think for a moment if it were your daughter who was coming amongst strangers, how should you feel?"

"Just as you do, George," said Mrs. Ashton; and in ten

minutes more, cab, and horse, and groom, and master were driving in the stillness of night to Plymouth.

Yes, the steamer was there, and Miss Ireby had been a passenger; and the captain explained where she had gone to Mr. Ernehulst, who muttered something, not exactly a blessing, between his teeth, in connection with the name of John Dobbs, his sister's coachman, as he proceeded to the street and number to which he had been directed.

"Miss Ireby here?" he demanded of the woman who opened the door in answer to his summons.

"Yes, sir."

"Gone to bed yet?"

"I believe not, sir; she has not even taken any refreshment; the lady has just come in."

"Oh! then it is all right," he remarked. "Please to inform her Mrs. Ashton's brother is here, and would be glad to speak to her." And as he spoke he entered the dimly-lighted sitting-room, where Constance was not; she had gone upstairs to take off her bonnet, and thither the servant followed her.

In a few minutes more she entered the parlour, where a gentleman, standing with his back to the light, greeted her in a voice she remembered having heard at some period, with the words—

"You are a most unfortunate traveller, Miss Ireby, but I am glad you have reached us safely at last."

Constance started, as the memory of that weary journey from Jonesford, connected as it was with the individual who now addressed her, flashed upon her mind. She was so astonished, and so little pleased, that, for the time being, the power of speech seemed to have forsaken her.

He merely laughed at her evident annoyance, as he proceeded to say he was commissioned by his sister to take her to Ashton Court, unless, indeed, she were too much fatigued; and when she replied in the negative, he requested her to

resume her bonnet and shawl as quickly as she could, that he might "get her into shelter as soon as possible."

When they reached their destination, or rather, as the vehicle rolled along the avenue leading to Ashton Court, he said, in a careless tone—

"You were going to say something to me just before we left Plymouth."

"Yes," she replied.

"What was it?" he demanded.

"Nothing of any consequence," she returned.

"Is anything which causes us a moment's annoyance of no consequence?" he said. "I believe I know, however, the nature of the sentence you thought proper to leave unspoken. Do not be afraid; I am not going to claim a previous acquaintanceship with you. Remembering the conventional idea, that no one is otherwise than a stranger to another till his, or her, or their names have been spoken by a mutual friend, I know nothing at all about you, excepting that you are a lady dressed in mourning, I was sent to meet; unless it pleases Mrs. Ashton to utter those magic words: 'Miss Ireby, allow me to introduce my brother Mr. Ernehulst, and, George —Miss Ireby.'"

"You must have thought it so strange," murmured Constance.

"No; I have not travelled through life for forty years, in all sorts of conveyances, meeting with all varieties of fellow-pilgrims, to deem anything singular. I guessed one-half as we travelled that wintry night to London, and subsequently learned enough from Mr. Empson to fill up the blanks ignorance had left in the previous conjectures I had formed concerning you, when my imagination and my person were literally frozen. You, I understand, had a fever, or something of that kind, by way (so I read the moral of the story) of a punishment for your obstinacy. I hope you won't travel

outside of a coach in January again, especially through a snowstorm." And as he uttered the last words he checked the horse's speed, and exclaiming, "Now you have a prospect of rest," assisted her up the flight of steps leading to the hall door.

A light was burning in the room towards which Mr. Ernehulst conducted her. A vague sort of dread seized upon Constance as she entered the apartment—a dread of the person and the home she was seeking; but a kindly pressure of the hand from Mrs. Ashton, who exclaimed, in a tone of interest and sympathy, "Is this Miss Ireby?" sent the warm blood quivering with a sensation of relief and pleasure to her heart, and from thenceforth, from that night for many a long pleasant day, Ashton Court was as a home, and Mrs. Ashton like a mother to the girl who otherwise was homeless and orphaned. Oh! what a power to make others happy or miserable has been given to all; for even the poorest and humblest are gifted with the ability to render some one person more contented and resigned for the time being by the magic of a look, a smile, or a kindly-uttered word; and if, as is true, in our passage through life we do occasionally meet with some who mingle more bitter in our cup than fate had already decreed there should be, let us not forget the frequent good because of the occasional evil, but humbly and reverently thank Him who of His great mercy has ordained that whithersoever our footsteps stray, whether north or south, east or west, kind tones greet our ear, cheering words renew our courage.

"Thank God for all things." Yea, truly, and with an overflowing heart, more especially for the friends who cheer our onward way, like bright flowers, beautifying and shortening the road of life, making glad the pilgrim's heart within him, and causing him to proceed with a firmer step towards that other land, where care and sorrow are unknown.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FICTITIOUS WEALTH.

CHARITABLE Reader, do not for a moment imagine, when I say "Misery, like matrimony, is accomplished almost in an instant," that anything disrespectful to the holy state of marriage is intended, or that I would by any means imply that in the wide dictionary of life's experiences the two Ms would be frequently found to bear a similar significance. No; misery and matrimony are not always synonymous, and do not invariably hunt a man in couples. Nevertheless, I persist that "Misery, like matrimony, is accomplished almost in an instant:" the first endures sometimes for life, the latter always. It is nearly as difficult to shake off the bonds of misery as the chains of matrimony; and it surely must be regarded, considering the impossibility of snapping those chains, as a merciful provision of Providence, that a man is rarely as anxious to get rid of his wife, or a woman to free herself from her husband, as both invariably are to banish the cares which often destroy their happiness.

Well, we say a man is married, and there is an end to his history so far; and a man's life is blasted, and there is little more to tell. How the one likes his wife, or the other bears his misfortunes, seems to possess no great interest for the world at large. If the wife die, or the sorrow be got over, or a new one sustained, curiosity is once again stimulated and attention aroused; but otherwise both are permitted to pursue their paths in peace; and it is only when congratulation or fresh sympathy is required that society casts on them anything beyond a passing glance.

And as the author writes for society, and narrates the history of individuals, not for their edification, but for that of

others, who inhabit the world they live or have lived in, it is expedient for the "story-teller" to walk at the same pace as those who, after hearing the nature of a disease which is killing a fellow-creature, care little to know how he bears his sufferings, and never think of him again till they learn he is dead.

For, after all, when the every-day life of a disappointed individual is so wearisome and dispiriting to himself, how can it prove otherwise than tiresome to others? Wherefore, having said that for three years Reginald Ireby's existence was but a sort of perpetual drowning in whale and sperm and olive and colza oil, from which fate he was somehow rescued by hope and airy visions, bringing him again, as he said, "out of the cask," let us dismiss him to pursue his resentful struggling as best he can for a season, whilst some mention is made of his elder brother, Delavelle.

If the former, by scoffing at Mr. Empson's advice, and taking "Briarton and revenge" for his war-cry in the battle of life, had made at first setting out a false and fatal step—a step which never was retraced by him—a step he never, till it was too late, desired had not been taken—Delavelle speedily discovered that he too, though guided by experience and knowledge of the world, and sense, and what is commonly called "long-headedness," had, even with all these aids, lighted with all these lamps, signs, and signals, acted foolishly, for he had made a false start at Briarton.

Not by encouraging his father to act most unfairly and unjustly towards his other children; not by leaving those who had been so tenderly nurtured to face, as best they might, the cutting winds of adversity. No; these were matters which lay betwixt God and his own conscience; and of the inner life and experiences of Delavelle Ireby it is unnecessary to speak. If a wrong, and a great one, had been committed, he managed somehow to quiet his con-

science by laying the blame on his father, who did not leave Briarton to him, and on Reginald, who would not listen to reason, who would incite his sisters to foolish opposition, who would not become a visitor, or rather a dependant, in the house he had once hoped to possess, who, in one word, would, as Mr. Delavelle Ireby and his solicitor, Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn, asserted, be a hot-headed, absurd, hairbrained boy.

It was as regarded the world and his own position he had made the false start. And what had the world to do with a private question of right and wrong? why should it take the part of the oppressed against that of the oppressor? why, especially, should it deviate from its usual rule, and do this when the disinherited was an imprudent youth, when his extravagances were proverbial, when his own father had, as the majority believed, acted prudently in cutting him out of the property? why should the world be kinder to him than to another? No particular necessity existed for any exception from the general rule in his favour, and, accordingly, none was made. Men greeted the new possessor of Briarton, or rather the father of the new possessor, with eager hands; and those who once had dwelt there were speedily forgotten.

Still Delavelle had made a false start. People said he was a millionaire; and knowing the power of money and the might of power, he not only neglected to undeceive their extravagant ideas of his riches, but strove to sustain the reputation he had (certainly at first without seeking for it) acquired by every means which lay within his reach.

His vanity and self-esteem and desire for notoriety being all gratified by the absurd rumours current regarding him, he resolved to keep up the delusion. He had realized sufficient to enable him to live more than comfortably ever after, but he desired more; he felt a craving for eminence, place, position; a mania as intense as that which devoured

his brother, though its object was different, had seized upon his soul, and taken exclusive possession of it. A millionaire he had started at Briarton, a millionaire he determined he would to all intents and purposes continue.

He purchased the neighbouring estate, as he had promised his father on his death-bed should be done before long. He laid out first a large portion of his capital in buying the place, then commenced altering and building, laying out pleasure gardens, planting timber, and spending thousands of pounds for no adequate result, or prospect of an adequate result, present or future.

Henry died. Half the county followed the child to the family mausoleum. For a time the father sorrowed concerning him; then his heart turned for a period to Delavelle, the younger son, who was now the heir, and clung around him fondly. Then he began to give lordly entertainments; he was patron, chairman, or president of almost every meeting and institution in the shire; finally, he stood for the county, and though he lost, yet everybody knew perfectly well the election had cost him three thousand pounds more than his opponent.

The pace was killing—Delavelle felt it to be so even to himself; in what manner, then, must it not have affected his purse? He speculated in business, and lost; he invested money in mining and other shares; and whilst some were sold out at a handsome profit, he held on, hoping still for a greater advance; but the concerns failed, and at last he thankfully got rid of the business by paying a considerable sum to be released from the liability he had incurred. Nothing prospered with him; and during the most of the time the world imagined he was rolling through life with golden wheels to his chariot, the truth was that anxiety wakened him in the morning, dogged his steps by day, and disturbed his slumbers at night.

Men are frequently punished for obtaining money under false pretences;—it were well for society at large, and for domestic comfort in particular, if there were any law to reach and prevent men and women squandering money under false pretences; it had been doubly well for Delavelle Ireby if any one could have induced him to pause and reflect for an instant what he was doing, whither he was so recklessly rushing.

The end was ruin—hopeless ruin. Delavelle saw it at last; he grew pale, and ill, and careworn; he started and muttered in his sleep of a curse which was hanging over him, of impending degradation; his days were wretched, his nights a degree more miserable; peace was a thing he had left behind him for ever.

Three years settled the business: when once a downhill progress is commenced, the descent becomes more and more rapid. The first two years had been almost pleasant, so full of novelty and extravagant prodigality; but, like many another, Delavelle had more brains for making and keeping money than for spending it, and when he tried the latter, he soon found, to his cost, he had missed his vocation, and had better have stuck to a trade he understood, than attempted one for which he was unfitted by nature, habit, and education; for people do require to have served an apprenticeship to spending money, to enable them to lay out any considerable amount to permanent advantage in that vast shop, the world, where every commodity, save love and virtue, is to be purchased with gold.

The third year, Delavelle found the meshes of fate entangling him: he bore his sorrows and anxieties for a long time in silence, but at length suddenly broke forth to Mr. D'Evelyn, with—

"How the deuce am I to raise money?"

"What do you mean?" inquired his solicitor.

"This," said Mr. Ireby; "that unless you can suggest some plan for present relief and future emergencies, my name will shortly be in the 'Gazette.'"

Mr. D'Evelyn had anticipated this disclosure, but he chose to appear surprised, and answered, with a sneer which had now almost become habitual to him—

"Why, I thought you were a millionaire!"

"Did you?" retorted Mr. Ireby, with some irritation; "and what reason had you for thinking anything of the sort?"

"Why, every one said you were," replied Mr. D'Evelyn. "Your own actions, style of living, and so forth, did not contradict the general report; how, therefore, should I suspect you were almost on the verge of bankruptcy?"

"How?" returned his client; "by the same means, I suppose, as that by which lawyers seem to learn everything."

"I hope you do not mean to imply I have any dealings with the 'gentleman in black,'" said Mr. D'Evelyn. "I repeat, I know nothing of the actual condition of your affairs; —how should I?"

Delavelle Ireby looked angry for a moment at the solicitor; then, recollecting he required his assistance, he answered, with a forced smile—

"I wish you were on intimate terms with any one who could tell me how to get a few thousands easily, let his costume be black, scarlet, or grey. I am, as you say, almost on the verge of bankruptcy."

"And you a millionaire!" remarked the solicitor.

"Mr. D'Evelyn," replied his client, "to me this is no jesting matter; and I shall feel obliged by you giving me your serious attention. Money somehow I must have. I am not a millionaire, as you are very well aware, never was one, never had the least claim to be considered one; but even if I had possessed the amount people asserted, you know as

well as I, that when a man begins living on his capital, not what his capital produces, ruin must come sooner or later; you will agree to that proposition."

"Unquestionably he must ultimately become a beggar, unless he die, or stop in time," assented Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Well, I have lived on my capital, traded with it, bought men's good opinion that may leave me any day; shares which have turned out a loss; properties that have been sinking funds; traded, in short, and failed; purchased tickets in life's uncertain lottery, and drawn blanks. The capital is gone; I did not stop in time. I cannot die; but something else is just possible. Tell me how I can raise money, say enough to carry me over this crisis, and set me on firm land again; once there, I shall pick my steps more cautiously, and take good care the morass of debt never again finds me hovering even on its margin."

"Are you nearly engulphed in it now?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn, earnestly.

"Pretty nearly; but I rely on your helping me out."

"I must understand how you are situated."

"Briefly thus," replied Mr. Ireby: "I have an estate for which I paid thirty thousand pounds, on which I have laid out something like ten thousand more; I owe twenty-five thousand pounds in round numbers, and I cannot stave off the evil day much longer."

"How much would the property bring?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn.

"If sold at present, not more than twenty-five or twenty-seven thousand pounds; if held on for some time longer, perhaps double that sum."

"The first would clear you of debt."

"Yes; but on what am I then to live and support my family, and maintain a position? Sell I cannot and will not; what, therefore, am I to do?"

"I suppose," said Mr. D'Evelyn, with a quaint smile, "you could not appropriate for a few years the overplus rent derivable from Briarton? Say that you were to raise twenty or thirty thousand by mortgaging your own property, go abroad for a year or two, and retrench, or turn your whole attention once again to business; at the expiration of that period you could perhaps sell to better advantage, repay your son what you have borrowed from him, and start on a surer basis as a country gentleman once again."

"You do not understand yet precisely how I am situated," said Delavelle Ireby, reddening and hesitating, as Mr. D'Evelyn's professional glance read him through; "the truth is——"

"You have used the extra two thousand per annum already," said the attorney, as though it were a mere matter of course.

"More than that——" confessed the other.

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Mr. D'Evelyn, "you have not paid the interest!"

"Not for nearly two years," replied his client, coolly.

"And what do the mortgagees say to that arrangement?"

"That they will sell; which is precisely what I desire: the only thing I fear is they will not do it quickly enough, and that I shall have to think of some other plan, and raise what will carry me on till they make their threat a reality."

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I will tell you," said Delavelle. "My own property cannot fail to increase in value every year, besides which, it *is* my own; therefore I desire to retain it at all hazards, by all means. Briarton is of little real use or value to any one; it is of none to me; it is a burden, and a trouble, and an expense. Since poor Harry is gone, Delavelle, the present heir, cannot enter into possession for some eighteen years, and so the place is of no present advantage to him. Now,

by my plan all parties would be benefited. If the mortgagees would sell the place, I should be put into possession of a sufficient sum to clear off all pressing liabilities; I should still keep my own property in my own hands, and devote my energies to making money out of it,—and if not by it,—in business. By the time the boy came of age I could easily find enough to pay off his claims; and, in fact, I think a sum of money judiciously invested would be of far more permanent advantage to him than a mortgaged estate. This is my plan: what do you think of it?"

"Very little," was the curt reply.

"And why so?" asked Mr. Ireby, anxiously.

"Because, in the first place, it is not practicable; in the second, even if practicable, it would do you no permanent good; and in the third, it is, in so many plain words, robbing the young heir of his fine inheritance."

"But I will guard his interests strictly," said Mr. Delavelle. Then noticing a smile curling Mr. D'Evelyn's lips at the remark, he added, hastily, "I hope you do not imagine I intend to act otherwise than honestly and fairly by and to him."

"*Intend*, I have no doubt; but will you be able to act fairly?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn, who, whatever his private thoughts might be, did not choose to give expression to them. "Twenty years hence you may be just as unequal to meet your engagements as at present, then what will remain to your boy of the property to which he is legally entitled? Believe me, it were better for him to have the certainty of even a much more heavily mortgaged estate than Briarton, than trust to your having the means to repay him the sum you speak of when he comes of age. The plan is not feasible, or even just."

"My father should have left the place to me," said Delavelle, gloomily.

"Perhaps so," was the reply; "but it is your son's now, and his I advise you to permit it to remain."

"What is the sense, or use, or fitness of devising property to a child?" said Delavelle; "a child who cannot enjoy or turn it to account, nor do anything but keep it tied up—a source of perpetual regret and irritation; what is the use, I ask again, of leaving Briarton to the infant instead of to me?"

"I told you before the will was made," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn, "that your father so devised it to prevent your selling it, or, rather, your losing it in business; for I am sure he never contemplated your spending vast sums in draining, subsoiling, and planting, and buying boroughs, and entertaining half of the county; he thought you would derive some benefit therefrom in the shape of position, whilst Briarton was secured from your creditors; this I always thought was his idea, and apparently not, on the whole, an irrational one it has turned out, though the event may prove different from what he anticipated."

"But," demanded his client, reverting once again to the monetary question, "how am I to raise what will free me from present difficulties?"

"Mortgage your own property, if you do not wish to sell it," said Mr. D'Evelyn. "I will get you as much as you desire, if you only authorize me to do so."

"I do not want to mortgage it," said Mr. Ireby.

"Why not? *it* will still be yours."

"I hate mortgages; they are like millstones hanging around a man's neck; they hamper his movements—stop every plan. I won't raise any money on my property."

"A dislike of mortgages seems to be a characteristic of your family," returned Mr. D'Evelyn; "but I really think you must overcome your objections to adopting the course I have indicated, for it seems to me the only one open to you.

Perhaps, however," he added, "your present creditors have a claim on the estate already?"

"Assuredly they have," returned Delavelle; "but not in the way you imagine. They hold bonds and bills, and different securities, but I have always kept clear of mortgaging: people would have learnt the fact somehow, and it must have caused such endless conjecture and speculation and——"

"So!" thought Mr. D'Evelyn, as Mr. Ireby paused after this avowal,—"so the secret is out at last!—he wants to be a millionaire still, and clings to that delusive title with the same tenacity as his father clung to Briarton, and is willing to sacrifice as much for it, and would ruin his child and delude himself, to purchase for a few more brief years the proud position of outward show and inward misery which he now possesses."

Mr. Ireby guessed some part of what was passing through the other's mind, but he never spoke until Mr. D'Evelyn said—

"I do not think raising a few thousands on mortgage would cause one-half so great a sensation in the county as the sale of Briarton."

"Perhaps not," was the reply; "but it would be a widely different sensation: the one act would imply I was embarrassed; and——"

"What would the other?" asked Mr. D'Evelyn, seeing his client's hesitation. "It appears to me, that the mortgage scheme has one great recommendation, namely, its comparative secresy. Briarton *cannot* change hands without every one being cognizant of the fact; you might raise a few thousands without the affair being publicly known."

"I am determined to sell Briarton," persisted Delavelle. "I shall say, I thought my son was better without an encumbered estate; that I considered the surplus money could be laid out to greater advantage, and therefore did not step

in to prevent the place passing out of the family: this is the mode in which I purpose explaining the fact of its being sold."

"And do you think people will believe the story?"

"I do. Whereas if I were known to be scarce of money——"

"No explanation could alter the fact," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn. "Well, I see it is useless to pursue the subject further: you came here to tell me you are determined to pursue your own plan against law and reason, and also——"

"To ask you how I am to 'carry on the war' till fresh supplies arrive?" said Delavelle, doggedly.

"A small sum will suffice, I presume. I can get it for you. Now, is there anything else?" For Mr. D'Evelyn had noticed a sort of uneasiness about his client from the commencement of the interview, which, pressing as the money affair was, evidently did not relate to it.

"Nothing of any *great* importance," said Mr. Ireby, producing a letter, and handing it to the solicitor; "I only desired to know if there were any meaning in that epistle; and if so, what it is."

The lawyer read it twice.

"From your brother?"

"From Reginald, whom my father said, truly enough, was a rash, mad, impetuous boy. I did not think he was almost a fool in addition," returned Mr. Ireby, impatiently.

"He could not have brought Briarton much sooner to the hammer than you purpose shall be the case, however," replied Mr. D'Evelyn, dryly; "but," he added, noticing the angry flush that had spread over the face of his client, "you desire to know——"

"If there be any meaning in that absurd letter."

"The writer evidently considered there was."

"I am not talking about the writer," said Mr. Ireby, in a

voice almost inaudible with anger; "I want to know what meaning *you* think there is contained therein, if any."

"If any?" echoed Mr. D'Evelyn. "Well, he seems to imagine he has a claim on the property, and a power to prevent its being sold."

"Well, and has he?"

"Not the slightest power does he possess, so far as I can see, to prevent you sinking it in the German Ocean, should you have a fancy and the right to adopt that plan of procedure."

"So far so good. Now, has he any claim on it?"

"About as much claim as yourself," answered the other.

"Yes; but you know I have a sort of claim, because, first, I am father to the heir, and, secondly, if my boy were to die, I should succeed him."

"Precisely," assented the attorney.

"Well, Reginald is not Delavelle's parent, and therefore cannot have as much claim on it as I."

"No," was Mr. D'Evelyn's answer.

"What do you mean by these unsatisfactory replies?" demanded Delavelle, with some ire. "I want to know, and I will know, if he have any claim now on Briarton, or any interest, past, present, or to come, in the place."

"Claim at this time he has none," replied the solicitor; "but if you must understand this most foolish letter, he has a very, very remote interest in the place; so remote, that it is a folly to think, how much more to speak of it!"

"I *felt* there was truth in the allegation he made," exclaimed Mr. Ireby, striking his forehead with his hand; "and what interest has he? How did it happen? I never guessed this before."

Mr. D'Evelyn briefly explained the matter to him.

"Then Briarton *shall* be sold," were the words which burst from Delavelle's lips; "it shall! I will move heaven and earth to prevent his ever gaining possession of it. If

the mortgagees won't sell it, I will. You say I cannot, but I will find some means of carrying out my purpose!"

The attorney watched him as he departed, violently banging the office door after him; then, as his eye fell again on Reginald's effusion, he exclaimed aloud—

"This is what comes of people making unjust wills, and leaving fathers executors to their children's property,—an irresponsible person to hold a responsible post. I think this Delavelle a degree more unruly than his brother; and what an utter idiot the boy is to be sure!"

CHAPTER XXV.

REGINALD'S MASTER-PASSION.

How the individual of whom Mr. D'Evelyn made such flattering mention at the conclusion of the last chapter acquired the information that his brother purposed letting Briarton fall under the hammer, it is superfluous to inquire. From the morning when he paid the visit to Messrs. Jackson and French, recorded earlier in this tale, he had kept a ceaseless watch,—none the less keen because totally unsuspected,—on Delavelle, Briarton, Mr. D'Evelyn; in fact, on every one and thing who had directly or indirectly been concerned in the business which sent him so soon adrift on life's stormy billows: he had ways and means of gaining knowledge which astonished even himself. He knew Henry was ill unto death almost before the child's parents dreamt he was in danger; had intelligence of the mental malady of which shortness of

money was shrewdly suspected to be the cause, whilst even Mrs. Ireby had no idea anything beyond too much occupation was injuring her husband's health; he learnt how strong and beautiful the young heir was, how every one loved the child; and, lastly, he heard, with a wild pang, a faint whisper of the project Delavelle entertained of freeing himself from pressing embarrassments by letting the mortgagees of Briarton foreclose.

"Briarton!" thought Reginald, "which does not belong to him, or to the child, but to me."

And under this delusion he once more sought the office of the solicitors in Clifford's Inn, to inquire how he could prevent this utter blow to all his hopes being struck by his brother.

"Jackson and French" still graced the door-plate, but the name of the former had, since the time when Reginald first read the inscription, been traced on a monument erected to record his virtues, and tell the world at large how much his friends (who certainly had not entertained any especial affection for him whilst living) lamented his removal from amongst them. Yes, Mr. Jackson was dead, but his name, and perhaps some of his deeds, lived after him; and Reginald's eye mechanically rested on the plate as he entered the office, where a much quieter and humbler individual than the young clerk who had previously so irritated him requested the visitor to walk upstairs and enter the room on the right-hand side, where he said Mr. French was to be found.

"I had rather see Mr. Jackson," replied Reginald.

"He is unfortunately dead, sir," answered the clerk, as if he regretted the fact more on Reginald's account than his own. "Mr. French is now the senior, and Mr. Harrop the junior partner."

And as in former days Mr. Ireby had found Mr. Jackson seated by the fire, so now in like manner he discovered Mr.

French occupying the arm-chair which had once served his partner as a sort of throne; whilst Mr. Harrop, the once pert and coxcombish clerk, had taken possession of the chair and desk—*vice* French, promoted.

Mr. Harrop was now married to a City heiress. He lived in Harley Street; he kept a brougham; he thought himself a sort of prince amongst solicitors; and Reginald, as he noted his appearance, hastily arrived at the correct conclusion that pertness had merely changed into insolence, and vanity into low pride of position, money, and abode.

The junior partner glanced at the client and recognized him; they bowed stiffly to each other, and then Reginald, addressing Mr. French, said—

"May I beg the favour of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Alone?" inquired the attorney.

"If quite convenient," returned Reginald.

"Ah! I remember you now," said Mr. French, for a look from his partner had told him he ought to do so; but it was not true, for he had not the faintest idea of the name of the new-comer. "You are Mr.—, Mr.—, excuse me—I know your face perfectly well, but your name has escaped my recollection; so many clients——"

"Mr. James Thompson," interposed Mr. Harrop, breaking across the other's rather unsatisfactory speech—"Mr. James Thompson, if my memory does not deceive me." And as he beheld light dawning on Mr. French's brain, he moved towards the door like an individual who had done more than his duty; and with a dry "Good morning, sir," left his partner and Reginald to themselves.

"I remember now the matter concerning which you previously consulted us," said Mr. French, after his client had found a chair—"property devised to grandchild, &c. Have I to congratulate you on obtaining possession of—eh?"

"I believe, sir," returned Reginald, stiffly, "I never gave you any reason to believe *I* was uncle to the child referred to; Mr. Jackson merely stated the case in that form. We will now abandon it, if you please."

"Certainly," replied the solicitor. "Yes, Mr. Jackson did put it in that way, I recollect, and it was a very good way too."

Reginald bit his lip, but continued—"The child is not dead, nor is his father; but the latter desires to sell the property. What power has the uncle to prevent his doing so?'

"None," replied Mr. French, emphatically; "but, on the other hand, the father has no power to sell."

"Oh! I believe he means to attempt it."

"No one would buy;—the child could claim it back. No professional man would permit a client to invest money in such a case."

"But if sold by mortgagees?" asked Reginald.

"Ah! that alters the question completely. Is the father the person who has the lien on the estate?"

"No; but what power has the uncle in the matter? Cannot he, as remotely interested, stop the sale, serve the parties with some sort of notice not to proceed therewith?"

"I am not sure that in such a case the mortgagees could sell, but the uncle has no power in the affair; he must just let things take their course," was the satisfactory reply.

"And suppose he won't?" demanded Reginald, warmly.

"They will take their course in any event," was the answer. "He has no grounds for taking any steps to prevent a sale: if it can go on it will, let him interfere or not."

And after a few words more to the same purpose, Mr. French bowed his client out; and Reginald, instead of proceeding to the Messrs. Holinsfern at once, spent some hour and half more wandering into the offices of various solicitors, who all told him he had no right nor title to interfere in the matter, and each and all dismissed him in a state of mind

little to be envied, *minus* some money and a great deal of temper, and wishing in his heart people only would take the same view of things as he did.

At length he resolved to seek Mr. Martock that evening when he returned from business, a plan he proceeded to put into operation after a very stormy disagreeable day, spent in listening to and enduring sundry sarcastic and irritable remarks from Mr. John Holinsfern, whom Reginald, never a favourite with that worthy merchant of oils, had mightily enraged by his long delay and scant apologies.

And why, if Reginald Ireby had felt his heart was right within him, should he not earlier have sought counsel and assistance from the true friend who had aided him—when without aid from some one he must either have lowered his pride or starved; who had steadily persevered in his endeavours to preserve the young man from the consequences of his own impatient obstinacy; who was to marry his sister when he got a good brief which might bring him prominently before the public: why had he not sooner sought advice and assistance from Walter Martock?

Alas! there was that within him which could hardly brook to be revealed to one so frank-hearted as the still struggling barrister; he could not tell him (though perfectly conscious of the fact, he scarcely whispered the truth even to his soul) that the reason he had hitherto borne the burden of life with greater cheerfulness was because he expected others might die; he could not confess to having derived comfort from the hope that hereafter all those who now stood betwixt him and Briarton would be removed; that he had calculated the chances of their dying in the order needful for him to become heir-at-law; that, instead of praying and struggling not to be led into temptation, he had sprung eagerly, wildly, joyfully towards it, and fallen into the toils of his revengeful passions without having made even an effort to escape.

No; Reginald Ireby was conscious of so much lurking in his soul which would never bear inspection from Walter Martock, that it was only as a last extremity he determined to consult him, and then only to permit him to see a very small portion of what lay in his heart. But the barrister beheld it all. With dismay he read the dark story of revenge and greed, over which Reginald endeavoured to fling a veil. He strove to conceal some portions, to brush past others, to excuse all, but it would not do. When once he began to speak, he found he was so bad a dissembler, that somehow, whether he would or not, the truth was sure to creep out. He could be silent altogether, if need were for silence; but if he meant at first commencing merely to tell a portion of what was passing within him, he generally contrived before concluding to put his auditor into full possession of his every thought. Deliberately bad he was not; obstinately vindictive he might be; and Walter trembled at the undying resentment that interview revealed to him, and pitied whilst he blamed the unhappy man.

"Reginald," he said, "let me speak to you for once as if you were my brother, as if the ties of blood gave me a right to advise and warn. You have wronged my friendship for you often—nay, do not interrupt me—I have read it in your cold manner, your frequently impatient words, your total want of confidence in me; you have imagined, because I could not second your wild plans, that I did not feel with you. But, until to-night, I never dreamt of all that was passing in your mind; and now, willing or not, you must listen to me. Reginald, I implore of you to heed my words, if you would escape misery, and, it may be, sin. Give up at once and for ever your plans upon Briarton: there are hundreds of other places quite as beautiful, which any man with a brave and steadfast heart may win if he will. If you cannot forget your wrongs, endeavour to forgive them; tear out

from your heart this growing craving for revenge that is destroying you. Work for the future as you have done in the past; but let it be from a noble motive, not because you desire to win a property, which, without misfortune to others, can never be yours. Power you have none to interfere in this matter. Do strive to banish the memory of the estate from your mind. I know you hate preaching, as you call it, and it is not my profession; but there is one text containing more of the essence of Christianity than a dozen homilies, Reginald; we both were taught it ere we dreamt of the sad realities of life. No doubt your mother murmured that text to you as mine did to me, the golden rule of 'doing unto others as you would that others should do unto you.'"

"I am no saint," replied Reginald, sullenly. "I never professed, and I never expect to be one. The extent of my practice is 'to do unto others as others do unto me;' and I think it is the practice, if not the profession, of most people. I am not worse than others; the sole difference being that I say what they think."

Mr. Martock sighed.

"Time and experience, I pray, Reginald, may alter your ideas. If they do not, I tremble to think what the result of all this may be. I fear Briarton will be the curse of your life. Promise me to try to wean your attention from the place altogether. It may be difficult; but to you, who have a strong will and a determined heart, nothing is impossible. Promise me to make at least an effort; the remainder cannot prove otherwise than easy—only say you will try."

Reginald had started, as the words his friend uttered reminded him of Mr. Empson's warning years before. He felt shocked and moved and touched, as Mr. Martock, laying an earnest hand on his shoulder, pleaded with him to choose, ere it was too late, some nobler aim in existence, some wider,

better career than the one he had chalked out for himself; and it was with a touch of almost melancholy in his voice that he answered—

"It cannot be. Fate has decreed my destiny. It is impossible for me to change my nature, to undo the past. Walter, I have chosen, and by that choice I am resolved, come what may, to abide. For Briarton I am determined to live; once possessed of Briarton, I am resigned to die."

He spoke in a subdued manner, so different from his customary vehemence, that it impressed Mr. Martock with a hopeless dread.

"I trust," he said, as he removed the entreating hand with which he had solicited attention, "you may never hereafter have cause to think of these words with bitterness of spirit, in agony of soul. God keep you, Reginald, from the consequences of your own folly."

"The consequences, whatever they may be, must rest on my own head," was the reply, uttered still in the subdued but unchangeable tone. "You have done your part faithfully and well;—I thank you for it; but my path is chosen, and walk in it I will. I have pursued it for nearly three years, and cannot turn back now."

And having thus spoken, he walked forth silently into the night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DEATH OF THE SECOND HEIR.

If Reginald did leave his friend with a sadder face than usual, it was solely because the fact had suddenly dawned upon him that the path he was so obstinately bent on pur-

suing *might*, perchance, lead to some destination far remote from happiness. But still he was determined "never to turn back," let it conduct him whither it would,—to peace here, or misery both here and hereafter; he had, as he said, "chosen his course," and he sullenly, yet vehemently, resolved to persevere in it; till death he would.

He knew well enough there were other equally lovely places, which he might ultimately hope to possess; but Briarton was the bauble on which, childlike, he had set his heart: have it he must; take it from the person who now kept the toy from his grasp he would. He fancied if it were only once his own, if he could only oust Delavelle and his children from the place, he would be contented. So he went home, not to repent, but to persist; to shut his eyes to the real state of his own feelings; to attribute his unhappiness to fate, circumstances, Delavelle, absurd laws, his father, a perverse destiny; in short, to aught save that which was perhaps its true source,—a fault in his own character, which he would not see, which he would not endeavour to eradicate.

"He had chosen." Oh! how in after years that sentence rang in his ear! how he repented him he had not though more calmly, more deliberately of that choice, that he had not weighed well all the changes and chances of existence, ere he determined, as Mr. Empson told him before he quitted Briarton, "to start in life—a doomed man!" He had chosen; and the time for action having hardly yet arrived, that for repentance lay before him, dimly revealed by the sadly imperfect light reason and principle cast over the dark and treacherous expanse across which we all must, if our days be not cut short, travel.

If Reginald's anger for a moment was less demonstrative than on many previous occasions it had been, it was, if anything, more intense; and in precisely the same ratio as his

chances of Briarton faded away, his desire to possess it became stronger: have it he must, have it he would; and so, finding law could not aid him in his endeavour, he resolved to aid himself, and annoy others, if he could not individually be pleased. Through the long hours of a sleepless night, he thought, and planned, and resolved, and in the morning executed.

What a wild, angry, incoherent letter he dispatched to Delavelle, ere commencing the daily drudgery he hated! If he merely desired to irritate his brother, he succeeded to perfection; if he wished also to serve himself, he signally failed in his endeavour. For each vindictive, passionate feeling, which men think to use as deadly weapons against the happiness of their neighbour, may, perhaps, first do its work upon the object of their hate, but certainly ultimately turns and strikes a blow against those who dreamt of directing it as they pleased. It would seem, indeed, as if amongst the fallen sons of men the evil always took effect, the good frequently miscarried; wherefore the saying which must first have been invented by some old cynic amongst proverb-makers, "Ill news travel fast;" a proverb which, in a few weeks' time, was verified so far as Reginald Ireby was concerned.

He had been from home for a few days, on the business of the Messrs. Holinsfern; he had left it with a comparatively light heart, for he had heard the intention of selling Briarton was abandoned for the present. He thought his letter had produced the desired effect: the old wish was still gnawing at his heart, the old fever raging in his veins, it is true, but still the new and pressing anxiety was gone, at least for a while; and accordingly his mind felt relieved, and his hopes rose higher, and he went about his daily avocations with a firmer, stronger purpose; for Briarton—Briarton with its flowers, trees, lawns, and waters—Briarton,

fair, beautiful, and tranquil—Briarton, that seemed to him what gold does to the miser, liberty to the slave, health to the sick, youth to the aged, rest to the weary, the only thing in existence worth living, or suffering, or struggling for—Briarton might still be his.

He came back late at night, and Marian welcomed him; they sat down to supper together, and Reginald was just about to take some refreshment, when Marian inquired if he had heard Delavelle's son was dead.

"Dead!" echoed Reginald, starting from his chair, and asking the question in a voice so loud and vehement, that his sister shrank from him in terror. "Dead! When? How?"

Marian handed him a newspaper, and pointed silently to a paragraph it contained.

At one glance Reginald devoured the passage, which, like all containing evil news, was short and concise.

"On the 3rd inst., at Briarton, aged three years and nine months, Delavelle, eldest surviving child of Delavelle Ireby, Esq."

"Where are you going, Reginald?" asked his sister, as she saw him take his hat and rush to the door. Almost before her sentence was ended, and without answer of any kind, he had reached the street, and was striding along the London pavements, in a state of mind almost bordering on distraction, to the square where Mr. John Holinsfern resided, but the name of which I refrain from recording, lest it might shock the aristocratic ideas of those who deem (and justly, of course) that out of Belgravia there is nothing good, or what probably is more to the purpose, nothing grand.

Nevertheless, Mr. John Holinsfern considered his place of residence perfectly unexceptionable, and whilst he affected to laugh at "fashion," which had put his square out of the pale of respectable society, he in his turn sneered at perhaps better men than himself, who were compelled by necessity to

live in localities too vulgar and common even to be whispered of in polite circles, unless, indeed, they chance to contain a theatre or a panorama, or a much-frequented-by-the-nobility concert-room; in which case coachmen, who believe Russell and Bedford Squares to be either myths altogether, or else places where their masters' carriages ought never to be seen, manage, with commendable composure, to drive through very dingy lanes, and strange narrow streets, where it seems little short of miraculous that a coronet or even a very humble crest would venture to penetrate.

And pray why should there not be a fashion in life, when there is so much of it about death? why should a man not be vain of occupying a house in a genteel neighbourhood, when it is a matter of such paramount importance that he should sleep at last in a select graveyard? Why should his friends not blush to say he resided in Multon Square, when they would die rather than confess to his being buried under the flags surrounding St. Martha's?

Reginald Ireby stopped at a large handsome house, protected by substantial spear-headed railings, and boasting an imposing hall door, in the centre of which was a highly polished door-plate, bearing the name of "J. S. Holinsfern."

Mr. Holinsfern was, on the evening in question, entertaining his "set," which Reginald Ireby in his pride of birth despised and hated, and the individuals composing which set, in the pride of wealth, despised and hated him, who had been born to affluence and educated with strange haughty ideas of his own importance, but who was now, alas for Reginald! poorer than even one of their bankrupt brethren.

"Tell your master," said the younger brother to the footman, who insisted Mr. Holinsfern was engaged, "that I *must* see him; say Mr. Reginald Ireby is waiting to speak on pressing business."

Upon receiving which communication, Mr. Holinsfern, re-

splendent in white gloves, a white waistcoat, highly-polished boots, and a suffocating cravat, rushed downstairs, exclaiming,

"Nothing wrong, I 'ope? the warehouse ain't on fire, is it?"

Whenever Reginald was in a particularly irritable mood, he generally felt an almost irresistible inclination to reply to Mr. Holinsfern in that gentleman's own vernacular; and, notwithstanding the anxiety he himself was labouring under, and the fever of alarm into which he had thrown the worthy merchant, he had to bite back and swallow the words—"No, it ain't nothing of the sort," ere he answered—

"No, it is not; but I have come to tell you I am obliged to leave London for some days, and so cannot attend to Thompson's business to-morrow. I am sorry to inconvenience you, but the matter which calls me from town brooks of no delay. Here are all the papers; you will find them right, I believe. Good night, sir." And without further explanation or apology, he was turning to leave the house, when Mr. Holinsfern, exclaiming, "One moment, if you please," laid a detaining hand on his arm.

It is just possible, if Reginald had civilly requested "leave of absence" for a few days, the managing partner might have acceded to his request; but Reginald never could understand, or at least never could bear to confess, by word, sign, or deed, that he was in some sort the property of the Messrs. Holinsfern. He never considered that just as they were bound to pay him his salary regularly, he was bound faithfully and punctually to discharge the duties for which that salary was given. He worked under compulsion; he felt aggrieved at having to work at all; and, accordingly, vented his spleen on the very frequently offending heads of his employers, who were not especially calculated to make any individual filling a subordinate situation—more particularly such an individual as Reginald Ireby—contented or satisfied with his lot.

He did not endeavour to conciliate them, and they made no allowances for him. Still, it is just possible, if he had asked as a boon what he so hurriedly claimed almost as a right, the gentleman who now detained him might have said "Yes" in a tone of voice a degree softer than that in which he began to speak. For some time, however, he had been extremely desirous of getting rid of Reginald, because a sort of second cousin of his wife's, who had lately passed with honour through the Insolvent Court, was in sad want of any situation, and the dismissal of their present *employé* would provide him, as Mr. John Holinsfern argued, with a post for which he was eminently qualified by nature and habit; which latter, as everybody knows, is second nature.

"I don't know," said Mr. Holinsfern, "as how you can go."

"But I must," returned Reginald.

"You don't consider how much we have in hand at present. It ain't convenient for you to leave London just now," persisted the merchant.

"I said before I was sorry to inconvenience you, but my business is urgent; delay I cannot. I have even lost some valuable time in coming round to you this evening," rejoined his clerk.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Ireby; we must come to an understanding some time, and——"

"No time like the present," retorted Reginald, releasing his arm from Mr. Holinsfern's grasp and facing full upon him, whilst his dark eyes flashed and sparkled with excitement and anger; "no time like the present. We can get through a good deal of talk in five minutes, and I will devote so long to you. Now, sir, what is it?"

"I don't like the way you have got on ever since we first made acquaintance, more particularly lately."

"Don't you?" said Reginald. "Well, then, unhappily, neither of us has given satisfaction to the other."

"And what I want now to say," pursued Mr. Holinsfern, without noticing this interruption, "is, that you must finally make up your mind to attend solely either to our business or to your own. If you choose the latter, of course we don't propose to give you any further salary."

"Have you any other remark to make?" demanded Reginald.

"Yes; just one thing more. If you now leave our employment for a few days for your own pleasure, you must leave it altogether for ours."

"Have you done?" asked his listener, with a face from which rage had banished every shadow of colour.

"If you decide on quitting us, I will pay you your salary up to the first of the month, and then we shall be clear."

There are times when intense anger calms; when, instead of a violent storm for which we have in some sort prepared ourselves, we are met with a keen, cutting, though far from high east wind, which proves still more penetrating than the blast we had nerved ourselves to endure; and even thus it proved in the present case. Mr. Holinsfern, from his previous knowledge of Reginald, had expected an exclamation perhaps of "Confound your salary!" followed with a violent outburst of passionate indignation, and, under this idea, had settled himself to stand the gale without flinching by planting his feet a little apart from each other firmly on the ground, and burying his hands in his pockets.

What, therefore, was his surprise, not to add chagrin, when Reginald quietly replied—

"The business which calls me out of London being imperative, unlike your kind consideration, does not leave me an alternative. I therefore must bow to necessity, and relinquish a situation in which I have been so happy, and also in which I have experienced from you such evidences of gentlemanlike feeling and consideration as must always make

me remember the period I spent in your counting-house with unavailing regret, and the Messrs. Holinsfern with feelings of gratitude and respect."

Before Mr. John Holinsfern had recovered himself, Reginald was gone; and ere the former had slowly re-ascended to the drawing-room, and entered into conversation with some of the guests assembled there, the latter was speeding, oh! with what frantic haste, to Brenslow.

Ere leaving behind him, however, the London lights—in fact, as, guided by those lights, he was hurrying eagerly along, a gentleman, who chanced to be traversing the same street, just recognized, then turned and followed him.

It was Walter Martock. He had seen the paragraph in the paper likewise; he knew the unfortunate young man was not proceeding homewards; he guessed the rest; and when with some difficulty he managed to overtake him, he exclaimed—

"Reginald, where are you going? what are you intending to do? For the love of Heaven come home with me. I implore you to turn back ere it be too late."

The younger man started at the sound of his voice.

"Leave me to my fate," he hurriedly returned; "leave me to my fate, whatever that may be. Do not try to detain me. It is useless—I have chosen."

And, as hundreds besides Reginald have done, he left the truth and the light and the love behind, flung all hastily from him, and went out in darkness and solitude to encounter that fate of which he had spoken.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDECEIVED.

OCCUPIED with his own thoughts, so engrossed by them that even what was passing around was unheeded by Reginald, how was it possible for him to imagine, as he travelled from London to Brenslow, the scene that had, two evenings previously, been enacted at Briarton, in the room where Delavelle Ireby's son, the once beautiful heir to that fine property, lay quiet.

For it was true, the boy was dead: he had been stricken down almost in a moment; some childish malady, some rapid, certain disease, found him in apparent health one evening, and left him a corpse the next. Yes, it was quite true,—he was dead; and in the little bed where, on so many previous nights, the child, the innocent cause of such fierce dissensions, had fallen tranquilly asleep, he now lay at rest for ever.

How many an angry thought had been cherished against it; how many an unchristian wish had been mentally formed concerning it; how many high, proud hopes its mother had cherished about its future career; how often the reflection of its wealth had irritated the little creature's father, no one but the Almighty ever knew.

It had lived just long enough to mar the happiness of many human beings; it died to disappoint one man and to rejoice another, and that other was not Reginald Ireby, its uncle—one dearer, nearer, who would have shuddered had any one told him he was glad his child was dead, and yet who was glad.

Unconscious during life of the discord he had caused, it is little to say he was unconscious of all then; but it is much

to add, he had passed to that happier land where, in the course of no after years, the storm which was gathering could ever burst upon his head.

There were old men, and still more ancient women, in the village, who said, shaking their wise heads, when the news of the heir's death spread like wildfire amongst them—

"Ay, ay, it was an unjust will; good could not come of it."

The affair was canvassed far and near, in hall and cabin, in hostelry and vestry-room. There was pity for the mother, a sort of sympathy, half mournful, half rejoicing, with the father, amidst those in his own rank of life; a feeling of superstitious awe amongst the common people, with whom, on the whole, Mr. Ireby was not very popular; there was lamentation for the boy called away so suddenly; but it all signified little to the child's mother, who remained in a darkened room, almost bereft of reason by the nature and extent of the calamity which had fallen upon her; it signified still less to the child himself, whose spirit was never destined to be disturbed by the sound of human censure or of human applause.

In his little bed he lay rigid and motionless, the hands crossed; the closed lids veiling for ever the large blue eyes his mother had loved to see sparkling with pleasure, the long dark lashes contrasting with the pale cheek. The curls of his fair hair fell in rich disorder over the pillow; those curls were the only lifelike things about the body: loveliest, brightest, and best of all Delavelle Ireby's children, he lay there—dead!

Never more was the mother fondly to push back those shining locks and kiss the broad white forehead; never again should she hear his voice sounding joyfully in her ear. The promise was blighted, she should never see him grow to manhood; little marvel she wept and moaned and lamented. But there was another woman who mourned, though not with

so loud a sorrow; one who, when all else had, as she thought, sought their rooms, and left the body of the dead child to its lonely rest, stole stealthily, and as if she had no right to enter its precincts, into the quiet apartment whence the king of terrors had so lately departed, leaving such a beautiful wreck behind.

She had flowers in her hand, to strew on the bed where her former charge lay sleeping.

For a time she stood gazing at the child, whilst no sound broke the stillness of that solemn chamber; one by one she selected buds from the bunch she carried, and laid them gently down, some on the white covering placed over the body, some amidst the clustering curls, some on the snowy pillow, one in the little chill hand. At length her work was done; she took up one of the soft tresses, twined it round her finger, kissed it passionately, kissed the forehead, the neck, the cheek, the icy lips, the blue-veined eyelids of the child of so many anxious hopes, so many anxious prayers, and then, with a passionate burst of tears, sank down on her knees by the bedside, murmuring—

"My boy, my boy! may God Almighty forgive me,—forgive the wrong I have done, and enable me to make atonement for it. Willy, Willy, my child! how for more than three years I have repented and gloried, none but He who saw my temptation and my weakness ever, ever can know; and now I am punished, for you, oh, my son, are dead! Beautiful you were, Willy, and when strangers and friends, and the lady who thought you hers, and the man who called you child, all praised your loveliness, I went to my lonely home, and thanked Heaven you were mine. Proud was I of your beauty; proud of those curls that will soon be hidden from my sight for ever; proud of your bounding step; proud of the light of your eye and the colour in your cheek; proud—oh! may God have mercy upon my breaking sinful heart—

of the wealth I had gained for you; of the crime which for your sake I had committed, and which lay heavy at my soul. *She* has other children, and yet how she sorrows for you! I had only one, and he is lying before my eyes and cannot hear my voice! God pity me!—my son, my son, mine own, my darling!"

Thus did the wretched woman continue to weep and lament, sobbing her confession to the inanimate form of him for whom she had sacrificed her soul's peace; sobbing it in the watches of the night, whilst the quiet stars arose and went on their course, and no one dreamed of the agony enacting beneath their passionless gaze.

Save He who was cognizant of all she had endured during the years of her self-imposed banishment from daily intercourse with her son; who had inflicted so terrible a punishment on the guilty mother; He alone, and one other, witnessed that scene: He from His throne beyond the clouds of heaven, and one of His creatures who stood all unnoticed by the erring woman as she poured forth sentence after sentence, which revealed the full extent of the deceit she had practised on others, the agony she had entailed on herself.

Pale as the child lying before him, white as the sheet which covered the dead boy, Delavelle Ireby stood with arms folded on his chest, listening, as if in some horrible dream, to that wild confession, the words of which fell on his soul with the power of a curse.

"And had I but been content," went on the woman, "had I kept you to myself, had I not changed away my own flesh and blood for gold and silver, and the fine things of this world, though it was for you, not for myself, God knows, I coveted the wealth of which no good can ever come to living mortal, you might, perhaps, have been with me still. As it is—as it is—but I must not forget," she added, her voice rising again from the low despairing wail to which it had sunk as she

uttered the last words, "that *her* child has need of me; he must live—he shall live. I will yet do justice to all—not to you, my darling; that can never, never be now—but to him, to his father, to his mother. The child must come back to his own people, and I—I will go far away where no one will know of my sin. You have been the sacrifice, my beautiful child. Oh, Heaven! how white and cold and wan your face is now!" And with another burst of wild but unavailing repentance, she laid her burning cheek beside that little icy one, whilst her tears fell on the stony features, and moistened the soft fair neck, and saturated the golden curls with drops of as bitter anguish as ever were wrung from the soul of a woman.

Then came a sort of agonized lull, when for the last time she strained her trembling lips on the child's forehead in one long fervent kiss of farewell; after which, passing her hand hurriedly across her forehead, and pressing her aching eyes with trembling fingers, she turned to leave the room.

But Delavelle, stern and pale, confronted her as she did so: for a moment she gazed in his face, as if the steadfast yet troubled glance transfixed her; then with a low, wild entreaty for forgiveness, she flung herself before him.

Twice he essayed to speak before his voice obeyed his will; twice his lips framed words which his tongue refused to utter; then he said—

"I have heard all. Is it true?"

"True!" she repeated. "Have you witnessed my misery only to ask if it be true? Did ever woman sorrow as I sorrow for a child which was not her own? True!" she added, in a low, suffering tone; "oh! that you or any one could prove it to be false!"

"Can you prove it to be true?" he demanded, in a cold, hard, hollow voice, which sounded strange and unnatural even in his own ear.

"I can," she answered.

"Do so," he returned.

"Now?" she inquired, keeping her eyes averted from the bed towards which they were ever instinctively turning. "Now?"

"Yes, this instant," he replied.

Submissively she asked if he would follow her, and on his answering in the affirmative, led the way down a back staircase to a glass door, which she unfastened: when it closed behind them they were standing in a shrubbery walk. The bereaved mother had cast one look back ere she quitted the chamber; one glance at him who had been hers—her pride, her darling, her temptation; and as she hurried along through the night, Delavelle Ireby heard the low suppressed sobs that broke from her.

How well he knew every step of the way! It led between trees, through a rose garden, across fields, over a stile into the high-road; he had traversed it the first evening he came to Briarton a wanderer to his father's home. Had increase of wealth, a good position, the flattery of men, brought happiness with them? Memories of his father, the portrait of his second wife, of her children, of Reginald, Constance, and Marian; of his own dead son Henry; of the boy who, a deception and a falsehood, lay in the room they had left, passed swiftly before his eyes; but a bitter hate, a terrible anxiety, and a bad resolve were inmates of his heart, and the phantoms that seemed flitting around, if they distressed, had no power to appal him. For a strong purpose, even though it be a bad one, braces the nerves and steadies the brain; and if Reginald Ireby had a wild mania destroying his peace, so his brother Delavelle had his hates, desires, and projects to occupy, distress, and interest him.

They paused, at length, by the door of an humble abode; the woman unlocked, then pushed it open, to permit Mr.

Ireby to enter. He hesitated for an instant, but the next crossed the threshold, and found himself in the kitchen.

The fire was smouldering on the hearth, a faint red glare alone told that any heat was there, but the woman speedily blew the cinders into a blaze, at which she lighted a candle; then, beckoning Mr. Ireby to follow, she entered a small room at the back of the house, containing a couple of chairs, a few other ordinary pieces of furniture, and a bed, on which a child lay sleeping.

Delavelle Ireby felt a strange, vague, sickening sensation come over him as he looked around: for a moment the whole scene swam before him; his very senses appeared to be deserting him; he grew faint, and as he almost reeled, laid his hand on the back of the nearest chair for support. For one second a sort of spasm shook his frame; the next he seemed once again, to outward appearance, the strong, stern, unimpressible being he generally was considered.

"Why do you not go near him?" asked the woman, bitterly; "he is yours."

Delavelle Ireby turned away with a shudder, as he answered—

"Prove it."

She laid down the light on a table near the bed, and leaning against the wall in an attitude half of entreaty, half of despair, with her eyes now raised imploringly to his face, now riveted mournfully on the ground, she told her tale of temptation, weakness, crime.

How the long illness of Mrs. Ireby had assisted her design; how the love which was lavished on her boy, and the wealth she had purchased for him by the sacrifice of herself which she had voluntarily made, almost repaid her for the agony and suffering she frequently endured; how to her distorted imagination the death of Henry had seemed a sort of reward; how to her distracted reason the sudden death of

her own boy appeared like a direct interposition of Providence to punish her guilt.

It was a story spoken in hurried accents of bitterness and remorse; and when she had done, when she brought all down to the place where they then stood, she fastened her eyes on Mr. Ireby's face to see if he were not rejoiced to find that his son still lived, that it was her boy who lay dead, that hers was the crime and the sorrow and the agony; that his was the joy and the hope and the relief.

She might as well have looked for expression in features chiselled in marble as striven to learn aught of pleasure from the countenance of the man who stood within a few feet of her.

For a moment after the sound of her voice ceased he remained silent; but then, in a tone as dry and cold and hard as hers had been variable and sad and impetuous, he pronounced the two words he had so frequently employed before: "Prove it."

Oh! how he hoped she could not do so, how his heart died within him as, gently turning back the sleeve which covered the child's arm, she pointed to three red marks, and said—

"Do you remember them?"

"Perfectly," he answered, with a gloomy frown. "I ask no further evidence."

And his eye fastened on the boy's face as he spoke; and somehow it occurred to him that, of the two, the corpse in the chamber they had left was the more lifelike.

The countenance of the sleeping child was sallow, that of the dead one white; there were dark lines round the closed eyes of the former, whilst nothing disfigured the placid beauty of the latter; curls—long and bright and silky—shaded the forehead and brushed the face of the widow's darling, and some thin fair locks, damp with perspiration, made the wan, wasted cheeks of his son look doubly sunken and haggard.

And he had been vain of the beauty of a child which was not his own, but who had been a changeling; and this delicate, unhealthy being, this pale, wan, worn little creature, whose hands were thin and almost transparent, who seemed just tottering into eternity, was his, his eldest son, the heir of that which, as he a few hours since had imagined, was his own.

The boy did not even sleep like a child, his rest more resembled a stupor than a slumber; in fact, some narcotic had been administered to lull him to repose, and in the distress and anxiety of her mind, the woman had given him so large a quantity that his sleep was something like death, terrible to contemplate, so sound, so still, but yet so unrefreshing.

And this was his—his son! Delavelle Ireby moved from the side of the bed with a gesture of pain and pity and dislike. He went into the outer chamber, whither the bereaved mother followed him; but before she left the boy she stooped and kissed the unchildish-looking face, and hurriedly murmured—

"God help us all, and you, his son! When even I, who am nothing to you but a stranger, love you, why does not he?"

It was almost dawn ere Delavelle Ireby re-entered his own house. He had stayed long with the widow before he commenced the wandering ramble through the grounds of Briarton—*his* place—which lulled him into a sort of comparative calm, which allayed in some degree the fever of his mind. He had employed arguments, sophistry, threats, persuasions, bribes, promises, entreaties, commands; and the woman wept and implored, and remonstrated and moaned—but yielded; and so at length he induced her to leave Moreton the next morning for London, where better medical advice could be procured for the boy, and where also she

might remain till Mr. Ireby chose to acknowledge that the child who lay so near them was his—not Willy Barnes, but Delavelle Ireby—to acknowledge him—*if* the delicate creature lived.

And the next morning, accordingly, she left Moreton and proceeded to London, where her very identity seemed swallowed up in that vast human ocean; and once again the wretched father breathed freely—even though the weight of a heavy crime was lying on his conscience, even though it was his own son he was thus disowning, and sending from his home and heart for the sake of that which is "the root of all evil."

The village gossips were at this period so completely engrossed discussing the sudden death of Master Delavelle Ireby, that the widow's departure was but little heeded, and subsequent events conspired to banish the affair even from memory; besides which, every one believed she would soon return, for she had stated, ere leaving, to one of her friends, she should be back in a fortnight, when she hoped her child would be better.

To Moreton, however, she never came more; but intelligence eventually reached the place that the widow's son was dead. Who first conveyed the news from London was not accurately known, but no one marvelled to hear of the child's death; few, indeed, had expected he would have lived so long. There was sympathy expressed for her, and sorrow both expressed and felt for Mr. Ireby, who from the night of his son's death had been, as the common people said, "a changed man."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REGINALD'S SUSPICIONS.

It was Mr. Empson's custom each morning to take a quiet stroll before breakfast. He said it drove away the vapours for the day, and gave him an appetite for breakfast. Living in a small provincial town, of course it was quite possible for him to get into the country at once; and there can be little reason to doubt that, engaged as he was in a profession which sees the worst side of human nature, he did find that the calm and hush of nature enabled him to encounter with a stronger heart the perplexities of the day.

It was once my fortune to observe a gentleman, who very possibly spent twelve hours out of the twenty-four in his counting-house, regularly sally forth at 8 a.m. in what, it is to be presumed, he considered a rural costume. He always brought out with him three ugly little curs, who barked, and yelled, and snarled, and destroyed the peace of the inhabitants of a particularly "quiet street" for about five minutes, at the expiration of which period, master and dogs, wideawake, shooting jacket, cigar, and dog-whip once again ascended the steps of No. 50, and went in to breakfast.

Now, this was undoubtedly a pursuit of health under difficulties and in a hurry. And if this merchant derived benefit from a short stroll in town, why in like manner should Mr. Empson not indulge himself in a long one in the country? which question brings us back from a quiet street in London to a very desolate one in Brenslow, down which the worthy attorney was leisurely sauntering just as the early coach arrived from the metropolis.

Have you ever lived in a small provincial town? and if you have, did you ever pass any grander conveyance than

an ordinary cart without looking intently at it? If you did, Mr. Empson acted differently, at least on the morning in question, for his eye became riveted on one of the outside passengers, whom the moment the coach stopped he accosted by name.

"Reginald Ireby! you here?"

"Quite true, Mr. Empson: then you still can recognize me?" said Reginald, with a sort of confused and heart-broken smile.

"You will come and breakfast with me?" pursued the attorney.

"Thank you," was his reply, "but I am going farther."

"How much?" Mr. Empson asked the question hurriedly and anxiously, but the young man made no reply.

"Reginald," continued his friend, "you must not go there."

Still there came no answer.

"Let me speak to you; stay for an hour at my house, that I may talk calmly to you. Will you not be persuaded?"

"No," said Reginald in a husky voice; "I have made up my mind, and I am not intending to change it now."

The coach was just about to start again as the young man uttered his final resolution; and Mr. Empson, finding his remonstrances of no avail, took his seat beside Reginald, and, to the chagrin of the latter, proceeded with him to Moreton.

"What is your destination?" asked General Ireby's younger son as they stood together on the green before the inn door.

"I am not quite certain yet," replied the attorney.

"Would it suit you to choose your route now?" demanded Reginald, angrily.

"Yes," he replied; "your route shall be mine."

"To speak plainly, I do not desire a companion."

"To speak plainly, I am determined you shall have one."

"I am not a child," exclaimed Reginald, passionately; "I won't submit to be thus dogged and dictated to."

"I wish you were a child in years, as you are in judgment, Reginald," returned his friend, sadly, "and I would take you back to Brenslow by force. As it is, if you will not listen to reason, or entreaty, or argument, let me at least go with you to Briarton. I will not interfere unless you give me permission so to do; but I can at least be a witness to what passes."

Though Reginald was so headstrong, he was easily affected by the voice of kindness: it had not power to turn him, it is true, but it was capable of touching him; and besides, a thought suddenly occurred to his mind that had not entered there before; so, after a moment of irresolution, he answered—

"Well, be it as you wish; only remember you have promised not to interfere."

"Agreed," said the other; and they walked in silence towards Briarton.

The blinds were all drawn down, for it was still very early, and, besides, death tenanted the mansion.

Reginald looked sternly around: the solicitor observed him askance, and thought he bore the sight of that place well;—he could not read down into the depths of his soul, and see that the heart of the disinherited was almost breaking.

"Is Mr. Ireby in?" he asked—he felt it hard to knock at *that* door, and put such a question to a servant in *that* house.

"Is Mr. Ireby in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see him?"

"What name, sir?"

"Mr. Reginald Ireby—his brother." And the words were spoken in a harsh, hollow tone, as if their utterance pained the speaker: he thought they would have choked him.

The servant opened the door of that very apartment which, in former days, received Delavelle as a stranger—a wanderer—uncertain of how his parent might greet him. Reginald sat down. The furniture was still the same as of old; his mother's picture still hung on the wall; the piano still occupied its former position; but those whose taste had decorated it—where were they? One in London lodgings; the other, a "companion," hundreds of miles away. And he, who once considered himself almost the owner of that house—what was he?—a clerk out of employment—an intruder in the home of his youth—waiting for an interview to be granted to his petition by the man who had beggared him.

He felt as if a dagger were piercing his heart, as though a rush of agonized emotions, and vain memories, and useless desires, were suffocating him.

A step was soon heard crossing the hall. Reginald's face flushed as a hand turned the lock of the door; but he was pale and calm again when he confronted Delavelle Ireby, his brother.

There was no greeting on either side, unless the interchange of stiff, cold bows could be termed such.

Delavelle motioned his visitors to resume their seats, then assumed one himself.

"You desired to see me," he said, addressing Reginald.

"Yes," answered the other; "I am grieved to hear of the death of my nephew."

Delavelle inclined his head: it was his only reply.

"I have travelled from London here to prefer a request:—will you permit me to see the body?" said his brother, with a desperate effort at calmness.

"I regret to say it is impossible," answered his brother. "Had you arrived last night, you could have seen the body of my poor child—but the coffin is now screwed down; indeed, the funeral is to take place in an hour."

Delavelle turned very pale as he spoke; and, even in spite of himself, the solicitor pitied him, and blamed Reginald.

"Am I then to understand you refuse to permit me a sight of my nephew?" demanded the latter.

"You have come a few hours too late," said his brother.

"Will you let the coffin be unscrewed?"

"I will not," was the reply.

"Would you allow me to see it?"

"No," answered Mr. Ireby.

"If I remain here, will you take Mr. Empson to the room where the child lies, and permit him to see the body?"

"I decline to do so."

"May I ask the reason of your refusal?"

"I have previously stated it, and do not intend to go over the same ground twice. Pray, is your business with me concluded?"

"It is. I mean now to apply for a coroner's inquest." Reginald fixed a keen, scrutinizing glance, as he said this, on his brother, who, however, remained immovable under it. "You still persevere in your refusal?"

"Last night I would have acceded to your request at once," answered Delavelle, fiercely; "now I would not grant it to save you from perdition."

"I need not detain you any longer," replied Reginald. "Good morning;" and once again he crossed the threshold of his old home, to go into the world, for the second time, a beggar without a hope.

The day wore slowly on, and still Mr. Empson stayed with him. The solicitor found himself fairly at fault in all his conjectures regarding this unhappy young man; he could not understand him. He could not divine his purpose, or whether in fact he had one,—he was utterly unable even to conjecture what project could be fermenting in the mind of

his companion, and yet he felt convinced he entertained one; for Reginald was so calm, so sullen, so reserved, yet apparently reasonable, that it was impossible for any person acquainted with his disposition to believe he had not resolved on some plan of action, which he was fully determined to carry out, no matter at what cost of character, or reputation, or peace to himself and others.

He followed his nephew's body to its last home, much to the amazement of the rest of the mourners, and to the annoyance of Delavelle. He consulted Mr. Empson as to the probable result of an application for a coroner's inquest, and on finding that gentleman's opinion strongly adverse, gave up the idea. He declined to return to Brenslow—he said he preferred waiting at Moreton till the afternoon coach should arrive; and at length Mr. Empson, who had at first considered this a *ruse* to get rid of a troublesome companion, saw him, to his inexpressible relief, mount to the roof of the "Alacrity" coach, where he ascended also. When they reached Brenslow, Mr. Empson, after he had urged Reginald in vain to dine with him, shook hands warmly with the rash young man, and with a joyful heart beheld him fairly on his way back to London.

"He is safe at last," thought the kind-hearted solicitor; "how well it was I met him,—poor Reginald!"

It was late on the same night that a servant informed Mr. Ireby a boy desired to speak with him on business of importance.

"Send the lad in," said Delavelle, who sat in his library, surrounded by books which he never read, distracted with thoughts and anxieties that had no apparent termination. "Send the lad in;" and accordingly, the next moment, an extremely evil and mischievous face presented itself, the owner of which, after pulling his hair, as a mark of respect to the gentleman before whom he stood, closed the door

cautiously behind him, and advanced within a few steps of Mr. Ireby's chair.

"Well, what is it?" asked the owner of Briarton.

"What will you give me if I tell you something?" demanded the boy.

"That precisely depends on what the something may be," said Mr. Ireby.

"About him——"

"Who?" inquired the gentleman.

"Mr. Reginald,—what'll you give me *now?*" and the lad's face seemed to grow longer and sharper as he spoke of Reginald and money.

"What is the news worth?" asked Delavelle, more interested than he cared to confess.

"Gold," returned the boy, laconically.

"Will that do?" said Delavelle, laying down a sovereign, on which the lad seized with the avidity of a miser, even whilst he answered "No."

Mr. Ireby counted down "three." "Now," he remarked, "I'll give no more; and if I do not think your intelligence worth the money, I shall take it all back again. Proceed: what have you to tell me?"

"They are raising the body," whispered his visitor.

"Impossible!" gasped Mr. Ireby.

"Come and see," was the reply.

Ten minutes more, and Delavelle Ireby was standing by the entrance of that vault concerning which he had some three years previously murmured the words, "Who next?"

The stone, which had not been properly replaced after the interment, was removed. Delavelle rushed down the steps into the vault beneath, and found himself in the presence of three men, one of whom was his brother, the others being two of the wildest and most desperate characters in the neighbourhood.

By the light of a lantern, which one of the latter held high in his hand, the whole scene was revealed to Delavelle Ireby. There were the mouldering coffins of those who had died a hundred years before: there slumbered the child and the grey-haired man, the beautiful and the plain, the clever and the stupid, the good and the bad; they had all fretted and passed their little day; had experienced pleasures; suffered pains; given joy; caused sorrow; been loved, hated, despised, feared, cherished; had smiled and wept; been disappointed, gratified, or humiliated; they had, in one word —lived.

And it was to a place like this—full of sad warnings, solemn truths, melancholy satire—that mortals dared to carry their petty jealousies, their vindictive passions, their unholy desires! it was in a place like this, surrounded by those relics of mortality which mock the vanities of human desires, that two angry brothers met.

Almost in the centre of the vault stood Reginald, gloomily contemplating the face of the dead child; for he and his accomplices had displaced the lid of the coffin.

How pure and peaceful the face of the child looked in contrast to that of the man who gazed upon it!

"Are you satisfied?" exclaimed a voice almost at Reginald's side.

The younger brother started, and the man who held the light almost dropped it at the sound of the unexpected words: turning, they beheld the new-comer, who once again repeated his question.

"Yes, that the boy is dead—a fact I had previously doubted," replied Reginald; "but——"

"What!" almost screamed his brother; so shrill, so furious was his tone, that as it echoed through the vault, the oldest coffin seemed to murmur back a hollow and unearthly response.

And amidst those almost desperate men, unconscious of the raging human elements that contended over it, the child slept on, as quietly, as peacefully, but, oh! how much more soundly, than an infant in the arms of its mother!

Who that has looked on the face of a corpse has not felt that for every sorrow, every pain, every pleasure, every disappointment, every scheme in life, there comes an end, there is a balm?

Reginald kept his gaze steadily fixed on the white face and shining curls of the dead boy: an odour of flowers pervaded the vault; somehow, it made the younger brother feel faint and sick. Delavelle glanced at the body of the widow's child, then fastened his eyes on Reginald, waiting for an answer, but none came.

"You have obtained for yourself," said the elder brother, after a pause, "that which I refused to grant this morning —a sight of him; once again I ask, are you satisfied?"

"That the child is dead, yes; but as to how he came by his death, no," returned Reginald.

"Do you dare to imply——" began Delavelle.

"I imply nothing; I accuse no one," said his brother.

"I would give all I am worth to wring your thoughts from you!" exclaimed Delavelle, furiously; "to change ideas into words, words spoken before witnesses. But you are afraid to utter the black suspicions that are even now dwelling in your cowardly heart."

"No, sir," replied Reginald, "I am not; but as you seem so well acquainted with their purport, I need not give expression to them. Of this one thing, Delavelle Ireby, I am thoroughly satisfied, that somehow, though in what precise mode or by what exact means I am not at present prepared to say, you are wronging me. If sin be on your conscience, there let it lie. Time perhaps may give me back my rights; time will surely reveal the existence of guilt, and punish the

guilty. If you are innocent of evil, God pardon me the thoughts that distract my soul!"

"He has no idea of the truth," said Delavelle, mentally, with a sigh of intense relief; and then added aloud, "Once again I ask, are you satisfied?"

With a despairing look Reginald turned to one of his companions, and said, "You knew the appearance of the boy, my nephew: is this he?"

"It is," was the reply.

"I have done with you and yours!" exclaimed Reginald, addressing his brother; "whether for ever, or merely for the present, it is not for me to say. Misery you have brought on me and mine—misery and pain unutterable: if an hour of vengeance ever arrive, rest assured I shall not permit it to pass unimproved."

A bitter smile curled Delavelle's white lips as he answered, "I defy you!" Then speaking to the men, he said, "Finish the work for which you have been paid," and he made a sign for them to replace the lid of the coffin; and whilst they proceeded to obey in silence, he stood gloomily regarding them.

"I trust, sir," said the individual who had held the light, "you will remember we are poor men, and——"

"You are beneath contempt," remarked Mr. Ireby, as he turned on his heel. "Reginald," he added, "did you consider the consequences this night's work might entail on you?"

"I never consider consequences," said his brother.

"It might have been well for you to have done so in this one instance," resumed Delavelle.

"I echo your own words, and say, 'I defy you!'" was the reply. "*You* imagine it is impossible for any one to take your ill-gotten wealth from you. *I* know no act of mine, nor of yours, nor of living mortal can bring me lower than you

have brought me, or make me more wretched than you have made me. If you desire to punish me for what I know you would call an outrage, but what I considered not merely no wrong, but an act justified by imperative necessity, do so. I have no wish to fly from the consequences of that act, for I am not ashamed of it. I will go wherever you desire, provided you do not weary me either with your conversation or your society."

"Go home, boy," said Delavelle, scornfully—"I have no inclination to publish to the world the insane folly of my nearest relative; and when next you think harshly of your brother, remember he forgave a most cruel insult; and when he might have taken revenge on the perpetrator, refrained from doing so."

"Delavelle Ireby, you are a hypocrite as well as a scoundrel!" said Reginald, vehemently.

And thus in the calm dead stillness of night the brothers parted, never to meet again till years had rolled over the heads of both.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONSTANCE'S NEW FRIENDS.

CONSTANCE IREBY had been for about three months an inmate of Mrs. Ashton's pleasant home, when one morning that lady announced to all whom it might concern, that Mrs. Hernden and her daughter had returned to Grove Park, and must be called upon forthwith and invited to Ashton Court.

It is not easy to say why, at this intelligence, Constance's

eyes turned instinctively towards Mr. Ernehulst: perhaps Miss Ashton had told her how beautiful the young lady in question was—perhaps she merely desired to read in his countenance what sort of persons the new arrivals might be —perhaps she wished to know if the information did concern or affect him, directly or indirectly: be this as it may, she looked curiously at him for a moment, a compliment he returned with unflinching gravity, ere, addressing his sister, he begged to be allowed to accompany her.

Mrs. Ashton seemed gratified by this request; and accordingly that very afternoon the Herndens were called upon; but as they happened to be from home, cards, bearing the names of the Hon. Mrs. Ashton, Miss Ashton, and Mr. Ernehulst, were left to inform the ladies of Grove Park their friends had heard of and been not unmindful of their advent.

It might have been some ten days afterwards that Mrs. Hernden, having been duly announced, that gentlewoman and her daughter swam gracefully into the drawing-room ot Ashton Court.

For to say that either mother or daughter ever walked were a libel and a satire on their mode of progression; and, indeed, what with the amplitude of their skirts, and the excessive slenderness of their waists and throats, it may safely be asserted that the swans, whereunto Mr. Ernehulst likened them, ought to have been flattered by the comparison.

Miss Ashton, Constance, and Mr. Ernehulst, the sole occupants of the apartment, arose to meet them. As the latter welcomed Miss Hernden home, she shook her long slender fingers, which were encased in the tightest of Parisian gloves, and whilst a contortion, caused half by pain, half by affectation, flitted across her face, exclaimed—

"Really, Mr. Ernehulst, you *should* remember ladies wear rings."

Mr. Ernehulst laughed even as he apologized, and answered in a light, low tone—"I hope to be forgiven for losing more than my memory when near you."

Whereupon Miss Hernden said he was a sad flatterer, and that she saw he was not in the least improved since they had last parted; which speech, uttered in a pretty mincing tone, was sufficiently long to enable her to reach one of the windows and seat herself on a sofa near unto Constance Ireby.

"Now, Heaven help the girl!" muttered Mr. Ernehulst to himself as he followed her. "She thought I meant my heart, whilst it was merely my temper."

And beautiful as the lady undoubtedly was, her affectation might well have excited the spleen of a more patient individual than Mr. Ernehulst aspired to be.

It seemed, indeed, as if there were nothing natural about her, save her total deficiency of nature. From head to foot, from her expensive bonnet, with its long drooping feather, to her little dainty boots, which were small and beautiful as Cinderella's slipper, she seemed one perfect piece of consummate art: she could not walk, or look, or hear, or eat like other people. Mr. Ernehulst declared he believed she had some extraordinary mode of sleeping peculiar to herself; and as frost nips the tops of young and tender plants, so in like manner it appeared as if affectation had taken away some of her powers of speech, for she drawled, and lisped, and dawdled, and simpered through a sentence in a manner which, if slow, was sure, and had, in addition, the great advantage of being, in her own estimation, perfectly fascinating.

"We were staying for a few days at Brenslow, *en route* to Grove Park, Miss Ireby," she said. "I saw your pretty place; mamma and I were at a dinner party there. You have no idea what improvements Mr. Ireby your brother is

making both at Briarton and his new property; it is really wonderful!"

"Not so wonderful as the absence of feeling, or absence of perception, in some people," mentally exclaimed Mr. Ernehulst, as Constance, colouring to her temples and with tears starting to her eyes, merely answered, "Indeed?"

"Yes, it will be a splendid estate, every one says. Lord Bether told mamma, by the time the little boy comes of age (such a dear, sweet, darling little child it is), it will be doubled in value; and you know Lord Bether must know all about the neighbourhood, he has so much property there himself."

"Yes," interposed Mr. Ernehulst; "and, besides, you must remember he is a lord. When common individuals make an assertion, it occasionally requires corroboration; but with baronets, viscounts, and so on up the social ladder, the case is different. Have you heard, Miss Hernden, it is contemplated not to put peers on their oath, even if witnessing to—to—a murder?"

"No," returned the young lady; "but I think it would be very nice, and only right." And she daintily pulled the ears of a diminutive King Charles lying coiled up on the sofa beside her; whilst Constance said to Mr. Ernehulst—

"Have you?"

"Well, no," he replied; "but as it seems a merely proper arrangement for the noblemen, amongst whom Miss Hernden has such numerous acquaintances, I thought perhaps she might have heard if a project of the kind were mooted before it would reach my humble ears."

Miss Hernden turned her beautiful eyes on the speaker as he concluded his speech, then stated it to be her opinion, no, idea—for Miss Hernden made it a point never to entertain an opinion on any subject—stated it to be her idea, that each time they met, he became a "sadder quiz;" having

given him which flattering piece of information, and having vouchsafed once again—though with what magistrates call an "injunction"—to extend her hand towards him, she and Mrs. Hernden left the room as they had entered it, descended the stairs by some process of movement known only to themselves; were handed to their phaeton—which was a pearl amongst phaetons, even as they were pearls amongst women—by Mr. Ernehulst, who sauntered up and down the terrace ere he re-entered the house the ladies had so lately graced with their presence.

When at length he re-entered the house, he did so with a wonderfully gloomy expression on his countenance, that endured till he reached the drawing-room, of which apartment Constance Ireby chanced to be the sole tenant. She was sitting in the chair she had occupied during the conversation with Miss Hernden; and as she looked up when he entered, Mr. Ernehulst quickly perceived a shade of sadness lingering in her eyes.

He took no notice of this, however, at least not by any external sign; but taking up a position in the embrasure of the window, inquired—

"Well, Miss Ireby, what do you think of the lady who is to be Mrs. Ernehulst?"

Constance looked up in some surprise, as she said, "Of whom?"

"Miss Hernden," he replied, with a grim smile. "Pray do me the justice to believe she is not altogether my choice; I do not, in fact, feel myself worthy of such a seraphic being; something more a mortal like myself might, on the whole, have suited better; but as it is so it is—let that pass: now what do you think of her?"

"Oh! I do not know; I had no opportunity of judging," returned Constance, who knew perfectly well, and had formed her opinion without waiting for further light on the subject-

matter of this discussion; but this evasion did not satisfy Mr. Ernehulst, who persisted—

"Well, fifteen minutes—the orthodox time for a morning visit, and quite long enough it generally proves, weariness knows!—is not, perhaps, a sufficient period to enable you to arrive at a perfectly accurate opinion concerning this affair—that I should call an angel an affair!—but, so far as you have seen, what do you think of her?"

Constance hesitated for an instant; and he exclaimed—

"Oh! don't be afraid of offending me; she is no more to me, as yet, than the daughter of a large neighbouring proprietor, who died about a year ago; so what is your opinion?"

"I trust she may prove worthy of you," replied Constance.

"That may mean one of two things—either that you fervently trust this angelic being may make a mortal happy, or that you do not believe she will. In which sense am I to interpret your reply?"

"In whichever is most agreeable to yourself," answered Constance, with a smile.

"Humph!" said he; then added, "She has one great charm, not always perceived nor appreciated till fully understood, of which you may be ignorant: she is very rich."

"She's fortunate," sighed his listener.

"Yes; and my sister, and my niece, and my nephew, and my friends generally, have settled the matter amongst themselves somehow, and I have no voice in it. I should, on the whole, being endowed with very humble tastes, have preferred something not quite so highly finished; but you see it is, in short, necessary for me to be provided for."

"To be what?" asked Constance.

"Provided for," he answered, with a laugh. "I have lived very comfortably for—no matter how many years—on the fortune which, as a younger son, descended to me, and never thought of speculating in the matrimonial market, until

my sister—dear, sweet creature—imagining I was not sufficiently happy, and that my condition was capable of amendment, determined that I must marry. Not seeing any one who combined in such a pre-eminent degree the three essentials of beauty, amiability, and money as Miss Hernden, she and that lady's mother settled the matter, as women do settle such matters; and now, I believe, the only thing which keeps the marriage in the distance is that I have not proposed."

"And when are you thinking of doing so?" inquired his fair auditor.

"I cannot make up my mind. Sometimes I think I will in a few months; then, again, I resolve never: in fact, Miss Hernden might marry a duke or a clown for me, if it were not that my sister says I cannot go on for ever as I have done heretofore. She is anxious to 'settle me,' as manœuvring mammas do their daughters, at all hazards; in short, as I said before, I must be provided for."

"And could you by no possibility provide for yourself?" asked Constance, amused by the half-jesting tone he employed—"could you by no possibility provide for yourself?"

"Truly," said he, "the idea is not a bad one. I will give it my serious consideration, and find out what I am fit for. It never occurred to me before; so, you see, the apparently barren topic, Miss Hernden, has suggested a new thought, supplied food for reflection. Wonderful are the resources of the human mind."

"And so, my dear, you have seen Miss Hernden," said Mrs. Ashton to Constance, when the small family circle assembled in the drawing-room for a few minutes before dinner was announced.

"Yes," interposed Mr. Ernehulst, with a contemptuous smile; "and must be, I am sure, perfectly charmed with her tact and conversational powers. By way of choosing a topic

peculiarly agreeable to Miss Ireby, she entertained us with an account of the improvements at Briarton."

Mrs. Ashton reddened, looked first uncomfortable, and then angry ; whilst her daughter, spite of the sympathy she felt for Constance, smiled, and almost laughed.

Constance perfectly understood why Mr. Ernehulst reverted to the remark Miss Hernden had most probably thoughtlessly uttered. Perhaps she considered it was rather unkind of him to repeat it, merely for his own gratification; perhaps she saw how embarrassed Mrs. Ashton had become, and desired to relieve her; at all events, she said in a low tone—

"Miss Hernden forgot that Briarton to me is not a home. I am sure if she thinks about the matter afterwards, she will regret naming the place." Then, after a pause, Constance added, "She is very beautiful."

"And sensible and natural," returned Mr. Ernehulst; "she is perfect. And now, Margaret, suppose we discuss what I greatly prefer to perfect young ladies—dinner."

Eighteen months, or thereabouts, after the conversation just narrated, Captain Montague Ashton, peacefully smoking in the apartments of his uncle, occasionally removed the cigar from his lips in order to carry on a dialogue which he had commenced, in the following point-blank words—

"Pray, when is Miss Hernden to become my aunt?"

"That depend on circumstances," replied Mr. Ernehulst.

"But," persisted the other, "I want to know, without jesting,—indeed I do."

"What interest have you in the matter?"

"If you mean to marry her at once, I would tell my creditors so, and add that you have promised to pay my debts; if not——"

"You are very kind. Pray proceed; if not——"

"I would try my chance with her myself rather than ask my mother for any further advance just at present."

"I do not think you could do better," said Mr. Ernehulst.

"Complimentary, on my honour!" remarked the younger man, and resumed his cigar, as if comfort dwelt in it alone. He had grown very weary of himself, and of almost everything else. He did not consider life to be, on the whole, so good an invention now as he had thought it a few years ago; but his faith in smoking continued unabated: it was the attachment of his unengaged heart. Sometimes, apostrophizing his cigar, alluding to his own feelings, he affirmed—

"He loved in wintry age the same
As first in youth he loved."

And in truth it seemed so; for, from morning till night, sitting, walking, reading, lounging, riding, he held between his teeth that "balm of Gilead," which soothed his sorrows and lulled him into rest.

"Do you think my mother would let me marry her?" he asked, opening one side of his mouth sufficiently to permit the question to escape his lips.

"When I was young," said Mr. Ernehulst, "the individual who indoctrinated me into the usages of civilized society, informed me I should not talk while I was eating; permit me to suggest it would prevent your contorting your handsome face if you would not speak when you are smoking."

"It's such a nuisance," responded Captain Ashton.

"I quite agree with you. Now you have arrived at that conclusion, when do you mean to give up the habit?"

"Oh, dear!" he yawned, "how you will misunderstand me. I did not mean the smoking, but the talking, you know."

"If you think so, pray do not annoy yourself out of any fancied kindness to me; I can admire you in silence."

"Well, I suppose you can; but I want to talk about this girl. Do you think my mother would let me marry her?"

"Why, she desires that I should do so."

"Yes, but you are different, you see."

"I am not Captain Montague Ashton, certainly," said the other. "No, nephew mine, I do not imagine my sister would altogether approve of such a choice; so there is nothing for it but an elopement, chaise-and-four, endless driving, Gretna Green, tears, reproaches, blessings, and forgiveness. I will go with you as witness to the wedding, and then return and plead with your mother in your behalf."

"Thank you," returned the other; "I will consider of it. And now shall I tell you what I believe?"

"If it will be any gratification to you."

"Well, then, I believe the girl is trifling with you for her own ends, and——"

"*Tant mieux*," said Mr. Ernehulst.

"And that you are making a sham attack upon her heart. I must speak in the language of my profession, you know."

"I do not care what language you employ so as you render it intelligible to me."

"Very well; that you are making a sham attack upon her heart to carry on a real siege in another quarter."

"Your imaginative and descriptive powers will raise you to eminence some day, Montague," replied his uncle. "And now will you explain your ingenious idea more fully to me?"

"Yes—Miss Hernden will discard Mr. Ernehulst when the proper time arrives for her either to obtain her mamma's consent, or else elope with Lieutenant Duncan M'Leod Gordon, of the —th Highlanders. Mr. Ernehulst will then offer his hand and heart to Miss Ireby, and——"

"You need proceed no further with your edifice, Montague," said his listener. "It wants truth at the bottom; it has no foundation, and may as well be blown down before you have added another story. No: I have considered my position, and mean to live and die a bachelor; and it is,

further, my intention to go abroad for a few years; I intend to set off in about a fortnight; so, you see, there is an end of your card castle. Is it not fortunate you had raised it no higher?"

"But are you really going to leave England?"

"Really. Are you surprised? you seem very much so."

"Truly, I am; but there is comfort in all things—this will give me something to do whilst at Ashton Court."

"Yes," said Mr. Ernehulst, with a sneer, which Captain Montague, whose attention was at that minute otherwise engaged, did not notice; "and you can write occasionally and let me know how you are getting on."

And then the two gentlemen agreed to proceed to Ashton Court, where they calculated upon arriving in time for luncheon. As they entered the avenue, however, a carriage swept past them; the coachman touched his hat, but never paused: he was driving at an extraordinary pace.

"What's the matter, I wonder," said Captain Montague; "it's my mother's carriage, and there was only one lady inside, with her face hidden in her handkerchief: let us ride on and see what it means."

CHAPTER XXX.

REGINALD'S RASH ANGER.

ALMOST mad with rage and disappointment, with an unconfessed feeling of having acted foolishly, and yet a conviction that the view he took of the matter was correct, and a stub-

born determination to persevere till death in his hostility against the man he hated, Reginald Ireby returned home; home, where his young sister had watched wearily for his coming; home, where in silence and solitude she had endured her woman's portion of the sorrow which had fallen upon them; home, where she had done all that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred her sex can do—borne in patience.

For there never existed on earth a gentler creature than Marian Ireby; one less fitted by nature to battle with the storms of this world; nor one more resigned to bow her head in resignation while the blast swept over it. During the days of her brother's absence she had been quite alone. Walter Martock was too much engaged to come to see her, besides, he knew she would question him concerning the cause of Reginald's absence, and he wished she should first hear the story from the lips of the headstrong young man. A letter from Constance lay unopened on the mantelpiece: though she knew it was from her sister, and it contained no private matter, Marian had not ventured to open a missive directed even by her to Reginald. She loved him dearly, admired him, thought him the handsomest, the cleverest, the most-to-be pitied being in existence; but she also feared him: she had always done so, from the time when he was a strong, passionate boy, and she a delicate child, when a blow from his hand was perhaps quite as frequent as a caress, when he kissed her one minute, and if she refused to obey his slightest command, struck her the next. There was a something about the vehemence of his disposition, about his wild ungovernable fits of rage, his unbending obstinacy of character, that terrified her. Often did she think of Delavelle, who had spoken so kindly to her on the night when all their sorrows began; often did she think it strange so apparently amiable a being could be so bad a man as both Reginald and Mr. Martock

affirmed was the case. She did not profess to understand much about the matter, but she had, in her quiet way, come to the conclusion that it was a pity, now the will could never be undone, there should not be at least peace amongst them. She was often very unhappy, though she never said so, and one great cause of her uneasiness was the bugbear with which Reginald constantly terrified her—poverty.

He told her they were standing on the verge of beggary; spoke vaguely of the workhouse, to which in time they might all have to retire; in times of very deep depression he said it would be hard for his father's son to end his days in a common jail; declared it was dreadful for so beautiful a creature as Constance to spend the best years of her life as a mere "companion," a something betwixt a servant and a slave, yet not quite so respectable or fortunate as the former; sometimes commenced compassionating Marian herself, and invariably concluded with vowing vengeance and undying resentment against the man who had reduced them to their present unenviable position. All the poor girl could do was to listen, for, unlike Constance, she was unable to sympathize with the feelings which made Reginald's whole existence a sort of wild, fitful fever, full of pain, full of excitement, full of anger; a kind of everlasting tearing and gnawing and fretting at the chain wherewith Destiny had bound him. She was told the past was irremediable, so she reconciled herself to it. She had some pleasure in the present, so enjoyed it after a very quiet fashion, and tried to look ever steadfastly on the bright, not the gloomy, side of things. She was told to dread the future, and accordingly she had a vague fear always haunting her; a sort of skeleton—which a conversation with Reginald always conjured up—of poverty falling heavily on them at some indefinite future time; of misfortunes which were in store for him, for her, for Constance.

If he had left her to form her own conclusions in peace,

permitted her quietly to pursue her onward path, she would have been quite content, and have pictured her present life continuing until she married Mr. Martock, or till Reginald amassed a fortune; but he felt the necessity of talking to somebody, and as Marian never cavilled even at his wildest and maddest assertions, and, moreover, seemed to pity whilst she marvelled at him, he thought it a degree better to confide in her than to speak to no one, so treated the poor girl to all the outpourings of his wrath, anxieties, and perplexities.

Constance could enter into his every feeling: proud and impetuous, and indignant as her brother, if she would not have always acted as he might, her thoughts and his generally ran together; so what merely amazed or terrified Marian, touched a chord of kindred sympathy in her bosom, which vibrated ever at the name or memory of Briarton.

And Reginald mentally accused Marian of want of spirit, and thought her cold-hearted; and because, in fact, they could not thoroughly understand each other, he wished from his heart Walter Martock would get that brief which was so long in travelling to his chambers, and marry his young sister, so that he and Constance might live together, and talk over their wrongs and plans, and hopes and fears, with one common tie,—that of kindred emotions knitting their souls, and rendering projects which might have seemed vague, fanciful, or absurd to others, bright, beautiful realities to them.

The younger brother frequently dreaded that some time, either when she came of age, or at a more remote period,—if it were half a lifetime after, it was equally maddening to him to conceive of,—she might accept money from Delavelle, from the man whom he hated, and who he knew hated him, whilst he had once entertained a sort of half brotherly, half fatherly, whole admiring affection for Marian Ireby; and amidst many other reflections this one came swelling up in his bosom, and he vowed as he entered the house that she

should promise him that dower from Delavelle she would never take; that friends with him she would never be; that a gulf of anger and resentment and unforgiveness should separate them for ever and ever, henceforth, always.

Pretty and gentle and loving she looked, as she came quickly down the flight of stairs to meet him, which she did on the first landing. Oh! how fondly she welcomed him back, but somehow her calm look of happiness only irritated and excited him the more.

"Promise me, Marian," he said, barely returning her loving greeting, "promise me that you will never ask, nor take, nor let another take for you, money from the man who has blighted my life—all our lives!"

"How, Reginald?" she asked, turning a little pale, and trembling at his vehemence, the cause of which she was unable to guess; uttering the two words, more by way of entreating explanation than aught else; "How, brother?"

"I mean you must never have any friendly transactions, nor hold any communication, nor even become indebted to him, Marian; I entreat, I command you, to promise this. Can you not see in what a state of mind I am?—my brain is almost reeling with the fresh suffering which he has caused me."

"Dear, do be calm; you have no idea how you terrify me," she returned, laying an entreating hand on his shoulder. "Delavelle has never offered me any money, nor never, I dare say, will; so why need you agitate yourself so much about what is never likely to occur?"

"You do not want to promise, then?" he said.

"I have no objection. I am sure I shall never have an opportunity of refusing, for he is not likely to propose giving me a fortune; so, Reginald, do tell me where you have been and why you stayed away so long without writing one word to say where you were gone, or when you would come back,

or anything. I have been so lonely," she added, sorrowfully, whilst she made a movement as if to induce him to comply with her request; but he, without noticing it, proceeded—

"Yes, you promise, thinking that Constance or I, or Walter, or somebody, will always be able to provide for you; but she may marry, and I may die, and he may wish you to accept a portion from this man. Now you must promise me faithfully that, let come what will,—no matter who urges you to take money from Delavelle Ireby—no matter how you may be situated—no matter what happens to me or to you, or to Walter,—you will never, under any circumstances, for any consideration, even though tempted by poverty, forget so far what is due to Constance, to me, to yourself, as to permit Delaville Ireby to say with truth—one of us, one of *my* sisters, ever took from his bounty what justice and law ought to have given to all of us long ago. Promise me this, Marian;—you must promise it!"

She grew white with a variety of contending emotions, as she looked in her brother's flushed and angry face, grew white and somewhat sick, whilst a vague sort of terror seized her, but still she did not answer.

"Why do you not speak?" he angrily demanded. "You may think the will an unfortunate and iniquitous business, but he has inflicted a deeper wrong upon me even than that. He has destroyed my last hope of justice—he has blighted my whole existence! I hate him! and if I thought one of my sisters would ever receive a favour from or be indebted to him, I could find it my heart almost to kill her! I could not rest in my grave if I knew you were on friendly terms with him. Promise me, child, that you will beg, starve, die! rather than take a sixpence from him, now or at any future time!"

"Oh, Reginald!" she piteously exclaimed, "do not be angry with me;—I am so afraid of being poor."

She clasped her white delicate hands, and looked imploringly in his face, her blue eyes dimmed with tears, her whole attitude, tone, and manner, appealing to his love and forbearance.

Angrily pushing her aside, and unheeding aught save her implied refusal, he proceeded to stride past her up the stairs; but the abrupt movement and sudden jerk flung her off her balance, as she stood on the very edge of the flight, and ere he had taken a single step, she was lying huddled up in the hall beneath.

With one spring Reginald reached her side. His anger was gone: he cursed his own impatience. She never moved, nor spoke, nor made an effort. He just uttered the one word, "Marian!" as he stooped to lift her; but when he raised her in his arms, a sharp cry rang in his ear, so shrill, so intense in its brief agony, that it froze the young man's heart within him.

Faint almost to death, with a sort of bewildering dread and horror, he carried her up the stairs into the room she had so lately quitted; and oh! what a change the few brief minutes had sufficed to work! what an eternity of suffering they had entailed! for Marian Ireby had left the apartment soft and fair, and fragile and beautiful, full of youth, and health, and vigour, and the capacity for enjoyment; and her wretched brother bore her thither once again, beautiful, indeed, as ever, but hopelessly deformed—a confirmed invalid for life.

And this was the end of all!

This was what passed through the mind of Constance as she sat beside her sister: this was the end of all!—of the pleasant visions she had pictured to herself, of happy days yet in store for them—when Reginald should have amassed an independence and won back Briarton; when Walter, her sister's husband, had gained a reputation and a position;

when clients, and wealth, and fame should at length be his; when she should live—oh! so contentedly—either with Marian or Reginald, perhaps alternately with both; when their anxieties and difficulties should, after long struggle and firm endurance, have at length been overcome: this was the end of all!

If any annoyance irritated her temper, if any slight wounded her feelings — and even in Mrs. Ashton's house annoyances and slights would occasionally come to the girl who had so much to be thankful for—she had merely to turn her mental gaze toward the air castle she so ceaselessly constructed, either add another pinnacle thereto, or survey its goodly proportions with delight, and sorrow vanished, and hope and joy came fluttering back to her heart. The edifice of goodness, and love, and beauty, she had created with her own eager, impetuous fancy, grew and intertwined itself so completely with her very existence, that when the blast of reality levelled it in the dust, it seemed as though some portion of herself had been torn away, some terrible deadly gap made in her being, by the sudden destruction of the brilliant fairy-like palace she had spent above two years in bringing to a state of perfection.

Her eyes at length were rudely opened: she beheld Reginald as he was, a man who had left himself without a chance or a hope almost in life; who had wanted to succeed to the inheritance which Delavelle had wrested from him, not through earnest toil and noble endeavours, but by a chance; the chance of three individuals dying in the proper order; a chance on which having staked his all and failed, he sank hopelessly down, unable to do aught but curse destiny, and bemoan his own rash anger, and wish that he was dead.

She saw Marian — fair, sweet Marian — dimly, through scorching, blinding tears—saw that vision of joy destroyed, that reality of suffering revealed. Between the two, if she

thought of herself at all, she felt her own happiness was shipwrecked; but it was not a home where reproaches or angry retorts were uttered; where one blamed, and another flung back some cutting reply or stinging reproach; where each one deemed him or herself so much better than the other, that all contrived to disagree and be wretched. No: if sympathy were required, it was given; if wrong had been done, it was excused; if folly had been committed, love almost fancied it was sense. Happy together they might never be more, she feared; but that need not alter their affection: the suffering was common to all, why should each one, and she more especially, not strive to make it less heavy to the rest?

Thoughts and feelings such as these arose in her heart, as she removed her brother's hands from before his face, and held them pityingly between her own; as she strove to conceal at least a portion of her own grief, and comfort her brother; as she tried, with unfaltering voice, to tell Walter Martock of the great trouble which had fallen upon them all.

With what a bounding heart the young lawyer had sought their home that day! for the brief had come at last; sunshine, as he fancied, was breaking out in the gloomy sky, which had previously lowered above his head—sunshine to be at once overcast. He had come to tell, that at length he was to make a speech, to plead a cause, and he fervently hoped to win it, and then—

Constance Ireby, in low broken accents, ended the story.

"An accident!" gasped Walter.

"Oh!" cried Reginald, in a tone of agonized remorse, "it was an accident in one sense, but all my doing;" and in a single sentence he poured forth his confession, and his repentance, and his agony.

"Walter," he cried, "*she* forgives me; only say that you do."

"Oh! Reginald Ireby," was the wild, despairing answer, "did I not warn you, did I not implore, entreat, did I not say you were rushing to misery and destruction? God in heaven may forgive you, but I cannot!"

He had come to the house happy, he left it broken-hearted; and a few days afterwards the newspapers announced that Mr. Martock's client had lost; and the few friends who had prophesied his success, and eagerly looked for it, turned away disappointed and surprised at his failure—a failure so complete, so unexpected and overwhelming, that it, together with his other sorrows, almost brought him to the brink of the grave. When, after a long struggle betwixt life and death, he recovered, Marian implored to see him. He came: he could refuse no request she urged; it was, perhaps, an interview he himself desired, although he knew it would be fraught with pain unspeakable.

For a time neither uttered a syllable; his tears fell like rain over the beautiful slender hand of the girl who was now but a lovely wreck. She could not weep—she had reached another stage of misery—and was, to all outward appearance, calm, and sadly resigned.

She pushed the hair back from his forehead, and for long kept ever murmuring one sentence, in a low tone of intense sympathy—"My poor Walter! my poor Walter!"

Ere he left she made him promise to be friends with Reginald, "who is more to be pitied than any of us," she gently pleaded; and, at her bidding, Walter Martock, from the depths of his soul, forgave the brother of her whom he loved so intensely, whom he loved as few men and few women ever do love, whose hopes had been his hopes, whose sorrows were his sorrows, whose wishes were his wishes; and, as he clasped the hand of the wretched young man in his, and uttered the blessed word that is so hard to speak, which it is so comforting to hear, he felt that a portion of the bitter-

ness departed from his spirit; he arose above the trial, and went out again to face the dark, black future, a better though a sadder man.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FALSE DELICACY.

"UNCLE," said Captain Montague Ashton to Mr. Ernehulst one morning, about ten days after Constance's departure from Ashton Court, "are you still determined to go abroad?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"I wish you would defer your departure for a little. I shall be bored to death here after you go. I am tired of my mother and sister already. What can have induced you to think of leaving England?"

"A change of climate will improve my health," returned Mr. Ernehulst, dryly.

"It seems to me there is not much the matter with it," said his dutiful nephew. "But now listen to me for one minute. I have had a cough for some time past, and pain in my chest, and so forth. Do not laugh—I have indeed; and I am sure a trip to France, or any other place just away, you know, from this stupid Ashton Court, would do me good. If you will put off your journey for a very little time, I will go with you."

"An irresistible inducement!" replied Mr. Ernehulst; "but suppose I decline to take you?"

"Oh! I cannot suppose an impossibility. You never refused me anything I asked you for yet, except your grand-

father's watch, which you prize simply, I believe, because it is so ugly; and my mother would, I am sure, lay down her life for me. But then, you see, women get so tiresome after a little while, and they don't like smoking, and I cannot live without it; and there is not a bit of pleasure in a cigar on the terrace."

"So I am to be treated to your society solely because you can lie on the sofa and smoke Havannahs in my drawing-room?" remarked Mr. Ernehulst.

"Yes; and, besides, you do not annoy me: you don't ask me questions, and you don't want me to pay morning visits; and, in short, I feel at home with you, which I never do in my mother's drawing-room."

"If a certain old proverb be true, Montague," replied his uncle, "it is little marvel Miss Hernden has set her young affections on a different object."

"What the deuce do you mean?" asked Captain Ashton; but Mr. Ernehulst answered merely with a smile. "Uncle," said the young officer, "I do not quite understand you."

"Nor I myself," was the candid reply; "so suppose we both abandon the attempt, and settle when we are to set out on our travels."

"In three or four weeks," said his nephew, "at the furthest. And tell me, do you mean to go by London?"

"I am uncertain. Why?"

"Because I wanted to know if you meant to call on Miss Ireby."

"Should my sister wish me to do so, certainly."

"And if not?"

"There will be no necessity."

"Humph!" said Captain Montague Ashton. Then, after a long fit of musing, he suddenly exclaimed, "Hang it! I always thought you meant to propose for her."

"For Miss Hernden?"

"No; Miss Ireby. Did you not—now candidly, uncle—did you not think her very handsome?"

"Yes; but was that any reason I should marry her?" asked his relative, simply.

Hearing which reply, Captain Ashton declared it to be his opinion that his uncle should buy a tub and live in it, and not let any one—how much less a woman!—keep a gleam of sunshine from him; and after Mr. Ernehulst mildly suggesting if all his nephew's flirtations had brought sunshine to his heart, it had never become visible on his face, that young gentleman lounged into his mother's dressing-room, and informed her his Uncle George had taken Miss Hernden's desertion of him so much to heart that he had decided on going abroad for an uncertain period, and that he, Captain Montague Ashton, pitied his relative so much that he was resolved on accompanying him to the Continent.

Mr. Ernehulst had not the slightest intention of making a confidant of any one, more especially of his nephew. He never found that sorrow, like soup, grew any the less for being distributed to the public; he was perfectly competent to bear his own trials in silence, and to keep his own counsel to any extent, and so he never intimated to any of his friends that he had explained something more than the state of his finances to Miss Ireby, and that she, by way of return, had given him a hint, not merely of the long legal story, with which he was previously tolerably well acquainted, but also of another tale, that, as has already been intimated, was intertwined therewith.

I wonder which is the strangest phenomenon, the way that some men persist in flinging love from them, or the way most women continue to love an utterly unworthy object long after they have discovered how base and valueless it really is?

The present example of all of which is that Constance

Ireby refused Mr. Ernehulst solely because, in former days, she had cared for a man who was ready at the first blast of the tempest to throw her off. She had such pride that she would not now have married him had he offered her the devotion of a life; but she had also such an ideal love for him, that she never could think of entertaining even a shadow of affection for another.

Only to think of the men women do marry, and of the true affection they cast aside without a thought! Only to think that Constance Ireby should once have accepted Francis Montray, and yet refuse George Ernehulst! Yet so it was; why it was so, happily, it is not for me to explain.

And Captain Montague Ashton, though he had once almost hit the truth, had still missed the mark. "An inch," we are told, "is as bad as a mile;" and so he might as well have always wandered in darkness and blindness as come so near the light, and yet not see it after all. What his stupid black eyes could not discover, however, a pair of blue ones discerned at a glance; for when Mr. Ernehulst, passing through London *en route* to Paris, thence to Switzerland and Italy, called, "by desire," to inquire if Miss Ireby's sister were recovering, Marian, lying on the sofa, which was to be for the future almost her habitation, speaking little, but noticing much, guessed the way in which affairs actually stood, and accordingly, after the visitor had left, said, in her low, weak voice—

"Connie, come here for a minute."

The elder sister complied, drawing a low stool close to Marian's side.

"Connie," resumed the poor invalid, laying one hand on her sister's hair, whilst with the other she encircled the white, beautiful throat, "had I ever a secret from you?"

"I believe not, Marian," was the reply.

"You know I never had," said the other, earnestly; "then why are you reserved with me now?"

No answer came to this question, but Connie's head fell on her sister's shoulder, and the beautiful face was concealed by the long, fair, clustering curls that shadowed Marian's now colourless cheek. The elder wept in silence, whilst a soft, tender hand pushed the dark hair back from her forehead and kissed it gently.

"I do not ask you to tell me the story now," said Marian at last, "for I see what the end of the love tale has been on both sides; I only want to know how it comes that the end is so."

"Do you not remember how, in the old times——"

"Connie," interrupted Marian, almost vehemently, "tell me, if you will, that good, and disinterested, and true-hearted though Mr. Ernehulst is, that much as you respect and like, you could not love him; tell me you were proud, and would not enter a wealthy family a portionless bride; tell me you could not cast the shadow of our sorrow across the home of any one who might make a happier choice; tell me you feared his friends might look coldly on you; tell me anything, save that you flung the affection of this man from you because, before your eyes were opened, you loved a man who never cared for you. I could not have patience to hear you speak of Francis Montray and this Mr. Ernehulst in the same sentence."

"Then I must not speak at all," retorted Constance. "Neither you nor Reginald ever liked the man I once had almost married, or approved of the choice our dear father confirmed, but——"

"But we were willing to believe we were mistaken," interposed Marian. "We tolerated him; we did more: we tried to believe he was worthy of you. I always thought till today I was of a weaker character than you—not so proud,

not so strong, less courageous, less able to endure a great trial with a brave countenance and an undismayed heart; but now I feel that, were I in your position, instead of clinging to the memory of that absurd, misplaced affection, I should thank God almost for the misfortunes that have fallen upon us, so that the still greater misfortune of being wife to Francis Montray had been escaped by me."

"You do not imagine, though, that I would marry him now?" said Constance, hurriedly.

"I do not indeed know whether you would or not," replied her sister, with some irritation; "after what you have acknowledged, or at least not denied, this morning, it is impossible for me to tell what you might or might not do."

As these words met her ear, the elder sister gently removed Marian's detaining hand, but she held it clasped in her own while she said—

"Marian, I do not think you ever in your life before spoke an unkind or ungenerous word to me. When we were little children we never quarrelled. If one wished for any toy which the other possessed, it was given up without a tear of anger or regret. If one were ill, the other knew no rest or peace till she was better.

"Trial has come early enough to both; but as for nineteen years we have lived without a jarring word or angry feeling, do not let dissension arise between us now. What is this man to us that he should cause you to judge me harshly?"

And what was he to Constance that she never would speak of him willingly—what was he?

Marian asked herself this question as she looked at her sister. She saw the whole truth; she read her heart more accurately than Constance herself had ever done: she saw she was pushing happiness from her for the sake of a vain chimera; she saw this distinctly, whilst the one most nearly interested was barely conscious of the fact.

"Forgive me, Constance," she said, gently, "I did not mean to vex you. We are now so entirely dependent on one another for love and sympathy that I could not be unkind to you if I would. Do you recollect the refrain of one of our dear old ballads?—

'Shall a light word part us now?'"

"No," murmured her sister.

"Still," continued Marian, "if there be no confidence there cannot be complete affection; if we do not speak of our feelings, how can we understand each other? (As I have begun I will finish; as I have told you part of my ideas, I must tell you all.) You have often thought, 'Reginald is headstrong and passionate. He may, in the wild anguish of leaving his old home, have offended Mr. Montray; some portion of the fault may have lain with him, some part of the blame might, perhaps, by explanation, be removed from the other.' Some thought like this, very vague, very flimsy, but still comforting, *has* dwelt in your heart, Constance, and now I want to ask you to drive it away, for it is false. I know the state of excitement into which our poor dear brother can work himself. Ah! who knows it better than I?" And for a moment her voice grew tremulous, as the memory of her own blasted existence recurred to her. "But if Reginald be passionate," she added, after a pause, "Mr. Montray is cold, and false, and calculating. If you were proud, he was miserly; if you were true and loving, he was fickle and narrow-hearted. The fault rested with him, and with him alone; and, as Reginald once said, dear Constance (harsh and unkind though it may seem), I say, 'I had rather see my sister dead than married to Francis Montray, even if he were heir to a dukedom.'"

"And I would not marry him, Marian; but——"

"Still you refuse a good man because you once loved Mr.

Montray, because you imagine you love him still. I pray you may never regret this clinging to a fond memory, this ceaseless dreaming of the past, which, remember, 'comes not back again.'"

"But, to follow the words of the same author," said Constance, with an effort of cheerfulness, "Marian, we will, in spite of all our trouble, 'go forth to meet the future without fear.'" But as the younger sister tried to look with a smile in the face of the speaker, old thoughts, old desires, fresh disappointments, and new sorrows came crowding up so rapidly in her mind, that the smile faded away, and a mournful though resigned expression usurped its place.

"We will not talk much of these things," she said, hurriedly; "but strive to feel that 'whatever is God's will *must* be for the best.'"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MRS. D'EVELYN'S DEATH.

If Mrs. D'Evelyn had a purpose and an employment in existence, that purpose was to annoy other people—that employment was to make vexatious dispositions of her property. Some people imagine a good object in life is to employ their wealth in benefiting their fellow-creatures, whilst others seem to think the sole end for which money has been entrusted to their keeping is to fee lawyers before, and leave it absurdly and unjustly after, death.

It would, perhaps, be merely charitable to suppose that as Mrs. D'Evelyn, through the instrumentality of her first husband, had gained all her money by law, she thought it

only right to spend it in law, and that it was a purely conscientious feeling which induced her to pay various sums, at very frequent intervals, for having her latest testamentary disposition rendered null and void by the making of a new one.

I do not know if the rule of not prescribing for the members of one's own family holds good with regard to law as it does to physic; but one thing is certain, Mrs. D'Evelyn never permitted her husband to have any share in the doctoring of her wills; for she considered them very delicate patients, likely to be incapacitated for further usefulness by any treatment save the most gentle and skilful which long experience could suggest.

So sometimes she drew out her own will, and sometimes she got a legal friend to assist; and, in fact, this writing out her after-death wishes, if such an expression be permissible, constituted, as has before been intimated, the employment and amusement of her life.

She had all her plate docketed, and ready for distribution whenever she should depart to that land where silver and gold are of so little value; and if, on the occasion of a dinner or supper party, these labels had to be disturbed, why, it was an amusement for her to fasten them on again after the spoons, and forks, and urns, and candlesticks had played their part, and shone brightly before company.

We have all our one peculiar extravagance: Mrs. D'Evelyn's was paper—paper, to fold and refold her valuables; to direct them over and over again as her ideas changed, as her plans for their ultimate disposal altered. A sheet of paper, unlike the dress of the economical lady of whom we have all heard, will not do turned "three times," and, as a natural consequence, Mrs. D'Evelyn was a staunch, if not an agreeable, friend to the stationers as well as to the lawyers. She seemed perpetually haunted with the idea of

sudden death; so she never took a journey, nor went from home for a few days' visit, without leaving in the charge of her confidante for the time being a sort of sketch of what was to be done with the linen in the oaken chest; the silver in the box with the padlock; her mother's Bible; her own wardrobe, including the white silk dress wherein she was arrayed on the blessed morning when she was married to Snooks, Esquire, deceased; and a sacred brown-paper parcel, containing the clothes that sagacious old lawyer wore the very day when Death—the grim bailiff who, sooner or later, lays his icy hand even on the shoulders of attorneys—tapped Samuel Snooks familiarly and imperatively on the shoulder, and arrested him for the debt of nature, which, as we have seen, the solicitor immediately paid, and left his wife a widow—but not disconsolate.

Had any privileged visitor, calling at No. 26—early in the morning, or at any time on a wet day—sought Mrs. D'Evelyn in her own apartments, she might generally have been discovered tying slips of paper to bunches of keys, and labelling cream-ewers, and making other dispositions of her effects before she finally disposed of herself, and left off writing wills for ever.

It was a curious mania, but not more curious than many another affected by elderly gentlemen and ladies; and Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn declared if she would only keep her temper, and not worry him, she might leave her money to the Emperor of all the Russias for him; he said he did not want it; he only desired what he was never to obtain whilst she lived—peace.

For matters had at length arrived at such a pass, that, as Mrs. D'Evelyn remarked, with red eyes and swelled cheeks, to her newest confidential friend, "If we were sending out for a halfpennyworth of salt (a thing, however, which we never do, for we buy it either by the seven pounds, or else in jars

for table use), he would give one farthing towards it and I another. And this, my dear, is what I married for!"

And in one sense her description of their domestic economy was perfectly true, for, to save himself perpetual annoyance, Mr. D'Evelyn had proposed contributing one-half towards the housekeeping—an arrangement to which his wife joyfully acceded at the time, and grumbled over ever after.

The personage to whom the above financial statement was made was, in fact, no other than Mrs. St. George, who, having met the solicitor's wife at one of the Rev. Mr. Straightpath's social Christian gatherings—(the reverend gentleman had now enlarged the sphere of his usefulness, and held social Christian gatherings in London, conducted on the same principle as those his friends had attended at Dillsend)—became so charmed with Mr. D'Evelyn's interesting wife, and so desirous of enjoying, as she prettily expressed it, "her society in the next world, as well as in this," that she determined, at any sacrifice of time, and eloquence, and persuasion, to "bring her into the fold," to convert her, and, as Mr. Straightpath exclaimed, with a nasal twang, "make her fit for the society of saints both here and hereafter."

Fond of flattery, fond of variety, fond of being lionized in any way or by any sort of people, it proved a matter of no great difficulty to open Mrs. D'Evelyn's eyes to the light. It was perfectly delightful to be made into a "saint," and to receive as such, tokens of goodwill, and kindness, and admiration from Mr. and Mrs. Straightpath, Mrs. St. George, and the rest of the "*clique*" of which that lady was a distinguished ornament.

And further, as it was impossible for the ladies *always* to be conversing about their souls, they had many confidential chats concerning their husbands, neither of whom, it appeared, had "turned out so well" as their wives might reasonably have expected would be the case.

Mrs. St. George had not, as she told Mrs. D'Evelyn, "the least hope of meeting her LL.D. in Paradise, unless a miracle occurred—a thing," she added, piteously, "of which I have very little expectation." But she was a Christian and a woman, and though her essay in conversion at home had signally failed, yet she still thought it might be possible for her to effect a beneficial change in the stony heart of her friend's husband—a change which, if they could bring it about, would, she assured Mrs. D'Evelyn, "alter him in his domestic, professional, and financial relations—alter him for time, fit him for eternity, make him a better man, a better husband, a better member of society;" in one word, she proposed bringing him into the Church—*their* Church, be it remembered, which thought the Church of England as by law established a something tottering rapidly towards Rome and perdition—into *their* Church, then, making a Christian of the unconverted *ci-devant* clerk of Samuel Snooks, Esquire, who, Mrs. D'Evelyn asserted, and it is to be hoped she believed the falsehood, had been a most worthy and religious man—"quite different from *this* one," she said, with a despairing sigh.

Mrs. St. George replied hopefully, in a beautiful metaphor, which was to the effect "that the blacker the solicitor looked now, the whiter he would seem after he had been washed in her saving doctrine." Though, of course, her mode of expression was not quite so concise as the above, and her idea was clothed in more flowery language, still the thought, no matter how worded, was beautiful; so Mrs. St. George felt, and so Mrs. D'Evelyn said, as with her clasped hands and tearful eyes she regarded her new friend in wondering admiration. The wife of the doctor of laws was invited to tea, to the end that she might plead at her leisure his soul's cause to the "adder-like ears" of Mr. D'Evelyn.

At first the solicitor politely intimated that as he permitted

his wife perfect liberty of conscience, he trusted her friends would extend a like privilege to him; that, as he never interfered with the religious tenets of his acquaintances, he hoped he should be allowed to proceed to another world by the route which his faith, reason, and education had induced him to believe was the best and safest; and that, finally, he desired no discussion on the subject. But, when Mrs. St. George blandly hinted she thought it no great virtue for him to permit his wife to tread with a serene eye any road in company with saints such as Mr. Straightpath—suggested that if he attempted to interfere and make a martyr of her for her unflinching avowal of the truth, no punishment could reasonably be considered adequate to his offence—stated it to be her belief that if he imagined the way he was pursuing would ever lead to heaven, he was miserably mistaken, and affirmed that his disinclination to controversy only proved the utter badness of his doctrines and his heart,—Mr. D'Evelyn's politeness and temper fairly forsook him, and he told the lady, in so many plain words, "that he detested humbug—that he considered he had a perfect right to maintain his own opinion, and that go to her conventicle or join her sect *he would not.*"

Whereupon Mrs. St. George burst into tears, and the solicitor cut short a speech from his wife, commencing with the usual "Oh, Thomas D'Evelyn!" by walking out of the room, and leaving the ladies to settle his destination, which they quickly did, with many groans and sighs, and holy expressions of horror, pity, and Christian commiseration.

Before the "social Christian gatherings" had lost their charms—before the convert wearied of her new friends, or the converted found straying another very woolly lamb who would submit to be brought into their fold and shorn—before, in one word, novelty had ceased on both sides and discord begun, Mrs. D'Evelyn fell ill.

It was a something quite touching to note the speed with which Mr. Straightpath rushed to the side of his beloved sister; the tenderness with which his wife, who had a few minutes before turned from the supplicating entreaties of a new-made widow and her young children, brought jellies and delicacies of all kinds to her who could purchase these things for herself at any moment; the friendship and zeal with which Mrs. St. George folded up her shawl, took off her bonnet, and declared her intention of remaining to watch and nurse "poor dear Mrs. D'Evelyn."

Meanwhile, Mr. D'Evelyn never interfered. He saw well enough what the end, and aim, and object of all this was; but he knew it was perfectly useless to remonstrate; and he went on his course, and his wife pursued hers with some reluctance, it must be confessed, when she found it was leading to the tomb.

Once, and once only, her husband asked her, "Is it any comfort to you, my dear, to have these people about you?"

"It is," was the reply.

"Very well, then, they shall stay," remarked Mr. D'Evelyn; "otherwise——"

He did not conclude his sentence; but a not very loving glance directed towards Mr. Straightpath spoke volumes with reference to his own private feelings, desires, and opinions.

Time went on; the Straightpaths came and departed as if the house were theirs, not Mr. D'Evelyn's. Mrs. St. George resolutely maintained her post beside her friend's sick-bed; a gentleman arrayed in black, but who was not a clergyman, knocked once or twice for admission; two doctors prescribed, pocketed guineas for several weeks, then shook their heads as they left the room—in one word, it was finally decided that Mrs. D'Evelyn was dying.

Once thoroughly satisfied on this point, her husband changed his tactics. He knew that on Wednesday evenings

the Rev. Mr. Straightpath had social or other meetings, where his presence and that of his wife was imperatively necessary; so he walked over one morning to Grosvenor Square, asked to see Dr. St. George, laid the state of the affair before that estimable man, told him he thought matters had progressed quite far enough, and finished by civilly requesting him to "take his wife home," with which entreaty the LL.D. complied that very afternoon, driving over for her in the carriage once before mentioned in this story.

When Mr. Straightpath, after he had dismissed his class conversational or completely religious, hurried across to Mr. D'Evelyn's abode, just, as he remarked, "to see how it fares with our precious one," the servant informed him that Mrs. D'Evelyn was asleep, and could not be disturbed.

Having no idea that anything was wrong, he slept soundly upon this information, and being much engaged the following morning, did not go over to inquire how the attorney's lady had passed the night, until Mrs. St. George, who had somehow escaped the vigilance of her husband, came to learn if their dear friend were still alive.

Mr. Straightpath was horror-stricken to find the fortress had been vacated to the enemy; he rushed to Mr. D'Evelyn's, and insisted on seeing the patient.

"He wished to give her spiritual consolation," he said, and so made his way past the servant, and up the stairs, encountering the solicitor at the top of the first flight.

"Where are you going, sir?" demanded that gentleman.

"To comfort a departing soul; to strengthen a dear sister in a saving faith; to fulfil my part as a minister—an unworthy one, I confess with sorrow—of the Gospel," he answered, in a canting tone.

"Speak plainly," said Mr. D'Evelyn. "What do you want?" His face was very pale, but apparently he was not angry.

"I desire a few minutes' interview with your sainted wife;

I wish to assist her prayers, to comfort her sinking soul, to confirm her in the truth, and——"

"You come too late, reverend sir," said Mr. D'Evelyn, sarcastically, though solemnly: "she has passed to a land where not even your voice can reach her ear; where at last she knows what truth really means."

"What!" gasped Mr. Straightpath. "I do not quite understand."

"She is dead, sir," replied the attorney; and as, notwithstanding this information, the clergyman seemed still inclined to proceed to the apartment of her who had been his wife—his trial—Mr. D'Evelyn quietly took him by the arm, led him to the hall door, and after gravely bowing Mr. Straightpath out, closed it after him, and once more reascended the stairs.

He could not feel glad she was dead: it was a thing to feel quietly thankful for in after years, perhaps—an hourly vexation, a daily burden, and source of annoyance and irritation removed—but death is so solemn a thing to contemplate, that perhaps no one ever felt really rejoiced to see a fellow-creature expire: certainly Mr. D'Evelyn did not, even though it removed one who had, during the whole period of their married life, been a perpetual source of irritation and distress. He had borne and suffered as best he might; often been cross, frequently provoking, always sarcastic; yet, on the whole, he had not been unkind. He was not a man of so sensitive a constitution, that little careless and annoying words were likely to be perpetually recurring to his memory; indeed, he thought he had performed his part towards the deceased twice as well as she had hers towards him, and, perhaps, in this conclusion he was quite correct; and if he did not, like Mr. Simpkins, spoken of in the old song, feel it so great a pleasure to follow his wife to the grave, that he entreated his neighbours not to make a labour of the business,

neither most assuredly did he at all pretend he considered it a pain.

For he was free at length—free, if not to make the good thing of life he might once have done, at least to enjoy, or, at all events, to endure it better; and now, moreover, he was rich, rich without an encumbrance; at liberty to come and go as he pleased; to stay in or walk out, without endless questions, and frowns, and reproaches, and altercations; free to choose his own friends, his own associates, his own amusements and employments; free to discard her friends, never to be tormented with her common-mindedness and provoking whims and oddities more.

Mr. Straightpath speedily produced a last will and testament of Millicent D'Evelyn, bequeathing to him (in trust) the whole of her property, &c.

Mr. D'Evelyn exhibited a later last will and testament, devising all she died possessed of to her beloved husband, and so forth.

Mr. Straightpath grew white with rage, and threatened a lawsuit; Mr. D'Evelyn laughed him to scorn, and advised him not to attempt fighting an attorney with his own weapons.

Mr. Straightpath talked of the voice of the Church, and said that he could get the best advice for a mere nominal sum. Mr. D'Evelyn mentioned the opinion of the world, and remarked, he had his law for nothing.

The clergyman calmed down and spoke of a compromise; the solicitor requested him to leave his office.

The former asserted undue influence had been exerted over the weakened intellect of a dying saint; the latter stated it to be his opinion that the clergyman was a "canting hypocrite;" upon which Mr. Straightpath spoke of an action for slander, and Mr. D'Evelyn advised him to bring it, and proceeded to say as his time was valuable, and as he

was not in the least likely to be converted, and had, moreover, no present intention of dying, he thought the reverend gentleman he had the pleasure of addressing would find himself less in the way, and more comfortable altogether in the paved streets than in his office; having finished which speech he opened the door for Mr. Straightpath, and begged he would do him the favour of going away.

Muttering certain denunciatory passages of Scripture relative to evildoers, and backsliders, and sinful men in general, which he applied to Mr. D'Evelyn in particular, and growling out warnings which sounded wonderfully like maledictions, the man of peace obeyed; and whilst his wife and he mourned concerning the "savoury viands" which had been wasted, and the solicitor who had been fee'd in vain, and the prize that had slipped from their grasp, Mr. D'Evelyn smiled to think how he had outmanœuvred them all, and to consider how pleasant and goodly an inheritance had at length fallen to his lot. True, he would not have married the widow of Samuel Snooks, Esq., again, and gone through such another course of misery for any earthly consideration; but that was all past now: he was free, she was dead, and she had left him all the money for the sake of which he had originally married her. It was a considerable time after her death before he thoroughly comprehended how great a relief that event was; but as months rolled by, he began to look quite a different man; in short, he was almost, in spite of the weary past, happy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REGINALD'S NEW RESOLUTION.

TIME passed on, days grew into weeks, weeks into months, and months finally into years, and still the Irebys, Constance and Marian, were in London. Some events had occurred during the period to affect their present and future lot; there had been changes and anxieties, and one sad parting. Let us speak of all in order as they came.

Somehow, by dint of argument, or remonstrance, or supplication, or urgent representation, Mr. D'Evelyn, who really felt kindly disposed towards the brother and sisters of his client, managed to wring an offer out of Mr. Delavelle Ireby to settle fifty pounds a year on Marian.

The solicitor had striven to obtain double the amount, but on this point Mr. Ireby was resolute. "He had not the means," he said, "and had a family of his own to provide for."

Reginald gnashed his teeth in silent agony as he said he agreed to the proposal. Constance felt both relieved and mortified at the arrangement. Marian replied she had rather not accept it. "You or Reginald will always take charge of me," she remarked: "better to be under no compliment to him of any kind." But the brother turned away sick at heart on hearing these words, and a crowd of contending emotions almost choked his utterance as he declared she must take it. It was the first time he had ever assented to any proposition which ran counter to his desires; it was a bitter draught to swallow, but he felt he had brought the punishment on himself. It was his first and last act of voluntary penance for the misery he had entailed on his young sister; but he was so little accustomed to any self-

denial, to any setting aside of his own personal feelings and intentions, that the sacrifice struck him as being something wonderful, something so dreadful, that he only marvelled how he contrived to live through it.

Poor Reginald! He was in a wretched state of mind. He had no employment, or prospect of employment; he felt it was absolutely necessary for him to do something, but he did not very clearly see what that something was to be. The affair of the vault had been revealed to the world; and even in London, where most people are not, as in smaller places, perpetually haunted with the ghosts of their misdeeds or misfortunes, even in London that one unfortunate mistake dogged his every step, kept him out of a situation, caused him to be regarded as a sort of pariah amongst younger brothers, and made his life a perpetual source of irritation, anger, and—repentance? No. From his heart he repented his conduct towards Marian: the thought of her, pale, suffering, so resigned, so gentle, so loving, so forgiving, was ever in his mind. He went out, even when he had no business, and wandered aimless and miserable through the streets rather than remain at home and contemplate the ruin he had wrought. But each day he felt his hatred for Delavelle increase; in precise proportion as the consciousness of his own impotence became more fully revealed to him, so his desire for vengeance grew stronger. Two fierce and, as he employed them, equally useless passions distracted his peace. He found it impossible to rest either by day or night. The former he spent in seeking for occupation which he never found, the latter in tossing restlessly, whilst memories of disappointed hopes, and useless desires, and ungratified revenge, and a terrible accident kept sentinel watch by his bedside, and refused, even when wearied and exhausted he fell into troubled slumbers, to permit him to forget.

At length, when his once bright eyes had become sunken

and lustreless, when his cheeks were wan and hollow, his frame wasted, when his step had become languid and his existence a burden, he told Constance he could bear it no longer; go abroad he must.

"Where?" she asked.

"Why, anywhere: to some land far away, the farther away the better; to any place out of England; to any remote country, where no one had ever previously heard of him, where he might hope to live in peace. Anywhere—only to be away—to put the broad ocean between him and home—home! he had none now, save the world!

"Let him go," said Mr. Martock, when Constance informed him of Reginald's desire: "good here he will never do; in another country he may perhaps get on better; at all events he must have the chance. I believe the best thing he could have thought of is this scheme of leaving England. He will die if he remain here—let him go."

It was at that most trying period of the year, which our old, quaint, imaginative poets have christened the "Merrie monthe of Maie," that Reginald Ireby announced his intention of quitting his native land; and about four weeks afterwards, on one of those rare fine evenings to which June occasionally, though seldom, treats us, Mr. Delavelle Ireby entertained a few select friends at dinner.

It had been a close, warm day, and as the sun travelled farther and farther towards the west, a slight haze arose from the ground, and crept silently, darkly after him.

The dining-room windows of Briarton looked towards the east, and as trees and evergreens threw, even at noon, a shade into the apartment, it happened that, whilst it was still day in the other apartments of the house, a semi-twilight reigned in the one wherein the guests sat conversing over their wine.

The casements had been flung open to admit whatever air might be stirring the foliage of the shrubs and trees with-

out; the leaves and branches waved slowly and solemnly as a faint breeze passed gently through them, and were reflected back from the mirrors in the dining-room. Suddenly Delavelle Ireby's gaze became intently riveted on a large glass, placed almost immediately opposite his chair, with such an expression of dread and alarm, that all the persons assembled around the table turned their eyes simultaneously in the same direction; as they did so, admidst the leaves and branches a pale, haggard, revengeful face was observed gazing for a second on the group, then it passed quickly along the polished surface of the mirror, and seemed finally to disappear among the folds of the heavy crimson draperies that partially concealed the gilt frame from view.

The whole thing occupied so short a time, the apparition was so unexpected, so inexplicable, that at the first it affected the beholders with a sensation of awe, like that which, in former times, necromancers produced by causing the forms of the loved and lost, of the dead or absent, to flit across Venetian mirrors, and it was some moments ere one of the guests started up in pursuit of the fugitive.

"Stay!" exclaimed Delavelle, trembling so violently that his tongue almost refused its office; "it—it was nothing; never mind, it is of no consequence; we can close the shutters." And as he rang the bell for candles, and ordered the servant who answered it to shut the windows, and then to see if any one were lurking about the grounds, his visitors, greatly marvelling, resumed their seats.

Delavelle Ireby alluded no further to the incident. He had seen what none of his guests had observed—a hand grasping a pistol, and a wild fierce gaze directed towards him. He had caught the first glimpse of the face, and shudderingly recognized it.

Diligent search was made in arbours where the clematis and the wild rose twined; in deep dark plantations, where

the sun at noonday never penetrated to the dank earth beneath; in woods of fir, and beech, and oak; in shrubberies, where the velvet shumach, the snowberry, the polished laurel, and the glistening holly grew side by side; in garden, lawn, pleasure-ground; but no fugitive, or footprints, or sign of human tread was to be noticed. The frightened hare sprang from her form as the rustling of boughs and the sound of voices announced the approach of her enemy, man; the whirling bat struck in its rapid flight the faces of the searchers; the owl, from her high perch on the bough of a decayed oak, looked solemnly down upon them; the birds rose from the covers with a loud whirring noise like that of a strong breeze —everything met their view, and was startled by their advent, save that alone of which they were in search—a human being. And when the visitors had departed, and Delavelle Ireby listened to the report of his servants in utter silence, he tried to believe it was imagination, and strove to shake off the impression the occurrence had made upon him as he might the memory of some horrible dream.

Far away from the house, in a shady dell, the sides of which were clothed with the yellow gorse and the graceful broom, where the leaves of June's fair perishable children, the wild roses of summer, strewed the earth with a covering of red and white and pink, and where the hawthorn still perfumed the air of night; where the blackbird poured forth his harmonious song in the quiet twilight hour, above which, in the clear blue sky of a summer's morning, the lark thrilled out her glad, ringing carol to the sun; where the turf was smooth and soft and velvety, where the dew fell thick and lay long—a man reclined and wept in silence under the starless canopy of heaven; for he was leaving all—a home where he had once been happy; a land that now contained no rest or peace for him; two girls, whose stay and support he should have been, yet whose hopes of happiness he had destroyed;

the habitation of his youth, the country of his birth, the dreams of his first struggling experience; his plans of ultimate aggrandizement and revenge; his last vague, sinful idea of vengeance; his hopes, his pride, his affections, his hates: to the objects of all of these he was saying farewell, as he imagined, for ever. Feeling and memory, unfortunately, he carried with him wherever he went; but he "had chosen" blindly and darkly in former times, and this was the result—unquenched hatred, ungratified revenge, blasted affections, hopes that he had not succeeded in making realities, a vision of happiness which was never to be his.

Almost ere he had begun life he was sick, and tired, and weary of it, of himself, of every one. He had started to gain a prize he could not win, and which would not have given him pleasure even had he gained it. At six-and-twenty years of age, after all his resolves, his schemes, his plans, his projects; after spurning from him friends, counsel, assistance; after making himself a slave to his own angry passions; after striving and struggling intensely for a mere chimera, a bubble of his unsteady brain; after nights of watching and days of toil; after exertion, suffering, a few hours of agonized repentance—days, years of rage and irritation—this was the end. With an unchanged heart, with no better resolves, with no higher aims, he was about saying farewell to his native land, and leaving it now, as he had left his home nearly four years previously—a doomed man. And he seemed to find it as impossible to escape from the doom he had voluntarily chosen as if the inspired voice of some of the prophets of old had declared that from the period of his leaving his first home till he found rest in his last one, he was to be a wanderer, unsatisfied and wretched, upon the face of the earth. On the damp grass he lay, his burning brow pressed against the cool dewy turf; his hair wet, and lank, and long, pushed back off his forehead. Men talk

but little of their misery, but Reginald Ireby and He "who pitieth even whilst He chastiseth," knew the fierce bitter agony that seemed to scorch the soul of the younger brother within him. He had resisted temptation, or it had been permitted to pass away from him; but still the fire of ungratified revenge, of intense hate, burned in his heart: not the silence of night had power to hush his thoughts to repose; not the refreshing dew which fell alike on the wild flower at his side, and on the weary, world-stained man, who once, an innocent infant, had reposed tranquilly in his mother's arms; not the unsatisfactory termination of all his projects; not the feeling of utter misery and intense loneliness which oppressed him, had power to make him pause and think of the inevitable end of the course he was pursuing. Not the thousand signs and tokens of God's perpetual care and love which surrounded him; not a sensation of thankfulness at having escaped the commission of a great crime, could soften his wayward heart even for a moment, and induce him to turn for comfort and support to Him who alone can bestow both on His fallen creatures.

Ere the faintest tinge of red coloured the eastern sky, Reginald Ireby arose to leave that shady dell, those bright wild flowers, the beautiful and graceful parasites, the emerald turf, the birds, the trees, the shrubs, to go out a wanderer and an alien from his native land, never, as he sadly hoped, to see it again.

When the morning dawned, and the sun looked down from amidst clouds of purple and gold on the quiet spot where so much of human misery had lately been, it seemed so serene and beautiful and bright, that no one could have imagined aught of sin had ever penetrated there; but down amongst the thick underwood at the bottom of the slope lay a weapon which Reginald had with impotent rage cast from his hand; it lay there for years; it survived many a one spoken of in

this tale; it was found there, rusty and decayed, long after the death of the man whose life it had been intended to destroy.

And two days afterwards Delavelle Ireby learnt, with a thrill of exultation, that Reginald had sailed in the fine vessel "St. Lawrence," twelve hundred tons burden, for Buenos Ayres.

He smiled as he heard the news; but women's tears had fallen as they bade "good-bye" to him who had once been their father's pride, their mother's firstborn; her darling, who had experienced so cruel a reverse, who had been treated so harshly, so unjustly.

Faults they knew he had in abundance; follies they were well aware he had committed; evil thoughts they feared he had entertained; evil desires they were conscious he had cherished; much unhappiness he had caused to them and to himself; but all was forgiven, all was forgotten: there was not a feeling save that of love and pity in their hearts; not a sensation save that of anguish and sympathy in their breasts for him, as they repeated, over and over again, the word "Good-bye;" as they saw him leave them, to seek a strange land; to go amongst unknown people; to dwell amidst unfamiliar faces; as they murmured, in sad, choking accents, to each other, "Poor Reginald! our poor dear boy!"

With something almost like hope, he set foot on the deck of the vessel that was to carry him far away from England; and he crossed the great deep, and commenced life again—on a similar principle as that with which he had started at home—in a new country; and he found, as years went by, that happiness is not a thing of place; that America possesses no patent right of conferring peace any more than Europe; that the man who cannot succeed in one town is not very likely to make a fortune in another; that change of scene produced no change in his desires and sentiments;

that new faces could not banish the thoughts and countenances of the old from memory. Whithersoever he went, disappointment met him; he carried the seeds of sorrow in his heart, and in whatever spot he settled, he planted them for his own especial use and trial.

From town to town he wandered; tried one thing after another; failed in all he attempted; and at length, weary and discouraged, having by different stages reached North America, he sought the far West, and located himself there —a most unpromising settler. And in the trackless forests of that mighty land, in the north, south, east, and west, in town or country, Reginald Ireby, young, strong, handsome, with a tolerable share of ability, with no present pressing cares or any great future anxieties, failed to discover what his sister Marian found in narrow London lodgings, amidst the glare, and noise, and fog, and dust of a crowded city, with a shattered constitution, and after long trial and disappointment, and much endurance and great efforts—peace of mind—that "peace which the world cannot give, which passeth all understanding."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARIAN'S DOUBTS.

During the course of all the years alluded to, Constance Ireby never heard her sister murmur but once; and that one little sigh of regret was so low and faint, it seemed to have escaped unwittingly from her lips, hardly to have been uttered by them.

It was one quiet Christmas eve, when the moon looked calmly down upon a mighty city, and the placid stars came forth one by one, and ranged themselves in their appointed order—beautiful gems glittering in the coronet of night. Constance drew back the curtains, that she and Marian might look on the sky, the only portion of lovely nature which ever now met their gaze; and for long the eyes of the two girls rested there, wandering from planet to planet, from star to star; faintly discerning some of the more remote, to which no power or art of man could enable him to travel, even in thousands of years, but to which the thoughts of his soul can wing their flight in a second of time.

Oh! wonderful gift from the Most High! which enables us, surrounded by houses and streets, and bricks and mortar, to close our eyes, and for a moment, in imagination, find ourselves on the free mountain-side, the fresh breeze fanning our temples, the heather beneath our feet, the clear blue sky above, the broad-spreading lake below. Oh! wondrous and inexplicable power! which can traverse the broad ocean, bring distant scenes vividly before us, recall words spoken in other lands, raise the dead from their graves for a brief instant, transform the middle-aged man into a child, picture the absent, cheer or sadden the present, preserve the memory of the past. Strange power! which raises a smile to our lips sometimes at the saddest tale; which brings tears to our eyes at the sound of the gayest music, at the sight of the brightest, sweetest smile;—gift which, like every other with which we have been endowed, can either be turned to good or evil account, to make ourselves and others happier, or to render life a sad and bitter scene;—gift that sometimes increases our happiness, often adds to our pain; mingled so much of joy and of sorrow, that where the one ends and the other begins in the composition of the mighty talisman no human being can tell; that lies dormant for a time, and starts

to life none can explain why or wherefore; which carries our imaginations from land to land, from one individual to another, from one period of existence to some portion so remote, that our dim eyes cannot detect the electric wire of communication along which the thought of our mind flashed so rapidly from point to point, that we were unconscious it had even left the one till we discovered it had reached the other.

From the bright stars glittering on high, to a scene on which they were looking peacefully down, Marian Ireby's thoughts travelled in a moment—from the firmament to earth; and whilst her body remained in a small room in London, her mental vision rested on trees, fields, flowers, lawns, pleasure-grounds. There was the sound of dancing below; the notes of the music floated up from the well-lighted apartments beneath—where the young, the glad-hearted, and the beautiful were keeping their Christmas Eve in content and happiness—to the silent, quiet chamber, into which the moon looked coldly, and the silver stars shone tranquilly, in which two girls spent a few sad hours in mournful memories of the past.

There were but a few planks, a carpet, a ceiling, betwixt the one group and the other; scarce ten feet of what we call "space" divided the happy and the sorrowful—those whose lives were, for so far, unclouded; those whose entire existence seemed to have been blasted: there were smiles below, tears above; for bright eyes shone brighter at the sound of the music; fair faces looked lovelier as they beamed with pleasure. In the one room, there was joy in the present, joyful anticipation of the future; in the other, there was the sorrowful remembrance of a happier past.

For, as the notes of a well-remembered melody fell on her ear, Marian's thoughts reverted to an apartment filled with guests, brilliant with light, radiant with flowers, pervaded

with perfumes. She saw, as in a dream, two girls: the one stately and handsome, the other fair and shrinking, mingling with the rest; roses nestled amidst the tresses of the one, white camellias contrasted with the dark hair of the other: theirs was a bright future then, and this was its mournful reality. Marian's constancy forsook her, as the vision of the past and the consciousness of the present swept through her mind, and she exclaimed in a tremulous whisper—

"Connie, in some future happy time you will be able to dance again,—I never shall; you will be able to wander through the bright green fields, and over the hills, and beside the murmuring river: this is all in store for you; but for me,—oh! never, never more!" and she burst into a flood of regretful tears, so wild and unexpected, that her sister could only weep with her, and press her hand in sympathy, and say, "Marian, dear Marian!"

At length the younger of the two bethought her of the good resolves she had made, of the holy intentions she had prayed to be enabled to carry into action; and pushing back the curls from her pure white forehead, and looking with her meek sweet face up into the skies, she said in a resolute voice, "Forgive me, Connie. I did not mean to speak so hopelessly; it was but a passing feeling, which is gone now. Whatever is, is best. I can from my innermost heart, dear sister, say, 'God's will be done.'"

And from that hour no one ever heard Marian Ireby repine. He who seeth in secret may have known that the sweet eyes were sometimes dim with tears, that the human heart would be rebellious, and fret and lament because of the sorrow that had fallen upon it. But He listened to the humble petition of His creature for strength to endure, for patience to submit; He heard and surely granted a merciful answer to the request; for no one who ever looked in her face dreamed that she was unhappy.

The part allotted to Constance Ireby in life was to endure, perhaps, also; but chiefly to exert whatever talents she might have been gifted with for her own good and for that of her invalid sister. For about eighteen months after Reginald quitted his native land the two remained together, mutually supporting and cheering each other. It was at the expiration of that period, a lady, one foggy afternoon, called to see Miss Ireby on business.

She wished to know if Miss Ireby would take the entire charge of two children, aged respectively eleven and thirteen, and manage a somewhat limited establishment when the mistress was from home. Salary no object—ten or twenty, or even thirty pounds, more or less, per annum was a matter of very secondary importance, her chief desire being to secure a lady in whom she could place such entire confidence as to be able to leave her house, her affairs, and her children solely in her hands without anxiety. She knew all about Miss Ireby's family, had a sort of acquaintance with Mrs. Ashton, announced herself as Mrs. Cranefort, residing in Cadogan Place, and waited for the young lady's reply.

"Was it likely to be a permanent engagement?" Constance inquired.

Mrs. Cranefort earnestly hoped so.

Miss Ireby said she would consider the proposal. Her greatest objection was leaving her sister; but perhaps comfortable lodgings in the neighbourhood might be secured.

"She can have a room in my house," said Mrs. Cranefort; "it is too large for my family. If that be your sole objection, I trust you will now consider it as removed."

Constance, however, declined to give a positive answer for a few days, and hinted that, as Mrs. Cranefort was unknown to her——

"True," interposed the visitor, "you ought to have references; it is all correct—quite necessary." And she good-

naturedly wrote down a few names of persons who, as she said, were her dearest friends, and, after pressing for a final answer as soon as possible, took her leave.

"Well, Marian, what do you say?"

"Well, Constance, what do you think?"

Such were the almost simultaneous questions that escaped the lips of the sisters.

"I think," said Constance, "the offer a desirable one."

"I do not like Mrs. Cranefort," said the younger.

There was a long pause: then Constance, looking intently in her sister's face, said, "If you only could imagine how wearied I am of my present life!"

"Do you think you would be happier with this lady?" demanded Marian.

"I do," was the reply; "the duties would not be very heavy; I should have to mix with fewer people, and consequently meet with a less number of annoyances; the present anxiety concerning money matters would be almost entirely removed; and last, though assuredly not least, the remuneration would be very liberal."

"In short, Connie, you wish to accept the proposal; and if, on inquiry, you find it is really what she says, I do not see why you should not go to Cadogan Place, excepting that I do not like her."

"I cannot imagine why you have conceived such a distaste for Mrs. Cranefort at a first interview," said Constance, with some annoyance.

"Nor can I," replied her sister; "but so it is. She looks amiable, seems frank, is ladylike and handsome, but——"

"But what, Marian?"

"But I do not feel as if I could trust her," was the reply. "However, I may be quite mistaken in my opinion: remember it is only an opinion; so form your plans without reference to my prejudices."

Once again Constance paused before she answered.

"I will think about it, as I promised; but suppose, Marian,—remember I am only supposing,—that all other things suited, should you have any objection to accept her offer likewise, and come with me? we could always be together then, even more than is possible at present. Of course," she added, seeing a flush overspreading Marian's wan cheek —"of course, in that case I would only take one-half of the remuneration she now offers, and it would make me so much happier if you were always near at hand to cheer, counsel, and aid me. I was so much more comfortable at Mrs. Ashton's than I have ever been since, the anxiety was so much less; I had no fear of what a day might bring forth then; and if Mrs. Cranefort proved at all like her——"

"Connie," said Marian, with a smile, "your imagination is running away with your reason; there are very few in the world like Mrs. Ashton, and we have no grounds for fancying this lady will at all resemble that kind friend."

"I wish," remarked her sister, "she had not been on the Continent; I would have written to ask her about this Mrs. Cranefort."

"Can you not inquire from these persons to whom she has referred you?" asked Marian.

"Yes, but——"

"But will their recommendation not prove satisfactory to you?"

"It may; all I dread is, it may not satisfy you."

"Why should it not? I wish you to act in this matter precisely as you like, or, rather, as you think most prudent: wherever you are I am content to be; all I desire is, that you should be happy; and if you are of opinion that an arrangement such as the one now proposed would make you so, why, try it by all means. It is not an engagement to which you are tied, remember; it can be broken at any time."

If Constance Ireby had not been so worn out with incessant teaching and wretched remuneration, she might have looked with more doubting eyes on the lady whom Marian said she did not feel it would be quite possible to trust.

Why she arrived at that conclusion it were difficult to tell, for Mrs. Cranefort seemed kind and amiable; in fact, perhaps the sole fault which the invalid could detect in her was that, if anything, her manner bordered too closely on plausibility to suit Marian's ideas of sincerity; but then, as Constance mentally argued, Marian, having been brought up in the country, and mixing little in society, had seen nothing of the world, and consequently could not be expected to understand the character of worldly persons. Even the elder sister thought Mrs. Cranefort belonged to that class.

However, let their visitor be what she might, Constance Ireby came to the determination that if it were at all a promising engagement she would accept it, for she had long been of opinion that, although their condition was capable of amendment, it could scarcely grow more painful and disagreeable than she felt it had become; and she thought Marian and she would be so happy together when Mrs. Cranefort was from home. Further, she felt it would be a burden taken from her heart to have the monetary pressure, which oppressed her, in some degree removed; and so she fell asleep in the middle of fancying that Cadogan Place might, perhaps, prove both to herself and Marian as happy a home as Ashton Court had been in former days to her. In former days; ah! how very remote they now appeared—those days ere the bright castle she had built in the sky of hope was destroyed by the touch of reality, ere Reginald had so utterly wrecked his own life and that of his younger sister.

When persons are particularly anxious to leave any one abode and proceed to another they can always find abundance of good and sufficient reasons to justify their doing so;

and, indeed, the result of the inquiries Constance Ireby made might have induced a much more cautious individual to relinquish a disagreeable certainty for a bright possibility; to exchange the Strand for Cadogan Place, and Mrs. Allman's dreary "furnished apartments" for comfortable rooms in Mrs. Cranefort's house.

And, after a month's trial of her new quarters and that lady's temper, Marian Ireby thankfully confessed she had been mistaken; that their new friend was kindness itself; that Constance, in a word, had been right, and she wrong.

They felt almost happy, and quite settled: Marian in her quiet room, talking to the children, or else reading and thinking in solitude; whilst Constance took the entire management of household affairs. The sisters had many hours of intercourse. Mrs. Cranefort was never out of temper, never impatient, never wearisome, always generous and considerate to the feelings of others; in fact, since the period of Reginald's departure, they had not been so free from harass and annoyance. The accounts they received from him were, if not cheering, at least not quite so unsatisfactory as formerly; in fact, he was tired of grumbling, and tried to write home in a more contented spirit than had previously been his habit. Matters seemed, on the whole, to be looking a little brighter with the three divided ones.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WIDOW BARNES'S GOOD FORTUNE.

Mr. Delavelle Ireby, with a face like an undertaker's at a funeral, undertook to condole with Mr. D'Evelyn on the death of his wife; but the solicitor replying to the touching

reflections of the owner of Briarton in a cheerful and frank manner, Mr. Delavelle Ireby speedily changed the mournful expression he had thought it becoming and proper to assume on the occasion, for one which might have suited a bridal or a banquet; and with a countenance radiant as an undertaker's after an interment, when things have "gone off to his satisfaction," congratulated the descendant of the ancient Somersetshire D'Evelyns with sincere joy upon the "melancholy event."

"I know," said the solicitor, "that most people would think I ought to say I felt sorry, whether I did or not: these things are what are called the 'decencies of society,' the 'etiquettes of ordinary life;' but I have no intention of assuming a grief I do not feel, and so I tell you frankly that although I cannot say I am *glad* my wife is dead, I certainly am not grieved."

"Particularly as she has devised and bequeathed—" suggested Mr. Ireby.

"To me, her beloved husband, what renders me independent of fate and fortune for the remainder of my natural life," continued Mr. D'Evelyn. "Now, this is what people call a total absence of feeling,—I do not see it in that light. I married her for money, and she married me, I suppose, because she liked me; for I possessed nothing but my sorrows when she changed the beautiful name of Snooks for that of D'Evelyn. She thought me not worth the price she bid; I soon concluded she was a dear purchase at any sum; and under these circumstances, it could not be supposed our life was a very happy one; but I treated her far more kindly than she deserved; I proposed terms of peace more than once, and she rejected all my overtures with disdain. I permitted her to do precisely what she pleased,—to have card parties, and tea and gossiping, and, finally, praying parties; to scold and order and manage and annoy, just as best suited

her fancy; latterly, I never asked her for money; I submitted to be preached at in my own house; I made it over to a 'Christian minister,' as he termed himself, his wife, and a Mrs. St. George, up to the very day before Mrs. D'Evelyn's death; permitted them to laud each other and denounce me by turns; to make wills, fee doctors, to weep and wail, and cant and scheme, until I saw the last hour approaching; until, in fact, I perceived that everything was becoming equally painful to my wife; that a new religion had no power to allay the horrors of impending dissolution; that the making of wills had become a necessity, and had ceased to be an amusement: then I got rid of all those whose presence had formerly excited and pleased her, sent for a clergyman of the faith in which she had been baptized, confirmed, married, lived, till these 'shining lights' led her into new paths; got her to confess I was one of the best of husbands, and express a desire to leave me something after she was gone, —something to remember her by, as if I were ever likely to forget her!—called in the assistance of a professional friend; had the will properly signed, sealed, and delivered; received her last sigh, and felt very much awe-stricken, or something like it, indeed I did at the time; and came downstairs just as Mr. Straightpath was making the best of his way upstairs.

"This is the whole story—of a marriage; of a married life —of its termination; and yet people think I ought to look melancholy and weep about the 'dear departed.'"

"You have crape on your hat a foot deep," remarked Mr. Delavelle Ireby, with a sneer: he was not sorry to sneer a little at the man who had so frequently indulged in sarcasm at his own expense; "you have crape on your hat a foot deep; surely that ought to satisfy the most fastidious."

"No," replied Mr. D'Evelyn, "there is a mourning of manner which is considered quite as essential as black gloves and a crape hatband; and provided these two, manner and

dress I mean, be attended to, the deeper mourning of the heart is never thought of. Yet the poor who mourn their relatives in ragged coats and coloured dresses sorrow more perhaps, than we do."

"And perhaps with greater reason," said Mr. Ireby, "for interest cannot destroy affection in a rank where love is all they have to bestow during life, where love is completely severed by death. Money sets man against man, destroys the affection of husband and wife, causes enmities to arise betwixt parents and children, coolness to spring up amongst brothers and sisters: it is the root of all evil."

"And of all good," added Mr. D'Evelyn; "at least, so I think, and so Mr. O'Shaughnessy says. And *àpropos* of him, do you know of any one who would take a troublesome Irishman off my hands?"

"Death, perhaps, who has so lately stood your friend," suggested his client.

"No. You may have heard of the physician who, after much research, practical experiments, wearing disappointments, and ceaseless toil, declared it to be his opinion that the 'Irish could not be killed.' Mr. O'Shaughnessy bewails that national peculiarity almost as incessantly as his paucity of cash; and, indeed, I am almost beginning to wish he would either die, marry, or go where he, it appears, has set his heart on going, viz., to America."

"Why do you not pay his passage out?" asked Mr. Ireby.

"Because he would work his passage home," replied the solicitor. "He is lodging now with a widow (she was about your family at one time, I think), Mrs. Barnes. I told him to marry her, but he says she is 'too low' for an Irish gentleman, and besides, has not money enough."

Mr. D'Evelyn pretended not to notice the sudden pallor that overspread his visitor's cheek as he carelessly uttered the foregoing sentence; but he saw it none the less clearly,

and set the incident down in a sort of mental note-book, from which he extracted and worked out difficult problems at his leisure; and so he stirred the fire, and tapped his desk abstractedly with his fingers, as though he were considering what he should do with Mr. O'Shaughnessy, or rather what Mr. O'Shaughnessy would do with himself, whilst in reality he was intently noticing the countenance of his client, and wondering what remark that gentleman would make next.

"What is he fit for?" asked Mr. Ireby at last.

"For anything he chooses," responded the solicitor.

"Yes, but what does he choose?"

"To amuse himself," replied Mr. D'Evelyn; "to sit out the farce at a theatre, to attend races and regattas, to frequent all public places of amusement so long as he has a shilling in his pocket, and when he has not, to stroll along the most fashionable thoroughfares, stare at the shop windows and the passers-by; and whenever he cannot gratify one or all of these propensities, he chooses to grumble and lament his fate, and curse his destiny, and talk of his country and his wrongs."

"That is what he chooses to do," remarked Mr. Ireby; "now, then, what is he fit for?"

"If he would only devote himself to anything, he could do almost everything. He could, he says, have got on well in his own green island, only he sacrificed his prospects to his politics. He might have done wonders here, he imagines, if he had not been born on the other side of the Channel. If his own account is to be implicitly credited, he ought to have been Governor-General of India, but he missed the appointment owing to the jealousy of some persons possessed of influence at home. He then said he could make a fortune in London if the vigour and the hope of former years had stayed with him; but such not being the case, and being,

moreover, afflicted with the dread that after he had spent years in amassing money he might die before he had commenced to enjoy it, he has taken the pleasure here first, and having got all the happiness he thinks he can out of England, wishes to fling her overboard and start for America—the land of hope—the land of promise—the land of liberty—the land of plenty! If he would only cease grumbling, give up brandy and water, and attend to business, he and I could get on very well indeed; but as matters stand I am quite sick of him, and believe I shall pay his passage to the other side, if it were only to be rid of the encumbrance for half-a-dozen months."

"Could you not get rid of it by any other means?" asked Mr. Ireby.

"No," was the answer. "That is the worst of old friends, you see: so long as they want anything, they stick to a man like leeches, and then, simply because they have tormented him for years, instead of (like new acquaintances, whom one can throw off at any moment) merely for a few months, he is expected to go on and on, everlastingly tugging them up the hill, and if at the end he do not succeed in placing them on its summit, he is called ungrateful, cold-hearted, forgetful of former times, old associations, and so forth. But why need I weary you with this tirade? You cannot help me; therefore I will drop the subject."

"No, I do not see how I can help you," agreed Mr. Ireby. "I am in want of a sort of steward or agent, certainly, but on the whole I should not feel inclined to instal Mr. O'Shaughnessy in that post. I have no doubt you will be able to help yourself better out of this difficulty than any other person could do it for you, or perhaps fortune may step in and assist you."

Mr. D'Evelyn smiled as he bade Mr. Ireby good morning, but it was a perplexed smile; and he sat down to work out

the mental problem he had propounded for his own consideration; but, like a sum in algebra, he found it had to be commenced on supposition; and he had to go so often over the figures to "find the error," that not having a solution appended to the end of the riddle, he was, at length, reluctantly compelled to give up his endeavour.

"I never," said he, impatiently, "could unravel a conundrum, though I am a lawyer; but there is a mystery, and, please Heaven! I will get to the bottom of it some day. Life is long, and truth will out—and does right triumph? Not always on this side the grave, I fear; but pshaw! I am not a clergyman, or even a shining light. We are the instruments only; the result is not for us to see." And so concluding, Mr. D'Evelyn pushed aside a pile of papers he had been looking over when Mr. Ireby interrupted his musings, and went home, it being now between five and six o'clock, to a dinner which, though not composed of herbs, was assuredly partaken of in peace.

And let those who rail at their fellows because few tears are dropped over the resting-places of some who made no green oases either for themselves or others in the desert of existence, strive so to live, that whether regretted or not, they shall at least deserve to be lamented when they have passed from earth for ever.

One of our popular authors affirms that whatever face men turn on the world it reflects back to them; which would seem to imply that whatever fate is meted out to us here below, whether good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate, is precisely according to our deserts: a doctrine which, if carried into practice, would make the successful rogue a nobler and better character than the broken-hearted saint. But, though the above may not be strictly correct with regard to life, it is true with reference to ninety-nine out of the hundred in death; and if a man be not mourned for and regretted by

his family after his decease, no matter how high he has stood in the estimation of his neighbours, we may feel pretty certain there was something wrong at home—some lamentable discrepancy between his demeanour in public and his conduct in private life. And accordingly, though Mr. Thomas D'Evelyn asserted he ought, in conformity with the ideas of society, to have bemoaned the loss of his wife in pathetic language, he did not do so; and neither grief nor joy having power to destroy his appetite, he ate his dinner in peace on the day Mr. Delavelle Ireby favoured him with his visit, and for many succeeding days; and after about seven suns had risen and set, he found himself *tête-à-tête* with Daniel O'Shaughnessy, Esq., from King's County, Ireland.

"D'Evelyn," said that gentleman, who was pretty nearly tipsy.

"Well?" observed his friend, as Mr. O'Shaughnessy paused for a reply.

"She has got some money left her!"

"She! Mrs. Barnes do you mean? Who has died just at the proper time?"

"An old miserly uncle in Cumberland: is it not lucky?"

"Very; and you are going to marry this woman?"

"Yes. She says she is of good family, but reduced; that they, that is, her ancestors, were once very well off in the land; that she is now very poor."

"That last clause is perfectly true, at all events; at least was so until this uncle died. Well, O'Shaughnessy, go on; I am all impatience."

"Her husband was an officer——"

"Good heavens!" murmured Mr. D'Evelyn to his wine-glass.

"Who was killed in North America, whilst gallantly heading his regiment," proceeded the Irishman, without heeding, or indeed hearing, his friend's ejaculation.

"For mercy's sake," exclaimed the attorney, "spare me her pedigree and misfortunes; let her husband rest in peace. Is she going out with you to America to see his grave, or does she purpose remaining here?"

"If you do not let me tell my story my own way I won't tell it at all," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy, sulkily; which remark induced Mr. D'Evelyn to promise that he would listen patiently, provided his friend would discard all ideality either of his own or Mrs. Barnes from the narrative, and the Irishman consenting to this arrangement, proceeded to inform the solicitor how he had earnestly entreated the widow, for "his sake," to remain in England ("to the end that you might get rid of the money as speedily as possible," suggested Mr. Evelyn); but she declared that she would go to America, and that if Mr. O'Shaughnessy did not like to come there also for "her sake," why, he might remain where he was, as she had no idea of staying in England to please him.

"So," concluded the disinterested suitor, "we are to be married and sail for the land of promise forthwith."

"And you really have determined," commented the other, "to follow my example, and marry a rich widow?"

Mr. O'Shaughnessy bit his lip, but retorted, "I shall take warning by your example, and keep my wife in order; besides, I have made a more prudent selection. Mrs. Barnes is a very different sort of woman from the late Mrs. D'Evelyn, and I am not precisely like you, my good fellow."

"Of course you mean that remark as disparaging to yourself and complimentary to me? thank you," said Mr. D'Evelyn. "Now, when is the wedding to take place?"

"Immediately."

"I wish you would introduce me."

"With all my heart."

And accordingly, one afternoon, three days before Mr. O'Shaughnessy married his landlady, Mr. D'Evelyn had a

conversation with the worthy woman concerning her affairs, and her uncle, and the legacy; which dialogue did not, if the truth must be told, tend to raise her character for veracity much, if at all, in the estimation of the solicitor. He found her *au fait* in all the more direct portions of her relation's history, and so long as she stuck to these she told the story glibly enough; but the moment she could be induced to turn from the highway of her narrative into any of the by-paths into which the lawyer delighted to conduct her, she found it impossible to get on, and floundered back through the mire of fiction to the main road as best she might.

More convinced than ever of the existence of a mystery, Mr. D'Evelyn retraced his steps to his own home, endeavouring to work out the problem he had frequently wearied himself with on former occasions; but still the algebraic supposition never seemed to him to become clearly equal to anything, and if a glimmering of truth did sometimes flit across his brain, it never remained there for a sufficient length of time to enable him to see precisely how matters stood; and whilst still in this state of uncertainty, he bade farewell to O'Shaughnessy, and saw him depart, as the Irishman pathetically hinted, to "leave his bones on a foreign shore."

If Mr. O'Shaughnessy had any other aim or object in visiting America save to accomplish this extrordinary purpose, it was not confessed by him: he stated he was going there to become an alien from Old England and the land of his birth, and to die. One might have supposed, to have heard him conversing on the subject after his departure was really a settled affair, that some insuperable obstacle did actually exist to prevent his giving up the ghost on this side of the Atlantic, and that he was compelled to travel thither in order to shake off his mortal coil.

"Good-bye, O'Shaughnessy," said his friend; "I shall see you back here again before long."

"Never, my dear fellow, never," was the reply; "you won't see even the corpse of your old companion, Daniel O'Shaughnessy." And so they shook hands and parted, and Mr. D'Evelyn felt something like sorrow at seeing him go out of his office for the last time. He had tormented him beyond measure, but still the lawyer cherished a sort of affection for him; he said, "he liked O'Shaughnessy as he liked the perfume of meadow-sweet; not that he cared much for either now, but because he had been fond of both when he was young, and almost happy."

So half our loves and hates proceed from association more than reason. We admire one melody, and cannot endure the sound of another, according to the scenes and people they severally recall to memory. We feel ourselves drawn to some because their faces remind us of those dearly loved in former days, and turn with aversion from others for no better cause than that they resemble persons who have proved sources of unhappiness to us in our passage through life. We dislike the scent of some particular flower, and like another, because pain is connected in our minds with the former, and pleasure with the latter; places, people, houses, flowers, music, scenery, we cherish or banish the memory of all of these according to the circumstances under which we first became acquainted with them, or the incidents that are connected in our minds with the sight or the sound or the recollection of each and all. And we call ourselves reasoning animals, and yet are as powerless to shake off the magic spell of association, as if fancy were fit to rule our actions through life.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN OLD LOVER IN A NEW LIGHT.

MASTER NICHOLAS CRANEFORT, or, as his mamma affectionately called him, "Nicksy darling," was as bold a little boy as ever crumbled cake over a drawing-room carpet, or spilt coffee on a lady's white satin dress. He never was out of mischief, from the first of January to the thirty-first of December; the falls and knocks and bruises he had received would have killed any ordinary child, but then, as his mamma asserted to visitors, he was an extraordinary child.

If he had contented himself with rolling downstairs, getting on the leads, burning, cutting, and otherwise maiming his whole body generally, and his hands and legs in particular; with falling into the Serpentine, and being brought home in a state of stupefaction; with climbing to the topmost branches of the old trees in the parks, and coming down head-foremost when he had accomplished his descent about half-way; with laughing at the beadle in church, and getting admonished either to behave better or retire; with setting trains of gunpowder in different parts of the house, and firing them under the feet of the domestics and his sister; with tearing his clothes to ribbons; making faces from the windows of his mamma's drawing-room at passers-by when they looked up at him; tormenting the cat till she, in self-defence, made his face into a sort of map of Europe, ready to have the countries written down in each compartment; had he, I say, contented himself with any one of these performances, or indeed with all of them (for boys will be boys at some time, or else not turn out brave, daring men), he might have been tolerated; but he had such a fancy for acquiring and distributing information, for startling people with unexpected pieces

of intelligence, for jumping at sudden and unwarrantable conclusions, and for bringing secrets to light which their possessors fondly fancied had been buried far beyond his ken, that the lad was really what everybody affirmed him to be—a regular pest and plague.

"Miss Marian Ireby," said he to that young lady one morning, about three months after he had made her acquaintance, "I want to know something."

"What is it?" she asked.

"What do you think of my mamma?"

"Of your mamma!" echoed Marian.

"Yes; I am sure I speak plainly enough," he retorted. "I don't lisp like my sister Margaret, nor drawl like my mamma, nor clip my words like Miss Constance Ireby. Now, what do you think of her?"

"That she is uncommonly kind and thoughtful, ladylike and amiable," replied Marian.

"Oh, you do, do you?" said the boy, a quizzical expression just gathering about the corners of his mouth. "Well, and what more?"

"Nothing," was the response.

"Did you ever happen to tell a fib?" he inquired.

"I hope not," said Marian, simply. "Why?"

"Because I thought that was one," he retorted. "*She* very often does."

"My dear Nicholas!" remonstrated the young lady.

"How very quickly you knew whom I meant!" he replied, with a hideous contortion; "but, *dear Nicholas* or no, it is all the same to me, and I repeat, she very often does say what is not true."

"You are a very naughty boy," said Marian, reprovingly, "to tell such stories. Remember she is your mother."

"Did I ever say she was not?" he answered. "I will let you into a secret, if you promise not to repeat it to your sister."

"I do not want to hear any secrets," responded Marian; "because you get to know things in a very improper way and you should not be encouraged to repeat all you hear: it is a very bad habit, Nicholas."

The boy sulked for a few moments after this rebuke, but then, fixing his eyes on Marian with an expression of intense amusement, he said——

"Were you ever in love?"

He had propounded a similar question to Constance about half an hour previously, and insisted so pertinaciously on having an answer, that, I regret to state, Miss Ireby lost her temper and boxed his ears, a feat which by no means aided her cause, and only resulted in his laughing at her.

The query had brought a flush into the cheek of the elder sister, and it now caused a mist to obscure the eyes of the younger as she frankly replied—

"Suppose I have been, what then?"

"Why, then," he said in a quieter tone, and looking affectionately and, for him, almost pityingly in her face, "you can sympathize with my mamma."

"You really either must leave the room, Nicholas," replied Marian, "or cease talking about your mamma and her affairs. I cannot listen to anything more on the subject."

"No," he retorted, "I suppose not when you have got the secret from me; but now I have something more to say."

"I cannot hear it," remarked Marian.

"Well, you can put your fingers in your ears, and I will talk to pussy." But just as he was settling himself with this intent, the door opened, and Mrs. Cranefort entered.

So far from being in the least degree disconcerted at her appearance, the boy jumped up, ran towards her, and whispered to her that if she would give him half-a-crown and buy him a few things he wanted, he would tell her a great piece of fun some time, which piece of fun was the little scene that

had occurred between himself and Miss Ireby, and which he subsequently described to his parent with many additions and improvements, of which he was the sole author; for if there were anything which excelled the brilliancy and sharpness of his eyes, it was the brilliancy and keenness of his imagination; and Constance frequently declared to Marian that "what that child would ultimately become she was afraid to think;" to which the other charitably replied, "He would improve as he grew older," and that "the half of it was a defect in his education."

Be this as it may, he got the half-crown from his mother, and immediately went out to spend it, leaving Mrs. Cranefort and Marian *tête-à-tête*, a circumstance which had not occurred for some time previously, as Mrs. Cranefort had been spending a month at Brighton, and had only returned on the preceding evening. Marian thought she looked but little the better for her trip; but Mrs. Cranefort said she never felt so well in her life, and, taking a seat close beside the sofa of the invalid, commenced talking to her in a hurried, nervous manner.

At first she spoke of Brighton; asked Marian if she had ever been there; mentioned the names of several persons whom she had met at the seaside; spoke of old friendships renewed, of new acquaintances formed; then, when she had apparently exhausted all her topics of conversation, she paused, and after a few minutes' silence, in a tone which was meant to be careless, but which sounded strangely agitated—

"Did not a gentleman called Montray reside somewhere near you at Briarton?"

A faint colour rose in Marian's face as she answered—

"Yes; Mr. Francis Montray, nephew to Lord Bether."

"Ah! exactly; that is the person I mean. Did you know him intimately?"

"Yes," was the reply; "we knew him very well at one time."

"And what kind of person is he?" demanded Mrs. Cranefort. "Pardon me, my question is not prompted by mere curiosity."

"My poor father thought very highly of him," returned Marian, somewhat evasively.

"And—and—excuse me, but was there not at one time an engagement, or attachment, or something of that kind, between your sister and Mr. Montray?"

"It was broken off," returned Marian in a decided tone, "years ago; some family circumstances caused a disagreement. Not one of us has seen him for a great length of time." Then, after a pause, she added, "As, of course, any allusion to Briarton recalls much that is painful to me, I am sure you will not ask me to enter into a full detail of the affair. All I have to say is, that nothing that I am aware of exists at present, or has existed for years, that need in the slightest degree prevent his engaging himself to any other person." And as she paused she looked earnestly in Mrs. Cranefort's face to see if she were satisfied; but the point, it appeared, on which that lady desired information had not yet been reached.

"Pray," she said, at length, as if she considered a plain, straightforward question would be the best and safest, and, perhaps, not more suspicious than any other; "pray, is this Mr. Montray rich?"

"I believe so," was Marian's curt rejoinder.

"Do you happen to know the exact amount of his income?" she pursued.

And once again Marian Ireby replied with a provokingly short "I do not."

"Is it not expected that Lord Bether will leave him a considerable property?"

"I believe," said Marian, simply, "that he is the next heir to the estates as well as the title."

And as this confirmed what Mrs. Cranefort had already heard, and as she thought the young girl was determined to tell as little as she could, she rose to leave her; but as she reached the door she said—

"I am interested in this gentleman on account of a near relative of mine: this must plead my apology for any apparent curiosity."

And Marian answering, "She felt quite certain that Mrs. Cranefort had some sufficient reason for making the inquiries," that lady quitted the room, greatly pleased with the result of the conversation.

In the quiet evening hour Marian repeated all she had learnt to Constance; but the latter had been already enlightened by Master Nicholas, who, with a mouth filled with raspberry tart, and a heart rendered communicative in consequence of the various dainties he had purchased with the half-crown, informed her, in one sentence, that his mamma was going to be married to a Mr. Montray, who was as rich as an old Jew, and only a step from the peerage, and who, moreover, would be at Cadogan Place in a few days, "When," the young gentleman added, "I shall see what I think of him."

But the boy chanced to be out when his future relative called, and was consequently unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions concerning him. Mrs. Cranefort and Constance alone occupied the drawing-room at the time Mr. Montray entered it.

The first meeting after years! What a strange sensation it produces! What a rush of overpowering memories, of old sorrows, of former joys, of changed feelings, of estranged affections, of the loved and the dead, the cold-hearted or the absent! What a crowd of all those sensations that make

or mar the happiness of life can be conjured into existence by the sight of a face that was once familiar unto us, but which latterly has been merely as a sad memory or a half-forgotten dream!

The first meeting, after years, with the once light-hearted schoolfellow, the generous, enthusiastic friend, the brothers and sisters who were nurtured under the same rooftree, oh, what a bitter meeting it always proves! What changes have taken place, what disappointments have crushed the leaves of the bright plant Hope! What visions have been dispelled, what sorrows encountered, what injuries sustained, what wrongs inflicted, what a world of knowledge, and suffering, and weariness has dawned on the heart since then!

Since when?

Since we said farewell to those who have now returned; since in grief or in anger, in tears or displeasure, we parted from them; since the days when we imagined life must prove a pleasant scene to us—a scene of great joy and little pain. Ah! the man who grasps the hand of an early friend after the lapse of years has come to the comprehension of bitter and solemn realities since then.

How few there are who stand the test of that second acquaintance, if it may be so termed. The faces that seemed to the eye of memory radiant with angelic sweetness turn out to be made of mere earthly clay after all; the generous hearts have grown selfish; those whom we once deemed perfect appear to our colder observations mere common mortals, like ourselves; the good are not so good, the bad are worse than we had fancied; some of the truth has been brushed off by constant contact with the world; wit and talent may remain, but the former has lost a portion of its sparkle; the latter has been traded with and made a means of livelihood since the days when gold was deemed the least good in life.

Both are changed; both have struggled, toiled, lost something by the way; the fairy frost-work has vanished before the sun of experience; the dew and the mists and the beautiful clouds have been absorbed, and nothing remains but the withering heat and the suffocating dust of reality. It is possible to worship a former idol unseen, to deck it with imaginary perfections, to imagine it lovely and holy and good, to cling to it through evil report, and cherish it in the inmost recesses of our heart; but to continue to admire it after its utter worthlessness has been exhibited to view must either be deemed the height of human folly or human blindness. And this is, perhaps, the reason that so many, both of men and women, cling with absurd tenacity to the recollection of their "first love," till the individual on whom their affections centred in early life is exhibited to the eye of their maturer judgment, when they at once renounce their allegiance, and turn with a sigh of pain or a look of contempt from one whose presence they once fancied capable of converting earth into a terrestrial Paradise.

"I fell in love at seventeen with a girl two years older than myself, and imagined she was an angel—beautiful, fascinating, amiable. Affairs did not go smoothly. We parted; but half-a-dozen years afterwards I prepared myself to meet her with a sort of tremor. We met; and, bless my soul! how ugly I thought her! I have never recovered from the shock since."

Such was the candid confession once made to the author, and if others would only speak out their feelings as plainly, might not most tell the same tale concerning love and friendship? Ideality confers beauty, "distance lends enchantment" to it; but time destroys the illusion—time and a nearer view.

And Constance Ireby had, as she said, loved Francis Montray fervently: she had continued to do so in spite of

his desertion of her; in spite of absence, in spite of reason; and possibly had they never met again, she might have continued to cherish an attachment for him till the day of her death; but the moment she saw him a change came over her:—this was not, could not be the man she had once cared for: she had given her heart to a shadow, fancying it was a substance, and this was the miserable reality!

"I believe you knew Miss Ireby formerly," said Mrs. Cranefort, as if to dispense with the formality of an introduction.

"I had that pleasure," returned he, with a slight degree of embarrassment, extending his hand, which Constance accepted; and thus they met after a lapse of years,—they who had once been so much to each other!

Somehow, as she looked at him, Marian's words recurred to the mind of her sister, and perhaps she did feel, even whilst a sort of sick faintness gathered about her heart, a sensation of thankfulness at having escaped becoming the wife of that man. Truly so she might, for time had not improved Mr. Montray: he was altered in reality as well as to Constance's imagination, or perhaps it were more correct to say he had developed, for characters never alter but merely expand, and send forth good or evil shoots, as the case may be, according to the nature of each individual after his kind.

A day or two later, when Constance entered the drawing-room, she found him standing there alone; he was waiting for Mrs. Cranefort, who had not yet made her appearance.

"Connie," he said, after an awkward pause.

"It is so long since we were friends, Mr. Montray," she responded, "that I shall feel obliged by your considering me in the light of a total stranger, and addressing me as such."

"Well, Miss Ireby," he amended, a flush of irritation mantling even to his temples; "pray have you known Mrs. Cranefort long?"

"About three months," replied Constance.

"And do you like her?"

"Very much indeed," she answered.

"That seems a fine boy—her son Nicholas, I mean," he continued.

"He is a fine boy," agreed Constance.

"And the daughter, Margaret, is an uncommonly pretty girl."

"Very pretty," assented his listener.

"And—and—they seem to live in good style," he said.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Mrs. Cranefort has a handsome jointure."

Constance bowed her head in the affirmative.

"Did she ever tell you its amount?"

"I never asked her," she retorted.

"Did she never tell you?" he persisted.

"She did not. And now, Mr. Montray, having remained quite long enough to be cross-questioned concerning Mrs. Cranefort's domestic concerns, I——"

But the leave-taking she proposed was suspended for the moment by the appearance of the lady whom everybody knew or suspected Mr. Montray was about to marry, for as yet the affair had been kept a kind of understood secret, of which every one was cognizant, and yet which was not openly mentioned.

And this was Mr. Montray, whom Mrs. Cranefort was about to endow with her worldly goods, and whom Constance Ireby had once loved.

"This is he," thought the girl, in the bitterness of her soul, "whom I imagined endowed with all human perfections—this is he!"

Yes, it was indeed: this sordid, calculating being was the man whom Constance had so nearly married, to whom she had clung in idea, notwithstanding all the past, because affection had palliated if it could not excuse his conduct;

for whose sake she had rejected the attachment of a true honest heart—this was he!

If there be but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, surely it is only a shade which separates love from hatred in the hearts of human beings. We all remember that line of Byron's—

"But oh! 't is delicious to feel how I hate you."

But whether or not Constance Ireby felt it a pleasure to despise her former *financé* it is impossible exactly to say; one thing is certain, that being, like Reginald, somewhat vehement, particularly in her aversions, she conceived a contempt, almost amounting to hatred, of Mr. Montray, and seriously consulted her sister as to whether they were justified in concealing their knowledge of his real character from Mrs. Cranefort.

"We will not interfere, Constance," said Marian, who had been favoured with a few more of Master Nicksy's instructive conversations. "If I am not mistaken, she is perfectly competent to take care of her own interests. We know what *he* is, so let them marry if they like: it is not an affair in which we, of all people, can or ought to meddle."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEW MISFORTUNES.

"My dear," said Mrs. Cranefort to Constance, one morning as she sat in *déshabille* sipping a cup of coffee in her dressing-room, "my dear, I suppose you have suspected for some time past that—that——"

The lady here produced a pocket-handkerchief, and Constance said "Yes." The door between the bed and dressing-room was partly ajar, and beholding Nicksy's black eyes peering into the room, and perceiving moreover the extraordinary gestures of delight and secresy he was making, she was constrained to raise her handkerchief also to her face to hide a smile, when Mrs. Cranefort, having recovered from her emotion, removed hers from her eyes and continued:

"I was married, I may say, from my cradle, Miss Ireby: choice I had none; I was told to accept Mr. Cranefort for my husband; a child in experience, I did so; never reflecting, and indeed not knowing, that an ill-assorted union is worse, infinitely worse, than death. What I suffered during the years of my wedded life no human being may ever know. I loathed the wealth and pomp and luxury which had caused all my misery. Death broke the hated yoke, and I resolved never, never to tie myself again: offers the most eligible could not tempt me to alter that determination; but at length I met Mr. Montray, and discovered what until then was unsuspected even by me, that I possessed a heart capable of loving fondly, passionately, devotedly."

The tone in which these words were uttered was perhaps too artificial to strike the listener as perfectly sincere; but Constance went through the scene, as the hope of the house of Cranefort subsequently assured her, "all right;" and the lady, after a pause devoted to coffee and emotion, proceeded:

"But still, my dear, liberty is so sweet a thing to those who once have felt the galling chains of slavery, that I doubt if even affection, esteem, or admiration could ever of themselves have induced me to change my name; no, there were reasons more powerful than attachment, more potent than love, which decided my choice—maternal solicitude, maternal devotion."

Once again she relapsed into silence. Nicksy declared she "took the journey by stages;" and if so, coffee formed the refreshment at each stopping-place: finding, however, that Constance made no remark, she resumed:

"My anxiety for my darling children, particularly with regard to Nicksy, has rendered this step necessary. I feel the boy a heavy charge, a weighty responsibility; I have no authority over him; he requires a masculine understanding to direct his future steps, to curb his temper, to soften the obstinacy of his disposition. Now, Mr. Montray will supply the place of guardian to him, I know, efficiently; I feel confident, kindly. This it is which has decided me: nothing but maternal fondness could have induced me to sacrifice my liberty and become the wife of even Francis Montray." And she raised her eyes appealingly to Constance's face, as if claiming sympathy and approbation for this surpassing abnegation of self.

Whether Miss Ireby might or might not have accorded it to her, it is impossible to say, for a voice at her side exclaiming—"I say, Mar, you needn't sacrifice yourself for me, you know. I have got on very well with you, and can live without Mr. Montray's help"—so astonished the worthy lady, so completely put to flight all her sentimental and maternal dreams, that she struck Master Nicksy a rapid blow on the cheek, and rejoining—

"You naughty, tiresome boy! how often am I to tell you not to come stealing into my dressing-room, and to give up saying 'Mar,' and not to interfere with me?" pushed him unceremoniously out of the apartment, and shut and locked the door after him.

Constance could not repress a smile, even though Mrs. Cranefort murmured, in a plaintive tone, as she resumed her seat, the words, "You see."—The sudden transition from romance to reality, from Mr. Montray to "Nicksy darling," was

too abrupt not to have moved the risible muscles of any one.

"That boy has caused me sleepless nights and anxious days," resumed the lady; "he is becoming perfectly unmanageable. Do you not consider, my dear Miss Ireby, I am only discharging a sacred duty towards my children in uniting myself to such an estimable man as Mr. Montray?"

Constance vaguely replied, "that no doubt Mrs. Cranefort must have deliberated well over the matter ere arriving at a determination."

"And you know," continued Mrs. Cranefort, "this event need make no difference in our relative positions. I trust you will continue to reside with me as heretofore."

"I fear," said Constance, "that will be impossible; but I shall never forget your thoughtful kindness to me."

"But why not?" persisted the lady. "Why should you leave me? do you not imagine I shall value you as much when my name is Montray as I do at present?"

"There are many reasons," ventured Constance, "which induce me to think it would be better, both for my sister and myself, to return to a sort of home of our own."

Mrs. Cranefort remained silent for a few minutes, then said—

"But at least you will not think of leaving till I return. I want you to take care of the children and the house, and to confer all sorts of obligations on me during my temporary absence—promise me you will remain for at least a short time after my marriage." And she so entreated Constance, and so tormented and implored her to say "Yes," that, finally, she agreed to stay for a short period; that was, till Mrs. Cranefort should return from the Continent, whither she and Mr. Montray purposed going immediately after the solemnization of matrimony had been read in St. George's Church.

"So you are to take charge of me?" exclaimed Nicholas

to Constance Ireby, as she was proceeding to her sister's room. "What a jolly time we shall have, to be sure!"

"When your mamma is from home," returned the young lady, "I mean to bring you into better order than you have ever been yet."

"Into training for my new papa," said he; "just try it—that's all; and as for him——"

He did not finish the sentence, but clenched his hand in a significant and menacing manner, which clearly indicated his feelings and intentions towards his stepfather-elect.

"I shall make you over to my sister, Nicholas," replied Constance; "as you will not attend to me, perhaps she may be able to effect some improvement."

"I wish you just would, then," he retorted. "I tell you what it is—shall I tell you what I think?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I think Miss Marian is a hundred times better than you, or any one else I ever saw in my life before;" which confession of faith so surprised and gratified Constance, that she kissed the boy, and asked whether he would be good, if it were only to please her dear sister; whereupon he relapsed once again, and said, "Perhaps he might, or perhaps he might not, just as he felt inclined;" but taking Constance's hand in his, and squeezing it, to see if he could "twist her fingers to make her cross," he accompanied her to the quiet room which Marian never left.

Poor Marian! if darkness did sometimes seem to her to dwell there, her sweet, gentle smile made a sort of sunshine in the hearts of all who entered that apartment. Even Nicholas seemed subdued when by her side, and Constance had a vague kind of impression that if he could only have been confined there for a couple or so of months, he might have come forth at the expiration of that time an almost perfect character. As the experiment was never tried, it is, of course

impossible to determine whether or not it might have proved eventually successful.

We have all heard and believed in the truth of Shakespeare's assertion relative to the course of true love; but still Mrs. Cranefort and Mr. Montray termed their *affaire de cœur* a perfectly disinterested one, and the course thereof was as smooth and placid as that of the Thames at Richmond on a summer's day. There were no quarrels, no crosses, no vexatious interferences, no forgetting of licenses, no disputes concerning settlements—all went merry as a marriage bell, and finally the marriage bell itself, in the shape of the silvery and harmonious tones of the Honourable and Rev. Godfrey Marshall, announced that Mrs. Cranefort had become Mrs. Montray, and that Francis Montray, Esq., had, after long deliberation, wedded a rich widow for love——

Of what?—he himself best knew. He said it was of her, and according to the beautiful legal myth of considering a prisoner innocent till he is found guilty, we must believe Mr. Montray spoke the truth till we clearly ascertain it to have been a falsehood.

The wedding breakfast was over; the happy pair had departed; the guests were gone. Nicholas, who was making sad havoc amongst the jellies and ices, declared there was "a prospect of peace at last," when Constance's eye fell on a passage in the newspaper of that morning—a newspaper at which Mrs. Cranefort had never glanced.

It announced the union of Lord Bether to Selina, Dowager Countess of Colchester. Nicholas was so busy with the relics of the banquet that he never noticed the expression which flitted over Miss Ireby's face as she perused the startling piece of intelligence. It had passed away ere she informed the boy he would make himself ill if he persisted in eating such quantities of blancmange.

Nicholas exhorted her to leave him alone, if it were only for that one day, in honour of his mamma's wedding; and Constance did let him alone, the consequence of which was that he was laid up for so long, and had so serious a fit of indisposition, that for almost an entire month he became tractable.

During the whole of this time Constance only heard once from Mrs. Montray, and that once was almost immediately after her arrival in Paris, from whence she wrote to say what a safe and pleasant journey they had fortunately enjoyed, and to inquire concerning her darling children, and to know how dear Miss Marian was, and to hope that Miss Ireby would not over-exert herself.

Constance became uneasy, she scarcely knew why, at this protracted silence. She tried to persuade herself that they were travelling from place to place, that the letters had miscarried, that Mrs. Montray expected to return so speedily that she deferred writing what could be said by word of mouth in a few days; but as weeks rolled by and grew into months, as letters accumulated on the lady's escritoire, as inquiries concerning the period of her return became ceaseless, as two knocks (the dun's well-known rap) were to be heard from early morning till late at night resounding through the silent hall of Mrs. Montray's abode in Cadogan Place, Constance's missives completely changed their character, and she wrote to the newly-wedded widow, post after post, imploring her return, and imperatively demanding either money to settle with the creditors, or instructions how to proceed until Mr. and Mrs. Montray should arrive in England and attend to their affairs themselves.

"Miss Ireby," said Nicholas, entering the breakfast-room one morning with a face of utter woe and blank astonishment, "there are a couple of men in the hall."

It was no astounding piece of news, certainly, Constance

thought, and so informed the boy; for when for weeks had there not been men in the hall?

"Yes, but these are a different sort," he answered. "It's a pretty piece of business; they are seizing for rent, they say."

"Why, I thought your mamma had purchased the lease of this house," exclaimed Constance.

"She said so, did she?" demanded Nicholas, with a very rueful smile; "but—but—I say, Miss Ireby—they have told me we shall have to go—and—and—what are Maggie and I to do?"

He was almost crying, and seemed so subdued, so terrified, and stricken with fear, that Constance waited for a moment to console him before she went to ascertain the truth of his assertion for herself. Margaret Cranefort had sought Marian in her distress; and whilst her brother poured forth incoherent expressions of despair in the ear of the elder sister, she was weeping bitterly by the side of the younger.

Nicholas had, for once in his life, spoken the bare truth without exaggeration; there were bailiffs in the hall, and ere long facts startling, alarming, and scarcely credible, were communicated to Constance Ireby. The house had never been bought; the rent had never been paid; the furniture, the plate, the mirrors had been hired; tradesmen had supplied goods on credit; milliners had sent dresses of satin, and silk, and velvet, bonnets of the most fashionable description, veils of Limerick and flounces of Mechlin lace to the rich Mrs. Cranefort, without the least fear in reference to their safety.

The *trousseau* had been procured by promises; the jewellers were to be paid when Mrs. Montray returned; the confectioners had not received one shilling by way of exchange for all the ices and cakes and rarities wherein Master Nicholas Cranefort had revelled; the servants had con-

sented to wait a little longer for their wages: from the landlord down to the greengrocer, every one complained of having been deluded and juggled and cheated. Mrs. Cranefort's establishment, her wealth, her grandeur, had been, in fact, nothing but a mighty bubble, which the bailiffs blew into worse than nothingness the moment they crossed the threshold of that luxuriously furnished house.

It was well for the girls that at this juncture Mr. Martock was near at hand to assist and to enable them to get clear of the wreck; but it was not in their natures to refuse to assist two of the unfortunate passengers, who must otherwise have perished.

"You 'll take Maggie and me with you, won't you, Miss Ireby?" said Nicholas, clinging to Constance's dress, raising his large dark eyes entreatingly to her face; and, even while she soothingly answered him, she could not avoid asking herself, for the hundredth time, whom it was the lad so strongly resembled that she frequently felt as if she had seen his face before, in other times, in some far-distant place.

"What are we to do with the children, Marian?" she demanded.

The invalid looked almost reproachfully in her sister's face, as she returned, "We cannot leave them to the mercies of the world; they must come home with us."

And once again the old lodgings off the Strand received the sisters, but this time they brought with them an addition of anxious cares and heavier burdens than had ever entered there before; for Constance had now taken on herself the responsibility of almost entirely providing for four instead of two; and Nicholas Cranefort stuck to her like her shadow; he seemed haunted by a perpetual dread that she would cast him adrift, and, whenever he saw her look anxious, he would come close up to her, and exclaim, "You won't send me away? I will be good, indeed I will," in so

imploring a tone that it well-nigh brought tears to the eyes of the girl, who remembered that they, too, had been left homeless, that they, too, had found how cold and dreary an abiding-place the wide earth generally proves.

"I have an uncle some place," said the boy, one evening as he sat looking into the fire and at Constance by turns; "I have an uncle some place."

"Have you?" returned she. "How do you know?"

"About eighteen months since," he replied, "just before we came to London, when mamma was very ill and very unhappy about something, a gentleman called one day and stayed for hours with her. I met him on the stairs, and he stopped me, and put his hand on my head, and asked me some questions. He said, 'My boy,' in a kind voice, and seemed vexed—why, I don't know. Mamma cried a great deal, for there was something said about Maggie and me leaving her; and I heard her say, 'Dear George;' and at last he went away. And two or three days afterwards I asked her who he was, and she said, 'Your good, kind uncle, Nicholas: I hope some day you will grow to be as like him in character as you are in face;' and then she began to cry again."

"You never heard his name?" inquired Constance, as she looked at the boy by the faint flickering light of the fire,—"you never heard his name?"

"No; and remember, you are not to tell this, for I don't want to see him again—I want to stay with you."

And Constance assured him he should remain if he desired it, providing he would be very quiet and not disturb Marian. Marian, who was now so ill that her sister's heart was filled with dread concerning her; Marian, whom Margaret Cranefort tended with ceaseless affection; Marian, who seemed to the eyes of the wayward boy something so like an angel, that, even whilst he clung to Constance for comfort and sup-

port, he felt admiration and wonder mingling with the love he had for the poor suffering invalid. And thus a year passed by—a year of great anxiety and much endurance; but at length Marian slowly rallied, and her sister thought and said that so long as she lived "no future trouble had power to overwhelm her."

Once a letter, containing a twenty-pound note, reached the hands of the elder sister. A few lines traced on the cover in irregular characters met her eye:

"Heaven bless you for your kindness to my dear children; do not fear I will ultimately provide for them; but I have been lamentably deceived. The enclosed is all I can send at present.

"Yours till death,

"E. M."

And this sum, small though it was, proved a great help to the limited income of the Irebys; for few have ever made a competence or earned more than a bare livelihood by tuition. Reginald could not assist them, and, beyond the fifty pounds yearly, Delavelle would not. But somehow Constance managed to make both ends meet, and, after twelve months' toil and anxiety, found herself able to face a new year with a still undaunted heart, and a conscience free from the overwhelming presence of that mighty bugbear—debt.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN THE FAR WEST.

UNDER the shade of the forests of the "far West" Reginald Ireby had at length pitched his solitary tent—he who had been brought up as heir expectant to a fine estate; who had

mingled with the best families in his native county; who had for years never known what it was to have a desire ungratified, a wish unfulfilled, wandered by day through paths which no European foot had ever previously traversed, his companion the stately Indian, some fleet-footed and sagacious dog, or his own thoughts; and at night he laid him down to sleep on skins and leaves—he who had once been the beloved son of a proud father, the hope of an ancient race, the idol of his fond mother.

Oh! if she could have seen him now, would she ever have recognized in that emaciated man, whose eyes gleamed wildly and fitfully forth from beneath his dark matted hair, whose dress was careless and disorderly, whose step was languid and voice harsh and discordant, the once graceful, healthy child, in whom her soul delighted, as she beheld him bounding with a light free step over the spreading lawns and grounds of Briarton? If one-half of the parents who dream that their children will work their way to eminence, or amass great wealth, or enjoy much happiness, or make a name which shall be handed down to an admiring posterity, or grow up holy and good and virtuous men, only lived to see the result; to see their hopes crushed, their visions dispelled, their expectations disappointed; how many more broken, grief-stricken hearts there would be on this side the grave than at present take refuge in it! Well was it for the proud, beautiful lady that she died ere her son's future was wrecked; well was it she had gone to that other land where there can be no looking back on this; else, methinks, it might (at least to our earthly comprehension) shadow the bliss of Paradise itself to be cognizant of the tragedies, and the crimes, and the sad dramas, and the many wrongs that are daily, momentarily enacted and inflicted by man upon the surface of this thrice beautiful, thrice sinful, ever-changing earth of ours.

To hunt by day, to follow the wild deer and the buffalo into the wildest, rudest regions; to nestle by silent lakes where the water-fowl loved to dwell; to bring down with unerring shot the strange birds of that distant land; to waken echoes in the silent woods, and listen to them reverberating from rock to rock, and at length die away in inaccessible caves; to speak to the red Indian, in whose nature there seemed to dwell a proud, wayward spirit, rebellious and revengeful and haughty as his own, of his far-distant home, of his wrongs, of his hatreds; to make friends amongst the wild men of the woods, who, he felt, had been, like himself, despoiled of their inheritance; to listen to their horrible tales of wrongs and enmities, and massacres and vengeance; to win their love by the instrumentality of those very traits that had procured him ill-will, and censure, and the world's scorn at home—these were his employments, his pleasures, or rather his substitutes for pleasure, his devices for lulling memory to sleep, for forgetting his sorrows. And when at night, weary and exhausted, he lay down on his wretched pallet and fell into deep slumber, he dreamt of his childhood, of his sisters, of the abode of his youth, of hopes realized, of times ere the disease of discord destroyed his peace of mind; he dreamed, and was happy for a brief period, but then awoke to find himself thousands of miles from England, with something more terrible than the ocean, more frightful than dreary forests preventing his return; and, starting from his couch, he commenced once again his savage existence, a wanderer and an outcast from the country of his birth.

Sometimes he thought of making a home and a fortune for himself in the New World, as he had once talked of winning wealth and recovering Briarton in the Old; but it was only a thought: energy for good, if he ever possessed it, had completely deserted him; sorrow and a kind of re-

morse had stricken him with the blighting palsy of despair. If ever a sensation of hope for the future, if ever an idea of bettering his condition crossed his mind, the vision of a pale suffering face of a fair gentle girl, whose life he had blasted, whose whole existence he had rendered one of pain and endurance, flitting before his eyes, caused him to plunge once again amongst the thickest jungles of that mighty continent, and seek forgetfulness where he never completely found it.

Occasionally he determined to make a clearing for himself; sow the land with waving corn; send produce to the nearest station; gather a little money and remit it home to his sisters; and, filled with this idea, he would take an axe and commence hacking away at some mighty monarch of the forest, which had been sown, taken root, and grown, and flourished, and spread forth overshadowing branches wherein the fowls of the air took refuge—in solitude.

But when, after hours of toil, he saw the small progress he made, and thought of all the labour and time and patience it would require to clear even a limited space, of the burnings and ploughings, and diggings and plantings that would be needful to be performed ere a moderate result could be anticipated, his heart died within him. "No!" he exclaimed; "I will go with the Indians and hunt; get skins and trade, and send the proceeds to those poor girls." And so he left the half-hewn-down tree to be turned to a better use by some future wanderer, either for fuel, or to assist in the construction of a temporary home; left all, struck his tent, and departed with the red men to their earthly hunting-grounds.

But, like them, Reginald lacked the commercial or money-making element: he could ride the wildest horses, face the fiercest animals, trap the wariest prey, bring down the fleetest antelope; he could endure pain, fatigue, privation without a murmur; swim the broadest river; climb the giddiest

peak; feared not the strongest man; but make money he could not: the traders cheated him; the half-domesticated Indians, who seem in their intercourse with the whites to acquire nothing of civilization but its vices, robbed him; the red men of the woods suffered with him—they exchanged their skins for beads and tobacco and fire-water; he for remuneration almost as valueless.

He had no genius for barter; he detested the very name of trade; but he liked the wild, free forest life as well as he could like any life which might now be his; and so, although he never gained money by his hunting expeditions, he continued them because they provided him with pleasurable excitement; and the fever of passion and anger, and hatred and revenge, had so long dwelt within his heart, that now, when those sensations were no longer capable of gratification, excitement of some kind was necessary to his very being.

And thus from place to place he wandered, across the plains, over the mountains, through the forests; lingering occasionally by the margin of some lonely lake, or in the bosom of a verdant valley through which a quiet stream gently glided, like some meek Christian diffusing happiness and refreshment, as it noiselessly pursued its course to the far-off ocean.

Once, after years of exile, he pitched his tent on a green grassy knoll in the midst of a forest where a solitary settler had come to make a home and a country for himself in a new land.

It was long since Reginald Ireby had heard the accents of a friendly voice; the half-incoherent, wholly figurative phraseology of the Indians, their strange expressions, their poetical similes, their extraordinary ideas had, it is true, become familiar to his ears as "household words;" but still they were not the household words of HOME, and he turned

him eagerly to listen to the tones of one who bade him welcome to his hut for his "country's sake"—for the sake of that dear old corner of mother earth which called both the wanderers children.

Neither asked the name of the other. It was enough for them that they had crossed the wide Atlantic, that they were fellow-exiles, that they were strangers in a strange land: they met as friends. In England they might have been nothing, or worse than nothing, to each other; in America they were brothers.

Under the rooftree of that forest hut, Reginald, after years of wandering—of dwelling amongst Indians and their dark-eyed squaws—of an almost savage existence—doffed his hunter's cap in compliment to a countrywoman. His brow, his cheeks, his hands, were bronzed by constant exposure to a warmer sun than ever shines on our island; his dress was composed of the coarsest and commonest materials, fashioned in the most primitive style; he wore sandals like the red men his friends; his gun was slung carelessly over his shoulders; his hair was long and matted; his beard, untrimmed and black as the raven's wing, made his wasted, haggard countenance look doubly haggard and wasted by contrast; and yet, and in spite of all these things, there was an indescribable something of manner, walk, carriage, accent, which assured the settler and his wife at a glance that the stranger who crossed their humble threshold had been and was still a gentleman.

He remained near them for months. He took the husband to the haunts of the timid deer, he occasionally assisted his labours; he fashioned canoes after the manner of the Indians; he showed him the safest, shortest paths across the almost trackless forest; he constituted himself an instructor of the eldest boy, a delicate child who clung with reverence to the daring sportsman, the intrepid stranger. He said he

would render the lad "worthy of the soil;" made him swim through the calm, clear depths of inland streams; taught him to shoot, to fish, to climb, to endure fatigue. For days they would be absent together, wandering through ancient forests, and scenes where bloody encounters had taken place amongst the old inhabitants, tracing the graves of the red men who had gone home centuries before to the "Great Spirit;" destroying, as man always does, something in their progress, and bearing back with them the proceeds of their expedition to the settler's cabin.

When the boy was weary, Reginald carried him; when the heat oppressed him, the strong companion watched by his side whilst he slept; when he desired to return to his mother, his guide retraced the way he had come with a pleasant smile; if he were ill, the kind instructor nursed him with the solicitude of a parent; if he desired to learn the lore of books, and neglect for a time the study of nature, still the disinherited was patient and indulgent, and, lying at the foot of a giant oak, he told the child legends and histories he himself had heard in childhood, or else taught him some of the knowledge he had acquired at school and college a "long time ago."

The love which lies in the hearts of all living, and which Reginald Ireby had never previously bestowed on woman or child, he lavished on that boy—the son of a stranger, of an unknown settler in the backwoods of America. With the same attachment as that with which, under happier auspices, he might have loved a wife and children of his own, with a fierce affection such as befitted his harassed life and his impulsive haughty nature, he clung to that boy; clung to him as he had to other things in previous times, only that he might bring sorrow to the lad, agony to himself.

Winter came: they had constructed traps to catch the eaver: Reginald spoke of crossingwary bice-bound rivers,

of entering caverns brilliant with perishable gems, of sleighing expeditions, of encounters with savage animals, and the child's face grew pale, half with pleasurable excitement, half with fear. It was to be a happy season to the exile. Alas! was happiness ever to come to the heart of Reginald Ireby, and remain there?

Just when the first snowstorm had covered the earth with a pure white mantle, when Reginald was prophesying frost, and a fine, hard, cold season,—just when he was polishing his gun, preparatory to going forth to slay, replenishing his powder-flask, and putting up provisions for a journey, the wife of the settler fell ill—ill unto death.

Medical aid was a thing not to be hoped for in those remote regions; but what simple remedies came within their range of knowledge they gave her. With all the gentleness and solicitude of women her husband and his friend ministered to her wants. By turns they watched beside her wretched couch; by turns they moistened her parched lips, and strove to cool her burning brow; all that kindness could do to alleviate her sufferings they did; but it seemed as though some malady of the mind increased the distemper of the body, and this they, or any mortal, were unable to reach.

But when it appeared as if her days on earth were numbered, when death, and judgment, and eternity lay like an open book before her eyes, when the shame of the present and the thought of man's censure were engulphed by the weightier dread of the future and of God's displeasure, the heart of the weakened one died within her, and the dry lips were opened, and the parched tongue unloosed, and in the solemn stillness, and hush, and overpowering majesty of night she confessed to the startled ears of her listeners the secret of her life.

When she had concluded, Reginald Ireby arose and silently

quitted the house, and seeking his own solitary tent, left her to her fate.

Morning dawned; noon came; but still he lay on his face upon his bed of skins, weeping in convulsive agony. A light step crossed his threshold, a troubled face contemplated him for a moment, and then a child's hand was laid lovingly and confidingly on his shoulder.

The touch was light as the breath of a summer's wind; but it caused him to start at one bound to his feet, to push the intruder violently from him, to rush forth into the forest amidst the snow, and plunge madly into its deepest recesses, to wander he knew not where—he cared not whither.

When night again closed, he sought the home of the settler. His violent emotion had subsided; it had given place to a fierce, determined idea—revenge and Briarton might still be his.

By the death of that child—of the boy who had clung to him, around whom his very soul had twined, so that now, when he tore that love from his bosom, it seemed as if a very portion of his existence had gone from him too. Revenge! for it he had lived until he met the creature whose affection he now flung from him; for it he had once lived; for it he would thenceforth continue to live—for it alone.

And it was Delavelle's boy—his nephew—whom he had loved so devotedly; it was the lad for whose sake he had been despoiled of his inheritance; it was he whose foster-brother lay mouldering in the family vault at Briarton; it was because of the supposed death of this child he had returned home broken-hearted, to blight his young sister's whole existence, to seek a foreign shore, to wander from land to land without a hope, without an object in life;—it was he!

Reginald struck his clenched hand furiously against his burning forehead, as wild, vague thoughts such as these hurried through his brain: the fever of old, that had for a

brief period appeared to subside, was once again raging within his frame as he stooped his proud head and crossed the threshold of the wretched wooden hut.

Beside the miserable pallet on which the woman reposed her husband still kept watch. She was not dead; the eyes had the look of life; the cheek and brow were damp with perspiration; the lips occasionally moved, though no sound proceeded from them; she breathed heavily, though apparently with difficulty. All this Reginald noted at a glance —the woman was not yet dead. A faint hope shot through his heart that, perhaps, she might recover. He sat down silently near to watch in peace—that is, in such peace as is ever known by those whose hearts are distracted by vain desires, evil passions, sorrow, anxiety, hatred, and the longing for vengeance.

The husband came close beside him, and whispered how that day there had paused by the door of his cabin two strangers; one of them learned in the healing art, who had looked to the condition of the invalid, and endeavoured to alleviate her sufferings; he had left medicine and hope behind him ere he proceeded on his way,—hope for the father of her children, hope for the wretched Reginald

"Do you remember the tale she told us last night?" asked the younger brother in a hollow voice; and the other answered "I do," even whilst a flush of pain suffused his face, which he buried in his hands—"I do."

"And you remember," said Reginald, clutching the settler's arm convulsively, "she spoke of a son, and of two daughters, who had been driven to seek a livelihood and a home for themselves in London?"

"I had often heard of them before," returned his auditor, quailing under the intense gaze of those gleaming, sunken eyes, that once had seemed so brilliantly beautiful.

"She spoke of one lovely as an angel," continued Reginald;

"and there was another, stately as a dream of a painter of the olden time: they were my sisters; I that younger son, and he is my nephew."

The wild eyes turned for a moment in the direction where the child slumbered; then they once again riveted their gaze on the face of the settler, who faintly muttered, "You!"

"Yes," returned Reginald. "I am indeed that thrice-wretched being of whom she casually spoke—an exile from my native land, without a home, without a shelter, without a living thing to love or pity me; I am he. Be it yours," he added, in a stern, hurried voice, "to restore her, if possible, to health; to do justice to him, to me; to insist that she shall make such atonement as guilt ever can make. I leave something ten times more precious to me than life in your hands; I know you will neither deceive nor disappoint me."

And as he uttered these words Reginald once more arose, and, quitting the shelter of the settler's hut, wandered forth into the night.

Weeks passed away. He shunned the once welcome sight of his little companion as he might have done a pestilence. The child sought him with loving steps, but Reginald repulsed him; and as the boy turned away bewildered and weeping, the heart of the strong man died within him, and he groaned in agony.

Slowly the woman recovered. One day she gained a little, the next day she again relapsed. Reginald felt a spirit rising within him at this long delay which might have made him drag her even from the very jaws of death, but at length the monster reluctantly yielded up his prey, and life and its duties claimed her for its own.

And then Reginald told O'Shaughnessy all he expected and required him to do, and the Irishman bowed his head in silent acquiescence.

But when the immediate dread of impending dissolution

had passed away, when the thought of the world, and the exposure, and the censure all came sweeping through the mind of the miserable woman, she repented her of the confession fear had wrung from her quivering lips; repented and would have retracted; but her husband firmly insisted that as wrong had by her been wrought, so by her it should be repaired; as she had taken the child away from its parents, so she should give him back to them; as through her instrumentality Reginald had lost the chance of possessing Briarton, so by her assistance that chance should be restored to him.

Willing or not, he vowed she should atone in some measure for her fault. He knew, he said, "it would be a bitter draught for both to swallow, but it was right to be done, and do it he would, and do it he was determined she should."

The discovery seemed to have changed the very nature of the man. He found he had been duped; that he had been living on the money of bribery, the price of silence; the sum which had been paid to his wife for consenting to bring up as her own child one who was not hers; for whom she had changed away her own flesh and blood.

He had spent most of that money under a delusion; had squandered it in folly and pleasure and amusement; he had bought tools and implements of labour with the trifle that remained, and come away from the haunts of men to repair his fortunes, or at least to earn a bare subsistence, amid the forests of the mighty West.

He had squandered, he had enjoyed; he had endured, he had toiled under a delusion; but it was one no longer to him, and he resolved it should remain one no longer to many others; so he coldly told his wife one day in the early spring to prepare for their return to England—England, which he had told Mr. D'Evelyn he should never see more.

She wept, she remonstrated, she refused to go; she de-

clared she had raved, that her statement was false; but her husband remained firm and incredulous. Somehow he and Reginald between them managed to raise a n sufficient to defray the expens of their journey; the former by disposing of the little he possessed, the latter by selling every article of jewellery or luxury which time and change and long wandering had left him.

During the weary days of the passage home Reginald lay watching the vessel cleaving her way through the fathomless waters, thinking of his past life, brooding over his wrongs, cherishing bitter and angry and revengeful feelings as he travelled home; nay, rather shall we say, to a land where home had once been, and was not; to a country wherein he had suffered misery untold; where he owned no spot of earth; to that land he had fled from, and felt thankful to see a speck on the horizon far, far behind. Thither he was journeying, and for hours and days he leant him over the ship's side, and read the story of his fitful life, and the tale of his wrongs, and the memory of his sorrows, and his follies, and his disappointments, traced as if in characters of fire in the rippling waves or the dashing billows that circled and foamed around the vessel.

Once when he stood thus thinking, more gently than was his wont, of Marian, and her dear sweet face and her sad history, a little hand touched his, and a young, low voice that once had been welcome to his ears as the tones of a melodious instrument awakened by the fingers of one skilled and cunning in minstrelsy, exclaimed—

"Uncle, why don't you speak to me?"

Reginald started; for an instant objects reeled before his eyes; then drawing the child towards him, he said—

"My boy, some time, perhaps, though not now, you will be able to understand my words. You have been much to me; oh! the great God who knows all hearts alone can tell how

dear you were; but something wider than the mighty ocean yawns now between you and me: near you are to me now; nearer than in the days when we tracked the forest together; but dear to me you never can be more, never—never! I am going to take you back to parents, to wealth, to position; and you must forget me; never come near me again. It wrings my heart to see you, to know how I have loved you, to feel how I must hate you. Now go away."

The boy stood still; he never stirred to obey; he never made a movement as if to leave the side of his relative; but, in answer to Reginald's passionate speech, he clasped his little hands together, and uttered a cry so mournful and despairing that his uncle caught him for a moment to his heart, and held him there.

"I would give up Briarton," he exclaimed, "my hopes of it for ever, if you were but my son, or not *his* child: oh! boy, I have loved you better than I ever loved anything on earth; and this is the end of all! this is the end!"

The child's face was wet with tears,—tears that *he* had shed as he released him from his arms, and turned from him with an expression of mingled loathing and affection. For hours after the boy had crept back, frightened and sad, to the other companions of his voyage, Reginald Ireby remained looking over the side of the vessel; and drops of anguish fell into and mingled with the briny wave, drops wrung from the eyes and the heart of him who had never previously wept for love of living thing.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NICHOLAS FINDS HIS UNCLE.

As Nicholas Cranefort gradually recovered his spirits (his appetite he never lost), his old propensity for looking out of the window and staring at the passers-by revived also. Constance and Marian, and increasing sense, induced him to relinquish his habit of making faces, but he still found pleasure in the recreation he had enjoyed in the home of his mother in Cadogan Place.

One morning in the glorious summer-time, when he was pursuing this amusement, and criticising the costume and appearance of the pedestrians in anything rather than a complimentary manner, he suddenly sprang from the window to Constance's side, exclaiming, in a tone of consternation—

"Here he is!"

"Who?" she asked, in some astonishment.

"My uncle," answered the lad; and even as he uttered the words Mr. Ernehulst entered the apartment.

He held out one hand to Constance, and laid the other affectionately on the boy's shoulder.

"Do not run away from me," he said; "I want to be a friend to you, Nicholas, always."

The words were spoken sadly, though kindly; and Constance, looking at his dress, perceived that he was in mourning. She guessed the rest ere another sentence was spoken.

When the lad left the room he told Constance all. Mrs. Montray was dead; he and Mrs. Ashton had seen her expire. She was the youngest of all. She had been in turns the darling and the pet and the pride of parents, friends, brothers, sisters, relatives. Beautiful and graceful and amiable, she

entwined herself, when a mere child, around the heart of a very wealthy aunt, who expressed a desire to adopt her as her own daughter, bring her up, and leave all her money to her.

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Ernehulst, "tempted by the splendid offer, and dazzled by the amount of the fortune which he hoped would be left ultimately to his daughter, my father complied with the request, and Emily quitted the shelter of the paternal roof.

"All that money could do for the girl was done. She was rendered accomplished, fascinating, useless; she never had to prefer a request twice; she was reared in the lap of luxury; servants sprang at her slightest word; she breathed a perpetual atmosphere of adulation and admiration; truth she rarely heard uttered; its necessity was never impressed upon her;—if she were elegant and beautiful and graceful—if she could sing like a siren, dance like a sylph, converse with fluency—it was all her relative deemed necessary to ensure her happiness and success in this world; and as for the next—why, if it ever were thought of at all, it was naturally concluded that what sufficed on this side the grave would suffice on the other; and if Emily Ernehulst could enter a drawing-room on earth in a distinguished manner, it was only reasonable to suppose she would experience no difficulty about obtaining admission without further trouble into Paradise.

"At seventeen she made what is generally termed a 'love match.' After her aunt had refused her consent to the marriage, she eloped with a penniless younger son, and plunged at one thoughtless step into matrimony, misery, debt, and a life of 'contrivances.'

"How, during years, she and her husband quarrelled and became reconciled—how they managed to keep up appearances by the aid of friends, plausible manners, pitiful stories, tales of distress, and other, perhaps even less justifi-

able, means—it would take a volume to tell. They hoped, at one time, her aunt might relent, and obtained credit and money and consideration on all sides upon the strength of the expected legacy; but the old lady resented the marriage so much that she left all her wealth to the building and endowing of churches and hospitals and almshouses, and the remainder to a menagerie for invalid dogs and cats; and Emily and her husband found themselves at her death some thousands in debt, and not one shilling richer than they had been during her lifetime.

"He was arrested at the suit of several creditors. We did all we could to assist them," proceeded Mr. Ernehulst,—"paid off the most pressing demands, obtained a lucrative situation for him abroad; but just as he was setting out he fell ill, and in one week Emily was left a widow, her children orphans.

"Mrs. Ashton provided them with a quiet home for some time, but her sister soon wearied of its monotony. She pined for society; a quiet life was to her insupportable. She said she would rather be dead than buried at Ashton Court; so she left that place, taking her only two living children with her."

It is curious how fortune sometimes favours those who either cannot or will not do anything for themselves. Mrs. Cranefort had managed, in six short months, to spend all the money Mrs. Ashton had intended for a year's maintenance, and was fairly at her last shilling, when a lottery ticket she had purchased turned up a prize; and once again the lady sped over the waves of existence in the golden bark of prosperity, and astounded society with her wealth, her amiability, her genius, and, above all, her ready pay.

Mr. Ernehulst and one or two others alone knew how short-lived all this would prove. Most persons imagined either that her husband must have been much better off than

any one had ever supposed to be the case, or else that a fortune had suddenly been bequeathed to her.

"I went to her," said the narrator, "when her funds were well-nigh exhausted; reasoned and remonstrated; offered to take the children, and provide for them; offered to do anything or everything she could desire, if she would only turn ere it was too late—ere she brought misery and disgrace on all of us—on her fine boy and sweet pretty daughter. She wept. Somehow, tears were always my poor sister's answer to all arguments and entreaties; but though she appeared to concur in all I said, though I hoped she was at last going to relinquish her extravagant ideas, and settle down quietly with me, or at Ashton Court, I found that my words had produced as little impression as if they had been spoken to the wind.

"We parted, if not in anger at least in sorrow. I went abroad; Mrs. Ashton joined me there. We travelled through many fair and lovely lands, away to the East, and finally home, stopping for a few days in Paris.

"There we and Emily met again. She was dying in penury and misery. Montray had deserted her when he discovered that he had been deceived as to the amount of her income. She told us, on her death-bed, the story of the past two years: she had always, even from her girlhood, been possessed with the idea that Fortune had a great prize in store for her. I believe she had even fancied, before her marriage, that Mr. Cranefort would turn out some sort of prince in disguise; most assuredly after she was left a widow she had all kinds of absurd imaginings concerning a splendid match she was, sooner or later, to make. Without luxury and society she could not exist. She had for so long a time trusted to chance for support, to fate for releasing her from all her embarrassments, that she at length began to believe she could never come to want, that something would always

turn up, if not from any old source, why, from a new and unexpected one. Under this delusion, she took the house in Cadogan Place, furnished it, plunged into hopeless and endless difficulties, married to extricate herself from them, purchased misery by a falsehood; penury and death by the reputation of wealth she never possessed. Poor Emily!"

Mr. Ernehulst paused, as the contrast between the beautiful happy child and the unprincipled wretched woman was vividly presented to his imagination; but after a few minutes he resumed—

"You know as much of the circumstances attending that most rash and ill-assorted union as I. He married for money; she from a similar motive. Mutually they deceived; mutually they were deceived. He was unable to pay her debts; she had no means to clear him from his embarrassments; and so, finding he had wed a delusion, he abandoned her to her fate a few months after their arrival in Paris, left her in poverty and sickness, to return if she could to her native land, or else to die a nameless stranger amongst strangers."

And once again the words "Poor Emily!" escaped his lips—the end was nearly reached.

"In a poor lodging in Paris she died, she who had once been the beautiful Emily Ernehulst. With her head resting on her sister's bosom, with her hand clasped in that of her brother, she passed quietly away; and tears fell over the fate of her who had been the best loved of all in the home of her childhood.

"Her faults," said Mr. Ernehulst, a darker shadow stealing over his face as he spoke—"her faults were those of education: under better auspices she might have been made anything of; but now she is at rest for ever—my poor Emily!"

Such was the substance of the conversation Mr. Ernehulst held with Constance Ireby that summer's morning—a conversation which made her heart sad and sorrowful, for it was

a mournful termination to a painful history; but the import of many succeeding ones can only be surmised from the fact that, one day, Nicholas Cranefort confidentially informed Marian Ireby that her sister Constance was going to marry his uncle. "And then," added the boy, "I tell you what, she'll be my aunt—my own aunt, and so will you; and I'm not to leave you ever; nor neither is Maggie:" which announcement was perfectly correct, for a few weeks afterwards among the "Marriages" in the "Times," the names of George Ernehulst and Constance Ireby figured. And if any one had turned over the sheet, and read a short paragraph in another column of the same paper, he would have seen that on the 10th day of September, 18—, sentence of outlawry had been proclaimed, amongst many others, on "Francis Montray, Esquire, gentleman, of Brenslow, in ——shire."

When Captain Montague Ashton heard of his uncle's marriage (he had sailed about four months previously with his regiment for India), it was currently reported amongst his brother officers that he purchased a fresh stock of cigars, and smoked incessantly for a week, at the end of which time, his surprise being exhausted, he wrote to Mr. Ernehulst, and congratulated him in writing that wonderfully resembled some of the hieroglyphics on the stones of Nineveh, begging him also to excuse the brevity of his epistle, because the climate was so warm, and writing such a bore. And here leave might be taken of him, had it not happened that on his return home some years later, he was so astounded by the beauty of his cousin Maggie, that he declared to Mr. Ernehulst she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life; and the admiration appeared to have been mutual, for Captain Ashton sold his commission, and settled down quietly at his paternal mansion, where he—so the local papers affirmed—"and his graceful and accomplished bride frequently entertained a distinguished circle of visitors."

In one of the bloodiest and fiercest of the Indian battles a brave young ensign fell; where the smoke was densest, where the danger was greatest, he was the foremost amongst gallant men.

"On, boys, on! for the glory of Old England!" he cried, and next instant fell, shot to the heart.

He died, as he had always said he wished to die, amidst the roar and tumult of a battle-field; the cannons thundering forth his death knell—leading on his men to victory!

And when the fight was over, they found his body, and wrapping a military cloak around him, buried Nicholas Cranefort, and left him to his lonely rest. Under the shade of Indian trees he sleeps, close to the plain where hundreds of others, brave, and young, and gallant as himself, fell in mortal combat.

CHAPTER XL.

HOME AGAIN.

"LAND!" As the look-out uttered that word, every soul in the vessel in which Reginald Ireby was a passenger rushed to the ship's side to catch a glimpse of what the spokesman had already seen; and at length the green shores of Erin blessed the eyes of the wanderers, weary of gazing on the interminable, unfathomable ocean. Some wept with joy, to think of the meetings with friends and relatives—wife, children, parents—that lay in store for them; some were re turning prosperous and happy to their native land, others broken-hearted; some had left it in youth, some in maturer

age, some in gladness, some in sorrow: a tale distinct and yet similar, of human joys, and woes, and endeavours, could have been revealed by each one of the individuals who fixed his straining, eager gaze on that still remote land.

The incidents of life are like the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope: they are perpetually the same, and yet still seem different. Children's hands shake the one, and marvel to note a dissimilar result produced at each fresh experiment;—fate shapes the forms of the other, and fashions them so as to render no two destinies, no two existences, precisely alike.

Botanists tell us no one flower exactly resembles its fellow. We know that each face, amongst the many which compose the thousands we encounter, possesses some peculiarity so essentially its own as to stamp it on our recollection for ever; and as with the external form of everything in what we term animate or inanimate nature, so is it with the secret story that time and events trace in indelible characters on the heart and memory of every individual who ever played a part, whether great or small, for good or for evil, in the mighty drama which goes on from generation to generation, from youth to age, with fresh actors, fresh incidents, ever old yet ever new;—that mighty drama, which pleases the child and has charms for the grey-haired man, in which all delight to take an active part, which none ever seem to weary of watching, criticising, admiring, abusing, till the curtain drops on the last scene of their existence, and the grave closes over the final event in their life's tragedy for ever.

Land! What a crowd of contradictory emotions that one word called into life! How Reginald Ireby brooded and brooded concerning his present, past, and future, as he stood gazing over the flood at the dimly discernible shores of Ireland, his thoughts travelling farther than his sight, and conducting him to Briarton!

Port at length was reached, and by rapid stages he travelled

to Brenslow. Delavelle Ireby was not there. His brother turned to seek him in London, but it was so late ere he reached the metropolis that he abandoned the idea of an interview till the following morning. He had gone first to see the man he hated: disappointed in this project, he bethought him there were two in England whom he loved.

He went to the house of his married sister: there were lights burning in the drawing-room, there were carriages at the door. "She is receiving company," he said; "I will wait;" and he passed the house. But the memory of old times, of the days of their childhood, of their common sorrow, of their years of anxiety, swept with the force of a torrent through his soul, and caused him to turn and pause irresolute.

The hall door was open to permit the egress of a departing guest. The stranger entered, and passing unnoticed, or at least unheeded, up the staircase, reached the drawing-room just as a lady came out of it.

In the background Reginald beheld, as in a dream, fair faces and shimmering dresses, handsome furniture and polished mirrors, and a glare of light; but his gaze was riveted on the principal figure in the picture—the woman who stood intently regarding him. There were clustering roses amidst the raven hair, a look of bewilderment dwelt on the pale, beautiful face; but it was only for a moment she remained in doubt, for then flinging her arms around his neck, and laying her soft, lovely face close to the wanderer's bronzed and sunken cheek, she exclaimed, in a voice broken by sobs of pleasure, "Reginald! dear, dear Reginald! welcome home,—my brother!"

Hers were the first lips that had greeted the wayward one "home," and drawing her towards him with the hand that had grasped the red man's in friendship, he kissed her broad white forehead over and over again.

Thus they met—they who had been separated for so many

years, who had called the same woman mother, who had been brought up side by side, who had watched by the same death-bed, suffered from the same unrighteous will; the one lovely as ever, the other a perfect wreck, a mere skeleton;—he who had suffered and sinned, she who had striven and endured. Thus they met in that fashionable London house,—she who had borne her share of the common burden in the land of her birth; he who had carried his to distant climes, and only increased its weight as he journeyed: changed in everything save in love for one another; for Time, the destroyer, modifies, alters, improves, blasts all things save love and virtue; wherefore we happily believe these will be the only two human traits, or rather divine traits, that have dwelt with us here, and ennobled our humanity, that shall follow us to that land where evil, and the knowledge thereof, are unknown.

Oh! if Reginald Ireby would only have been happy then; if he would only have turned and repented him; if he would only have rooted the one dark thought from his heart—the thought that had blighted his entire existence—he might have spared further sorrow to the one dear sister who hung so lovingly on his neck; to the other, whose lot, but for him, might have been so bright; to Constance and Marian, who, though the world might scorn and censure, had loved him through good report and bad report; who had striven to comfort, and had never by word or look reproached him for his headstrong folly.

But as, in the years gone by, he had chosen to take the wrong path in preference to the right, so now he persisted in adhering to that former choice, and in wilfully shutting his eyes to the precipice that lay beyond.

He was a youth then—a man now; little more than an impetuous, headstrong boy, when he flung advice and counsel from him, and strode forth, with hurried steps, from the home

of his childhood, to commence the struggle of life on the wrong principle; but when, after years of anguish and experience; when, after that meeting with his elder sister; when, after an interview with Marian, he went on the morrow to seek his brother, he was a man in years, in knowledge, in trouble; he should also have been one in perception, in sense; but the impetuous folly and rashness of youth had only changed into stern, fierce determination: the object of his life had not yet been accomplished—might never be accomplished; but for it he still resolved through life to strive.

O'Shaughnessy accompanied him—O'Shaughnessy and the child who had for a time lighted up the darkness of his existence, only (so it seemed to the heart of his uncle) that the subsequent gloom might appear more intense.

After the lapse of years, Reginald again met the man whom most on earth he hated. This time it was not in the boudoir at Briarton, but in the library of a spacious house in London, for Delavelle was ill. He required the best medical advice, and, as he was rich, obtained it.

Somehow, as the younger brother entered the apartment, the memory of that room where they had last met and parted—of its furniture, its ornaments, of the pictures that hung on the wall, of the bitter angry words which had then passed between them, of the subsequent scene in the family vault—recurred with terrible vividness to his mind. All seemed to be enacting *then*—not to have been thought and said years previously. He felt the old fever and the uncontrollable rage boiling within his veins; he could have strangled his brother where he stood, and rejoiced in the deed.

His anger had been impotent then; it was all-powerful now. His time of weakness was past; he had the will and the strength in the present to cause Delavelle agony. He saw he had; he saw it in the deadly pallor which overspread the face of his brother when his glance fell on the child and

his companion, in the quick, nervous start, in the sudden expression of anxiety and despair—Reginald saw it all. His hour of triumph was at hand. He would not have relinquished the wild thrill of gratified vengeance which shot through his frame for the treasures of Golconda.

"I am here again, you see," he said.

"What is your business?" asked Delavelle, with a desperate effort at self-control. "I presume it is not for any pleasure that you think can result to either of us from an interview that you have sought my house."

"For the first time in my life," returned his brother, "I do expect pleasure from seeing you: nay, more, I have felt pleasure at the sight."

Delavelle inclined his head without speaking; his gaze seemed fascinated towards the boy.

"I see," said Reginald, "that your heart has guessed the truth. I come to restore to you a son whose supposed demise we both lamented in days that have long passed away. The child on whom we looked that night when last we beheld each other was not your son; this is your boy—why do you not welcome him to your heart?"

Reginald pushed the lad towards his parent as he finished; but Delavelle waved the frightened creature back as he gasped rather than spoke the words, "It is false!"

"It is true!" retorted his brother; "true as that you, Delavelle Ireby, are, as I told you when we stood together in the churchyard at Moreton, a hypocrite as well as a villain. It is true, and you know it. Man, cease lying and tricking at last; take back your child."

And once again Reginald pushed the boy a step forward towards the chair his father occupied.

"Back!" cried the wretched man; "keep back! Reginald, this is a foul conspiracy. Leave my house; take your accomplices with you; leave me in peace!"

"Such peace I will give you as you gave me when you robbed me of my father's affection; of the inheritance I had been led to expect; when you sent me and mine beggars out into the world," retorted his brother, fiercely. "Take back your child now, or if you refuse to act justly, I have the means, and most assuredly I do not lack the will, to compel you to confess the fraud."

Delavelle did not answer; he looked with sullen defiance at the group, and as his eye fell on O'Shaughnessy, Reginald said to the latter—

"He may, perhaps, listen to you. Tell him that this is his son; that we can prove it—that we will."

"It is quite true," said the Irishman, in a tone which sounded strangely calm, after the angry voices that had previously echoed through the apartment; "it is quite true. If Mr. Ireby be desirous of hearing full particulars, I am here to give them."

But Mr. Ireby made no sign.

"Do you wish to hear him?" demanded Reginald, impatiently.

"No," returned his brother; "I am perfectly satisfied it is an imposition. May I beg of you to leave this house?"

"I have given you a fair chance of repairing wrong, and avoiding a public exposure," said Reginald: "if you refuse to avail yourself of it, do not hereafter blame me.—Oh! Willie," he continued, suddenly clasping the boy to his heart —the child had clung to him, weeping and terrified, during the stormy interview—"Oh! Willie, for by his name I will never call you; you are his son, and yet he will not own you, and it is because you are his son that I must hate you. Take him, Delavelle," he added, in an almost entreating tone; "take him and love him: he belongs to no one else; he has no great place in any heart save mine, and there, because of you, he cannot stay. For the sake of the dead; of

the father whose name we both bear, betwixt whom and me you sowed distrust; for the sake of the ties that bind us, which both would snap, if that were possible; for the sake of this child whom I did love as I never previously loved parent nor sister, take him and treat him kindly. Take him, Delavelle. I, whom you have wronged, ask it from you as a boon, to grant me this one great favour. Acknowledge him; never look harshly upon him; never let there be any distinction made between him and your other children. Will you not do it?"

There were tears, yes, absolutely tears, in Reginald's eyes, as he thus passionately besought the father to receive his own child.

Delavelle looked at him in amazement. He had never conceived his brother capable of caring for anything save himself; and yet the man was pleading, and almost weeping, before him for the love he bore *his* son.

"Reginald," he said, "you must be either wilfully deceiving yourself, or else you have been grossly deceived. Let Mr. O'Shaughnessy remain here with this child for a few minutes, I will speak to you alone." And he led his brother into another room, carefully closing and locking the door behind them.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE UNNATURAL FATHER.

"LET us, for once," he began, at the same time motioning Reginald to a chair, "let us for once talk together like friends. You best know why you have always been my enemy—I who would gladly have helped you in past times."

"I do indeed know," answered his brother, "and so also do you; but we will not speak of that. Let us talk of him—of your boy."

"Mine he is not," said the elder; "you cannot have been completely duped by these people."

"Delavelle!" returned his brother, "the boy is yours; he is the child for whom that wretched woman substituted her own son. The corpse we gazed upon was nothing to you; he was a cheat. But pshaw! why do I tell this to you, who know it as well as I?"

"You are mistaken," replied Mr. Ireby; "no human power could induce me to believe such a monstrous fiction——"

"You do believe it," exclaimed Reginald. "You are as firmly convinced that this boy is your son as that I am your brother. Delavelle, you must either be an utter idiot, or imagine that I am one. Yours he is, and that you know, and that I know; no lying, no scheming, no specious phrases can delude me now. For his sake I am willing to talk calmly to you; to make his life happier, to ensure him kindness; I am resigned to sit here, and speak to you, who are my deadliest enemy, as if you were my dearest friend."

"Why should I be your enemy, Reginald?" commenced Delavelle, but his brother broke in with—

"If we are to come to any understanding, if there is to be any good effected in this matter, discard all hypocrisy. I am not a child to be wheedled; I am not a fool to be deceived. Why should you be my enemy? Just Heaven! It drives me frantic almost to think of all the misery you have caused me; and yet you can sit there, with calm, unmoved face, and ask, 'Why should I be your enemy, Reginald?' When the golden rule that preachers talk about comes to be practised here below, when men turn their cheek to the smiter, when evil is rewarded with good, when peace reigns on earth, then, but never until then, there may be friendship

between us. If you wish to propose any plan, I will listen to it. You did not bring me here to ask why we were enemies, but to speak of your child—of this boy."

"You say you love him," remarked Mr. Ireby.

"Loved him as the mother loves her first-born," returned the other, sadly. "Under the shade of mighty forests, where nature seems all, man nothing, I—weary of life, of myself, of my sorrows—met that child. Somehow, why I cannot tell, I took to him as I had never previously taken to any creature. I forgot my cares, ay, and almost my wrongs, whilst teaching him the learning of the wild man, the book-lore of my native isle! He was all in all to me. What health is to the sick, rest to the weary, he became to my wayworn heart; and he in his turn clung to me as he ought long ago to have clung to a nearer friend. Loved him! Oh, if you ever felt such a passion of affection for the children you have lost, I pity you—you who have brought such agony to my heart—from my very soul! There is, however, one stronger emotion in our nature than love, and that is hate; and so, when I learnt whose son he was, I tore that intense affection from my breast, repulsed the child when he would have stayed by my side as in the days ere knowledge came to my heart, and brought, as knowledge always does, wretchedness with it. I tore that love away. Once again the hopes and the affections of my soul were wrecked—for he was *your son!*"

Reginald had started from his chair, and was pacing up and down the apartment. His brother regarded him in mute astonishment. He was fond of his wife, fond enough of his children; but a passion like this he had never previously believed in. Vehement hatred, desire of wealth, the mania of ambition—he had felt all these; but love, such as Reginald described, love for a plain, slight, pale-faced child!—he knew not whether to admire or despise the man who was capable

of entertaining it. "He cannot even be fond in moderation," he muttered, with a half-sneer; and the next moment said aloud, "Still you love him?"

"Why do you keep repeating that one sentence?" exclaimed the other, turning fiercely upon him. "Whether most I love him or hate him, I cannot tell, for I never was a skilful analyser of my own or others' feelings."

"Be calm," implored his brother, "and listen to me. Suppose—recollect, I do not admit the truth of your absurd statement, but merely desire to put an imaginary proposition—suppose the tale these people have told should prove to be correct, what do you think we ought to do with him?"

"You must acknowledge him," said Reginald; "give him his just place in your heart and your home; reinstate him as heir to Briarton; make reparation for the wrong that has been done the child, and do your best to render him happy.'

"And do you imagine," said Delavelle, "that your plan would render him happy? You take him from those who have been his associates since infancy, from the woman he calls mother, and set him down in a home in which he has nothing beyond a nominal interest. Brothers and sisters will look coldly on the boy who snatches their inheritance from them. The mother will scarcely credit the improbable story, and will always think of the stranger as one who stands in the way of those she loves; and——"

"And the father will hate the boy who deprives him of the rents and lands of Briarton," interposed Reginald, with a contemptuous laugh. "You must think I have lived thirty years in this world to very little purpose, if such shallow sophistry as yours could blind me."

"Had you waited till you heard the conclusion of my argument," resumed Delavelle, "you might then have been able to form a better opinion with regard to its merits. I was going to say that if, upon investigation, there should prove

to be even a shadow of truth in this story, as love the boy can never expect in this house, might, supposing you can convince me that all this is not a hoax—recollect, at present I regard the whole affair as a base fabrication—might some other arrangement not be made, some other plan not be thought of, which would be more conducive to the child's happiness than a public exposure and acknowledgment?"

"What plan should you propose?" asked Reginald.

"This," returned his brother, thrown off his guard by the unexpected coolness of the question. "You are fond of the boy. Say I were to place a certain sum in your hands for his benefit; that you were to adopt him as your own——"

"Delavelle," vehemently interrupted Reginald, "you are a blacker villain even than I thought you! So, you would pay me to keep your secret, to cut your son out of Briarton, that you may enjoy it! No; as I live, you shall own him in the face of day. The lad shall be restored to his just position. I have spoken, and now I will act."

"You say you love this child," said Delavelle, with a bitter sneer; "and now I ask you, Reginald Ireby, which is it, for love of him or for love of Briarton you so madly persevere in your hostility towards me, and side with strangers against your nearest relative? Is it because you really wish to give this boy wealth, which will prove no source of enjoyment to him, or because you desire to have your chance to the property restored, that you so vindictively pursue this object? I ask you candidly, which it is?"

Reginald turned white, as if a deadly blow had struck him, whilst Delavelle, with a half-smile, spoke; but it was only for a moment he seemed thus moved, for then, raising his eyes and fixing them sternly on his brother's face, he returned—

"I told you before there was one feeling stronger than love in the heart of man, and that feeling—hate. Whilst I

breathe I will never cease to cherish that against you. I will never relinquish my claims on Briarton, nor yield one iota of my just rights with respect to it. In former days you defied me, and I accepted the challenge. Defy me now, if you dare. I have the power to crush you, and if you do not, as I previously said, acknowledge this boy of your own free will, you shall by compulsion. When last we parted I said I felt you were wronging me in some way, though what that way might be I could not tell. All has since been made clear to me, and He who knows the secrets of all hearts is perfectly aware of the blackness of yours."

"And possibly yours is so clear of offence against God and man, so free from taint or spot of any kind, that you have a right to judge me?" said Delavelle, with a bitter, angry gesture.

"Sins I have committed numerous enough and dark enough," answered Reginald, sadly; "but, Delavelle, I never sold my own flesh and blood. I could love something almost better than myself; and, moreover, I was never the consummate hypocrite you this day have proved yourself to be. I cannot stay here; I feel as if the air were poisoning me."

And ere Delavelle could utter another word his brother had left the apartment.

Could the latter have beheld Delavelle after his departure sitting brooding concerning the fresh difficulty which had arisen in his path, and cogitating by what means he could again disappoint his brother's plans, he might, conscious of the power he now possessed, have felt satisfied, for Mr. Ireby had a horrible foreboding that Reginald for once could carry his threat into execution, compel him to ac knowledge the boy, wring Briarton from him, and make him a marked man for life.

He was ill, very ill, and the interview, though he had

borne himself calmly throughout, had shaken him so much, that as he leant back in his chair, after his brother quitted the room, he trembled like a woman. There was a something about this unexpected disclosure, this complete frustration of all his plans, which might have moved the pity of a stranger, but Reginald would only have gloried in the sight.

Like Reginald, Delavelle Ireby had been led on by imperceptible steps to the abyss of wrong he had finally sounded.

Hatred of those who kept him, as he persisted in believing, far from his father's heart, and a desperate desire to prove what he, unassisted by friends or relatives, could do, had been at the first the mainspring of his actions. He fancied when he could go to his father and say, "I am rich: acknowledge I am the child you neglected," he should feel satisfied; but when he beheld the broad lands, and green lawns, and trim parterres, and stately trees, and graceful shrubs of Briarton, when he thought of all that stately lady's children had enjoyed whilst he was an outcast battling for his daily bread; when he saw that proud woman's portrait scanning him with eyes of scorn, and defying him from the canvas, a desire for power sprung up within his heart: he longed to own that fine estate, to become a patron to the rebellious boy who had so long lorded it over all with whom he came in contact; to the sister whose chiselled features resembled her mother's; a patron, friend, and brother to the girl who first spoke to him in his father's house; and thus from point to point he glided by almost imperceptible degrees, till the will was made, till his father was dead.

Then Reginald defied him, if not by word, certainly by deed. They hated each other before the day arrived for the funeral—the day which announced to the younger son that he was disinherited.

From that hour even the semblance of peace vanished. How was it possible for two such tempers under such circum-

stances to agree? and Reginald flung down the gauntlet of hatred to his brother, who accepted the challenge, even whilst he laughed the boy's power to injure him to scorn.

Then, when ruin seemed to be staring him in the face, he felt his hands fettered, because a mere child stood between him and the inheritance which should have been his; and whilst this anxiety was galling his arbitrary spirit, Reginald enlightened him with regard to his chance of the estate. He was equally distracted by his desire to cut his younger brother out, and the more pressing but not more vehement wish to raise money, when the death of the child he imagined to be his son, removed, as he fancied, the stumblingblock from his path, gave him wealth, and enabled him to laugh at Reginald's premature claim.

Then came a new temptation, one which, like those that had preceded it, he was powerless to resist. After having tasted for a few minutes the joys of prosperity; after having been relieved from pressing difficulties by the death of the only one who had kept a fine estate from him (even though that one was his son, he rejoiced at the emancipation), he was called upon suddenly to receive a comparative stranger as his child; to place him as heir expectant to Briarton; to publish to the world that the beautiful boy whom all had admired was a deception and an imposition; to give back to his brother his chance. The temptation to err was great; the resistance weak, or rather no resistance at all was attempted; and from the moment he discovered the cheat which had been practised upon him, his life became a long deception.

So Reginald told him; but would Reginald, unstable in his principles, vehement in his hatreds, blind in his desires, have resisted better had he been similarly tempted? It is impossible to say, for the sin that paused by Delavelle's door never stopped at his.

When he was tried, he yielded. Could it be expected that, with greater temptation, greater strength would have come to him? "It is easy to preach, hard to practise," said to him, in former days, one who seldom preached, but who practised ever, who was possessed of that abundant charity which profiteth much, which "suffereth long and is kind," whom Reginald Ireby sought after he quitted his brother's home, and who welcomed with a friendly smile the man who had, in former days, prayed, as he might for some precious boon, to hear from his lips the words, "Reginald, I forgive you." After years they met again on the same business as that which had first brought them together.

CHAPTER XLII.

DELAVELLE'S DANGER.

No great success had attended Walter Martock's efforts during the period that had elapsed from that November night when Reginald Ireby first entered his chambers. He had gone on through the intervening years, storing up knowledge; but whether all his time and labour were ever to result in a wide-spread reputation, in wealth, fame, or even many briefs, appeared so doubtful a question, that it was one the barrister had almost ceased considering.

His first speech had been so total a failure that no one cared to give him the chance of making a second: people said he was a good opinion, but that he would never be able to plead in public, although he could decide rapidly and well

on the merits of a case in private. No one knew much, in fact, about him; and the whole story of his struggles and disappointments might have been summed up in that one short sentence which we hear applied every day to persons who can only contrive to keep their heads above water—"He managed to get on somehow."

How, he and Marian and Constance and Mr. Ernehulst alone knew, for these were his confidants.

Talent and knowledge, deep thought, a true, noble, expansive heart, a resigned, patient spirit,—these gifts from God lay buried in chambers dark and narrow and gloomy, in chambers where Reginald Ireby sought him.

He told his tale with less vehemence, perhaps, than in former times, but not less inward bitterness; and Walter Martock listened, and undertook to plead the cause of the outcast child—to obtain him justice, to win him wealth.

But although Reginald strove to conceal the dark spot in his heart from his friend's clear eyes, his shallow endeavours were incapable ot shrouding it from Mr. Martock's sight; and when at length the younger son arose to depart, he said, holding him by the hand—

"When first I advised you, Reginald, you were only a youth, but still you would pay no heed to my words; and now you are a man, how can I hope for better success? Still, greater sense may have come with suffering. You know how nearly I had been your brother in reality. Let me, as I said before, speak to you now as if I were one by nearer, closer ties than those of friendship."

Reginald knew what was to follow, and he sullenly nerved himself for the event, whilst Mr. Martock proceeded—

"I would ask you one simple question: Is it because you love justice, or because you hate Delavelle Ireby, and desire still to have a chance of Briarton, that you take up the quarrel of your nephew against his father?

"Do you not consider it a righteous quarrel?" asked Reginald.

"The justness of the boy's cause is indisputable, the guilt of his father's conduct unquestionable," was the reply; "but still you may be enlisting from bad motives even under the banners of truth. I want to know if you are."

The other paused for a minute ere he replied, while an inward struggle took place, which terminated in his answering in a clear though suppressed voice—

"Delavelle asked me a similar question, almost in similar words, this morning, and I retorted bitterly and angrily; but to you I say that, dear as Briarton is to me, much as I should relinquish to possess it, interwoven with all my plans and hopes as it has ever been, and must ever remain, it is not so much to me *now* as that boy *was*. If there were no enmity betwixt me and Delavelle, I would still endeavour to win back this child's inheritance for him: I would, if I had not the slightest interest, direct or indirect, in the matter. Do not, however, cross-question me further, for I am conscious of many bitter feelings dwelling here," and he pressed his hand on his heart as if some deadly pain dwelt there also.

"But yet you are fond of the lad," exclaimed Walter. "Thank God for that."

Then Reginald, leaning with folded arms against the back of a chair, told how he had cherished that boy; and Mr. Martock, instead of despising the weakness, as Delavelle had done, felt his heart warmed towards the younger brother, thought there was hope still—hope in the present and the future for the disinherited—for the man who could so love a child!

He was right glad to hear Reginald had been truly fond of something besides himself; that it had not been a mere wayward fancy; but, as he said, "a part of his being" that he was obliged to relinquish.

"Yes," thought Walter Martock, when he saw him leave his chambers, "rash and violent and unstable though he is; blind to consequences; determined to pursue his own plans, or whims, or ideas, in spite of right and reason, there is still good in his vexed nature—there is hope for him still."

And so he set himself to see how the ends of truth and justice might best be forwarded; set to work for a cause which was likely to bring him little but trouble, as others might for gold and the precious things of this earth. And ere long every one had heard, that "in the matter of Delavelle Ireby, a minor," the child was sueing for justice from the hands of its father, by Reginald Ireby, his uncle and next friend.

Mr. Martock was counsel in the cause, and Mr. Empson solicitor.

Meanwhile scenes stormy and unsatisfactory had taken and were taking place in the lodgings where Mr. and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy had bestowed their persons and effects; for, after the second day of their return, her reluctance assumed so much the form of opposition, that her husband did not, as he confessed to Reginald, "know what to make of it."

And when a few more days passed by, she attempted what Mr. O'Shaughnessy termed "deluding him;" but he, being learned in the artifices of women, saw through her scheme, and was not deceived by her insinuations.

"I tell you what, Mrs. O'," said he one morning to his wife; "I have more than a notion that the Serpent has been trying his hand on you. But if you imagine I'm going to listen to you, as our first father did to Mother Eve (I am sure it is no untruth to say there never was any piece of mischief yet but a woman was to be found at the bottom of it), you are most miserably mistaken."

"And I suppose," retorted his spouse, "it was a woman made General Ireby's will, and induced him to disinherit

his son and his daughters, and leave all to a miserable little child. I suppose you will say there was a woman in that!"

"I might swear it with a safe conscience," replied Mr. O'Shaughnessy. "Since the days of Adam down to the present time, I repeat, there never was a murder, or a rebellion, or a conspiracy, but a petticoat might have been seen in the plot somewhere or other, if we just went back far enough. And if General Ireby had not been such an idiot as to fall in love first with a pair of dark eyes, and afterwards with a pair still darker but prouder, all these bickerings and heart-burnings might have been avoided; and if you just had kept your own child to yourself, all this confounded work might have been spared to you and to me."

"But I tell you this boy is mine," she said.

"You have said he was yours and that he was not fifty times; you have veered from point to point like a February wind; you have told so many falsehoods, that I have often wondered some of them have not stuck in your throat and choked you. When you are on oath we shall have the straightforward story, as we heard it that night when death had in a manner put you on your trial, and forced you to speak the truth."

"I did not know what I was saying," she urged. "I did not, indeed; I was raving. You would not heed the tale of one out of her mind? I was not answerable for what I said."

"It is to be hoped," said her husband, "that you will not be held accountable for what you are saying now. But listen to me for one minute: bear evidence, I have given my word you shall; it will not be a pleasant day for me any more than for you; but I am not going to break faith with the man who was a friend to me in that savage country, who was so fond of that poor little boy, who has such just cause of anger against the man I call 'the Serpent.' So you may

be pleased or not, angry or sorry, sulky or agreeable; it is all the same to me; for give evidence you shall."

It was twenty-four hours ere Mrs. O'Shaughnessy made another attempt on her lord's constancy, and she then took a different tack.

"Do you mean to go back to America, dear?" she demanded.

"Perhaps so," was the reply. "Why?"

"Oh! nothing; only I was wondering where you would get the money from, either to live here, or go back there," she returned.

"Don't make yourself unhappy about that, my darling," returned Mr. O'Shaughnessy; "I'll provide for us all somehow."

"I provided the money before," suggested she, "and much thanks I got for it."

"Much as you deserved, and more," he retorted. "You did provide it with a vengeance; and honestly you got it."

"And prudently you spent it," she replied.

"Well, well, prudently or not," he said, colouring a little, "I never wilfully wronged any one, and I am not going to do it now. I know perfectly well what you are driving at: you want me to change sides, and go over to the enemy, who will pay well; but I am not a scoundrel, though I am not a saint; and if I ever know you take another shilling from this Delavelle Ireby, I should think very little of pitching you over Blackfriars Bridge, and leaving you and the Thames to get on as best you could."

Whereupon Mrs. O'Shaughnessy burst into tears, and we may take advantage of the pause to remark, that whenever the Irishman spoke of suicide or threatened murder he always fixed on Blackfriars as the scene of the tragedy. Why he had such a preference for it cannot be determined. Perhaps he had some dim idea that London Bridge was too crowded,

and Westminster too remote for either purpose; and as for Waterloo, when he grudged the halfpenny toll, and never crossed it even on business of life, it was not likely he would spend money for a mere matter of death. None of these may have been his motives; but as Mr. O'Shaughnessy said "he never did anything without a reason," it is only natural to suppose he had some good and sufficient one for his perpetual allusions to Blackfriars.

Be that as it may, he cogitated in silence for some time after the threat above recorded, and then suddenly exclaimed—

"You may just as well stop crying as not, because it won't do me any harm, and it won't do you any good. I have made up my mind, and I am not going to change it for an ocean of tears. If you could cry away the past, I would say go on for ever; but you can't, nor can you alter my determination with regard to the future. You have tried me about the boy being your own; and about how pleasant it would be to have as much money as we wanted; and about how kind Mr. Ireby was to you and to your son; and about getting our own children provided for; and about this Reginald's vindictiveness, as they call it, and a hundred other things. And now I want to tell you, once for all, you may give it up; for I am not to be deceived, or flattered, or bribed, or browbeaten into doing anything I have said I won't do; so you may think and cry over that, and get the better of it as soon as you like, for I have promised, and I mean, in spite of fate, to keep my word."

And Delavelle Ireby, almost in a state of distraction, finally decided on doing what he had shrunk from till necessity compelled the step, viz., seeking advice and assistance from Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Been from home for a week past, sir," said the clerk, in answer to Mr. Ireby's anxious inquiry. "We expect him back to-night."

The client muttered something about the solicitor's never being in when he wanted to see him, and then demanded "if he were *certain* to return that night?"

"Well, sir," replied Mr. D'Evelyn's representative, "he is due then; but whether he will be up to time I cannot positively say. I should think, however, that he would, for we require him here; in fact, I wrote for him last night;" and the young gentleman, who thus implied he had written, after a fashion, ordering his principal's return, bowed Mr. Delavelle Ireby out of the office, and winked significantly, half at the departing client, half in confidence to his juvenile coadjutor, who, with his nose on a level with the foolscap, copied "instruments," and "deeds," and affidavits, and cases, labelled "In the matter of ——," and recited all sorts of names and all sorts of incidents, from morning until night.

"Say that I shall be with him first thing to-morrow morning," were Mr. Ireby's parting words to the clerk. And, accordingly, first thing in the morning he came, and found that, for once in his life punctual to time, Mr. D'Evelyn had arrived.

"I have come to consult you," commenced Mr. Ireby.

"Compromise the affair; stop the proceedings; hush up the matter," exclaimed Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Why, what do you know of the affair? Let me explain.'

"My dear sir, I do not want to hear a word more on the subject; I am summoned as a witness on the other side."

"Confound it!" ejaculated Mr. Ireby.

"Ay, confound it indeed! Why did you not attend to the business sooner, or rather, why did you ever let it go so far?"

"What! would you have had me compromise such an iniquitous deception as this?" demanded his client.

"Humbug!" was the reply that had almost crossed the attorney's lips; but he repressed the word and retained it still as a thought, whilst he answered: "If you *know* it to be

a deception, let them fire away as much as they like; for if it be false, you need fear no man or woman either: if you have any reason to believe it true, take my advice, and say that you were labouring under a misconception, and that circumstances have altered your opinion. Acknowledge the lad, give him his property, and hush up the affair as best you can——"

"I cannot imagine," said Delavelle, "why they summon *you* as a witness, nor what can have made them think of such a thing."

"Nor I," replied Mr. D'Evelyn, "excepting that Mr. Martock is a very clever fellow, though he did make a stumbling business of his first speech; and as he has taken up the child's quarrel with his whole soul, he is not likely to leave any stone unturned which he thinks might be big enough to hide a beneficial secret under it. Walter Martock will surely rise to something yet."

Mr. Ireby murmured a few words under his breath, the purport whereof Mr. D'Evelyn ascertained to be a wish that Walter Martock and the infernal gods were better known to each other. When this little ebullition of temper had subsided, the client vehemently demanded "What the deuce they imagined Mr. D'Evelyn could tell about the matter?"

"This is not for me to conjecture," returned the solicitor.

"I never named the subject to you before in my life," said Mr. Ireby.

"Of course not; and besides, they would not expect me to tell my client's secrets—if he have any," added Mr. D'Evelyn, significantly.

"And you never heard her—this—this—woman speak about her child?"

"No, I never heard her say anything that could materially benefit their cause."

"Then what DO you know that they can possibly want to get out of you?" asked Mr. Ireby.

"Enough, if this child be not an impostor, to force you to acknowledge him," returned Mr. D'Evelyn; "therefore, I say, hush up the matter, if you possibly can, as quietly and speedily as may be. More than this I will not say till I am in the witness-box; but it is only fair to let you know in time, that you may act accordingly. Nay," he added, with a half-smile, seeing Delavelle about to speak, "I am in the habit of keeping other people's secrets, surely I may be allowed to retain possession of my own."

And, notwithstanding Mr. Ireby's entreaties, the solicitor remained firm in his resolve, and the client retreated from the office disconcerted, but not completely broken down; and the clerks, who knew that the "opposition" had effected what the youths called "the great move" of summoning the defendant's attorney to give evidence on their side, laughed at Mr. Ireby's perplexed face, the one over his foolscap, the other behind his moustache, until the entrance of a fresh visitor in the shape of an old officer, who took what he called the "worth of his six and eightpence" out of the solicitor, by boring him to death with accounts of his campaigns—Badajos, the Pyrenees, and Waterloo—obliged the elder to assume a professional gravity which became him wonderfully, and the younger to return to his quill and "recite no end of names in a family matter," or rather dispute, wherein Thomas D'Evelyn, Esquire, was solicitor.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REGINALD TRIUMPHS.

As Delavelle Ireby persisted, spite of Mr. D'Evelyn's advice, in his obstinate refusal to acknowledge the child, the preparations for the trial went on apace. O'Shaughnessy acted so well throughout the business, and seemed altogether so altered and improved a being by his change of country and trial of a settler's life, that Mr. D'Evelyn, who heard from sources both direct and indirect how affairs were progressing, felt proud of his old friend, and thought "how he had always said O'Shaughnessy would do well if he would only just," &c., &c.; and so many were against the defendant, and he had, as the solicitor well knew, so little truth on his side, that up to the very morning of the trial he was in a state of complete mystification as to how Mr. Ireby purposed defending the case at all, or indeed what he meant by attempting it.

There were others who marvelled, perhaps, quite as much at his obstinacy as Mr. D'Evelyn; but a sense of right and truth being on their side, induced them to pursue their path calmly, without reference to the one Mr. Delavelle Ireby was treading.

The morning arrived. Mr. Martock had prepared his case with care and skill, for independently of the interest he had in it for its own sake, he felt that something personal might be involved in its success, and he was just about entering the Court when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and turning, he beheld O'Shaughnessy.

"She's off," said that personage.

"She!—surely not your wife?" gasped Mr. Martock.

"Yea, verily," returned the Irishman.

"And where is she gone?"

"To that bourn——"

"You don't mean to say she is *dead?*" interrupted the other.

"*I* don't mean to say it, but *she* does." And as he uttered these words, he placed a note in Mr. Martock's hands, which was to the effect that when that reached her husband, she—Mrs. O'Shaughnessy—would be no more, and that they, the public in general, or all whom it might concern in particular, could look for her body in the Regent's Canal.

"Did you ever hear of such an absurd scheme?" asked Mr. O'Shaughnessy.

"Then you do not think—" commenced Mr. Martock.

"Think!—I know," returned the other. "Bless my heart! how clumsily people do manage these sort of things on this side the Channel. In Ireland there would have been a suicide, a corpse, a funeral, and an inquest, all in two days. But, to put you out of suspense, I have had my eye steadily fixed on her for some time past, for I suspected she meant to give us the slip, and I took into my confidence a very civil young fellow, a policeman, a countryman of my own. If you happen to have any influence with the Commissioners, you might endeavour to get him promoted."

"For Heaven's sake get on," implored the barrister.

"Well, life is short and time is precious, and no work can be done in the grave, I know; so I will make haste," returned the Irishman, with great glee. "I took Tim Morrison into my confidence, and told him what I expected would happen, and what has happened; so accordingly he said he would watch her, and this morning he sent me word he had seen her leave the house in the middle of the night, and go away down to the canal, into which she pitched, not herself, but her bonnet and shawl. Then she walked to Camden Town, took a cab, drove off to a vessel just on the eve of starting for Australia, and had her foot on the gangway when Tim

stopped her, civilly drove her to a place I know near at hand, where at this present time he is keeping a sort of fatherly guard upon her. Now, no doubt Mr. Delaveile Ireby thought we were such fools as to be gulled by a story like this; and, indeed, we should have been in a pretty fix if I had not taken precautions. An ounce of prevention, you know, is worth a million pounds of cure. And now go in and win, for when you want your witness I will produce her."

Perhaps Delavelle Ireby's cheek did turn a degree paler when he beheld Mr. Martock rise with a serene face to address the Court.

The opening speech was considered a very clever one, but one word of it did not reach the ear of the defendant, for almost ere Mr. Martock had commenced, a slip of paper was put into the hand of the elder brother, who hastily rose and left the Court.

The truth is, that just as Mr. O'Shaughnessy was politely handing his wife out of a cab, Mr. D'Evelyn caught sight of her.

"You won't spoil sport, like a good fellow," said the Irishman, endeavouring to detain him. "I would give a hundred pounds cheerfully, if I had it, to see Mr. Ireby's face when this witness is forthcoming. It will be a regular *coup de théâtre.* I say, dear old friend, you won't put your foot through it, will you?"

But the other shook him off, and hastily scribbling a few lines on a scrap of paper, sent it to Mr. Ireby, who came out to speak with him.

"You had better give in," said Mr. D'Evelyn. "You have not got the tenth part of an inch to stand upon. Give it up."

"Their principal witness is dead," remarked Mr. Ireby.

"She has come to life again. I saw her but five minutes since. She is here."

An exclamation of disappointment broke from Delavelle, but the next moment he recovered his self-possession.

"I do not care," he said, suddenly; "I will never give in. Let them say what they like, they cannot *prove* the boy to be mine."

"They can," was the answer; "or at least I can."

"Show me how," began Delavelle.

"If I do, will you give in, and avoid the disgrace of a trial? It is still in your power to do so."

"Prove it to my satisfaction——"

"Do you remember the three stars on the child's right arm?"

Mr. Ireby started. "Ah!" he said, "how do you know?"

"Never mind that point now," returned Mr. D'Evelyn; "I said I would tell you no more till I was in the witness-box, but I am convinced the case ought to proceed no further. Now my mind is easy, do what you like;" and he left Mr. Ireby as he concluded.

Five minutes subsequently a pause occurred in the trial, and in fifteen more the counsel for the defendant announced, to the great disappointment of many present, that the matter had been satisfactorily arranged, and that Mr. Ireby consented to receive the minor as his son.

And so Reginald had partially triumphed at last, and the affair went the round of the papers, as did also Walter Martock's successful speech; and solicitors began to inquire who he was, and to wonder why they had never heard of so clever an advocate before; and briefs found their way to his chambers, as briefs always do, by instinct, to the chambers of any one who has been engaged on the winning side in any case, good, bad, or indifferent; and the younger brother felt for a little time almost happy; and the sun of prosperity shone through the dim glass of his windows on Walter Martock's thoughtful, melancholy face; whilst in

bitterness of spirit Delavelle Ireby took the little solitary stranger "home."

Whether it was in consequence of the exposure to the damp morning air, or of anxiety of mind, or of vexation, or of repentance, or of anger, or of sorrow, it is impossible to say, but about a week after the events just recorded Mrs. O'Shaughnessy fell ill of a fever, which, completely baffling the skill of an "uncommonly clever doctor from Tralee," whose professional services her husband called into requisition, she died some fourteen days after the malady commenced, though "why she chose to do it" the doctor aforementioned professed himself unable to tell.

"If she had died three weeks previously?" said Mr. D'Evelyn, reflectively.

"I expect the trial in the case of 'Ireby, a minor,' would have occupied the Court a little longer than it actually did," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy; "but though she was a woman, she did the right thing for once in her life, and, on the whole, she was not a bad soul, and until this business we got on wonderfully together; but now she is dead, and the matter cannot be mended, I say, 'the Lord's will be done,' and there's an end of it!"

And if Mr. O'Shaughnessy meant that there was an end of her earthly existence and of his sorrow, he was perfectly correct; for there surely never was a widower who bore his bereavement with a more cheerful face. He said there was no use in showing Death you were afraid of him, either for yourself or a friend; and, fully carrying this theory into practice, he paced after a coffin as gaily as though nothing in existence, not even that last event which finishes it, were worth fretting about, so long as a man could, as he expressed it, "get enough to keep him whilst living, and sufficient to bury him decently when dead."

And for ever after Mr. O'Shaughnessy stuck closely to his

friend D'Evelyn, though the latter had persisted, notwithstanding the Irishman's entreaties, "in putting his foot" through Mr. Ireby's trial. What precise post he filled in the solicitor's office no one was ever able to ascertain; but he did something, and received what he cared far more about—a "salary." If Mr. D'Evelyn were engaged when a client called, that client was ushered into Mr. O'Shaughnessy's office, where that gentleman amused him, and discoursed of politics, the weather, law, America, India, and the cholera, with equal facility and politeness. He never seemed busy; he never was out of temper; he said he had got at length precisely what suited him; he was the kindest of fathers, the most good-natured of men; and Mr. D'Evelyn declared that his trip to the "backwoods" had improved and settled him wonderfully.

And Mr. O'Shaughnessy, happily, found other matter for conversation than his wrongs; in lieu of them he took his children for the theme of his desponding moments, and so tormented Mr. D'Evelyn about "what was to become of those fine boys after he was under the sod?" that, as they grew up, the solicitor first defrayed the expenses of their education, and then took them into his office, where it is to be hoped they learned to make a more profitable use of life than their good-natured, pleasure-loving, alternately light-hearted and desponding father, in the course of all his wanderings, and notwithstanding all his efforts and disappointments, managed to turn it to. Thus Daniel O'Shaughnessy lived, and thus he died, and the desire of his heart was gratified in the funeral his dutiful children gave to his remains. And during all the years of their "professional association," as he termed his engagement with Mr. D'Evelyn, an irritable sentence never passed between them; for Mr. O'Shaughnessy declared any one but Mrs. D'Evelyn might have managed to live for ever with Tom without quarrelling; and the lawyer

affirmed, laughingly, that he and the Irishman suited each other admirably, and that, in short, "he could better spare a better man."

Immediately after the trial, a scene, brief but painful, occurred in one of those rooms attached to Courts of law, which seem so cold and formal as to induce the belief that the moment sentimentality enters one of them it must surely die.

The boy was there—the cause of such bitter contention, such heart-burnings, such sorrow—the object of such jealousy, such love, and such hate. He did not know precisely what to make of it all, but he was aware he was very unhappy, and that he longed once again for the pleasant days when Reginald and he wandered through the backwoods together—for the days when his uncle loved him.

"I must see that child for a moment," said the younger brother to Walter Martock—"see him for the last time."

And in silence the barrister accompanied him to the door of the apartment, and waited patiently till Reginald should join him again.

The boy had been crying; but the instant Reginald appeared, he started up and ran towards him. Despite the frequent harshness of his later manner, the lad knew, by his fits of apparently wayward fondness, that he had a large place in his heart still, and clung to him accordingly.

Reginald sat down, and drew the child towards him.

"Willie," he said, "you are going home to your own father and mother; you will be among sisters, and, I trust, kind friends; you will be very rich, and, may God grant, happy." Here he paused for a moment, and then continued, "I am going back again to the dear old places where I first saw you."

"Oh! take me with you," cried the boy, his whole face lighting up as he spoke. "Oh! do take me with you. I will never be tired now of walking; I will do everything you

tell me: I want to be with you; I cannot go to *him.*" And a sorrowful expression came over the appealing eyes as he uttered the last words.

"We must part!" said Reginald, in a husky voice: "better, better far, we had never met. You will be rich."

"I want to go with you," pleaded the child.

"Don't cling to me so!" exclaimed Reginald, unclasping the little arms that encircled his neck; "you are suffocating me. No, my boy, you cannot go with me, nor I stay with you: try to forget me and to be happy where you are going; and listen to me, and remember this in after years: if ever you come into possession of a fine estate, try, for my sake, to make a good use of it. The property, which will some day be yours, has brought misery untold to me. I once longed to call it mine, but now from my heart I can say I trust you may live to enjoy it. And one thing more: if ever you hear any one speaking unkindly of your Uncle Reginald, and accusing him of many faults, remember that though I have sinned against others, I have striven to act rightly towards you, and loved you,—we both know how well. And now good bye; God bless you for ever and ever!"

Tears, such as Delavelle Ireby never shed, even over the corpse of his first-born, fell like rain on the face of the child, who wept and clung to his uncle as though he imagined his small strength could hold that wayward one.

Reginald violently released himself from the boy's embrace, and quitted the room just as one of the attendants came to say "Mr. Ireby's carriage was waiting to take the young gentleman home."

His uncle remained till he saw that pale tear-stained face look its mournful last upon him; and then, turning to Walter Martock, he said, in a voice still tremulous with emotion—

"Now I am a man again!"

So they parted, the nephew and the uncle, never in life to

meet again; for Reginald, notwithstanding Walter's remonstrances, and Constance's entreaties, and Marian's prayers, sailed in the first vessel that left port for the home he had chosen in the wilds of America—left sisters, and friends, and kindness behind him, to seek once more the forest's solitudes, the savage beasts' lair, and grasp again in token of amity the hand of the red man, whose mood accorded with, and whose proud, passionate nature resembled, his own.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SHIPWRECK.

YEARS passed away—five summers had come and gone since Reginald turned his face for the second time to the "far West:" spring blossoms had five times withered, and summer flowers shed their leaves, and autumn fruits mellowed, and winter snows covered the earth, since Delavelle Ireby, the heir of Briarton, parted from his uncle, and went home to the house of his father.

A child's place he never really found in the hearts of either of his parents; his brothers and sisters felt constrained and awkward with the strange, shy boy, who wept almost incessantly for an entire month, after he first came amongst them, for his dear, dear Uncle Reginald, whom the rest of the other children had been taught to regard as a monster of iniquity, a sort of ogre, who might only be spoken of in whispers.

There was a rumour current in the nursery, that a fortnight after his arrival there, when his elder sister affirmed that

"Uncle Reginald was a bad, bad man," the boy had so far forgotten the rules of chivalry as to reward her observation with a slap, which she returning, and accompanying the same with a still more disrespectful comment on their relative, Delavelle, fairly exasperated, flew into a passion; and whilst she used her nails with great effect on his face, employed his hands to such purpose amongst her shining curls, that he tore, as the nurse expressed it, "whole 'andfuls hout of 'er 'ead," and dispatched her screaming and bewildered to her mamma; whilst he washed the blood from his face, and declared, in answer to sundry vehement and uncomplimentary reproaches, "that he would do it again, that he would, the first time any one dared to speak badly of his dear, dear uncle, who had been so fond of him;" and then the boy subsided into tears; but the incident produced so great an impression in the establishment, that thenceforth the newcomer was permitted to entertain his heretical opinions in peace, his father sternly forbidding any one to meddle with the lad or annoy him.

Of all the household, indeed, Delavelle treated him with the greatest forbearance and show of affection. Perhaps he felt jealous to think of the love Reginald had borne the boy, and to know how completely the child's heart was given to his uncle; perhaps he desired to win a portion of fondness and trust for himself; perhaps he did not wish the world to imagine he regretted the restoration of the child, because that restoration deprived him of Briarton; perhaps he imagined it were wiser, and better policy altogether, to make the best of a bad business, and endeavoured to effect that object by keeping up at least a semblance of affection towards the boy. Be that as it may, he strove always to have his son by his side—he took him out to ride and walk, he tried to be kind to him; but it seemed a chill, cold sort of kindness, in comparison to that the little heir had experi-

enced from his Uncle Reginald in the forests of the mighty West.

It was the forced fondness of manner, not the earnest love of the heart; it was the affection of words, and proceeded from determination, not the love of deeds, proceeding from the soul. The child's heart withered in the uncongenial atmosphere. To his uncle he had been the sole object of the intensest devotion; to his mother he was one amongst many, and the least cared for of any; nay, further, she disliked him. What Delavelle had prophesied would be the case had come to pass; for she never could look on the son thus strangely restored without feeling as if he were an intruder, who had come to despoil the children she had nurtured from infancy of their just inheritance.

And if this seem unnatural, let it be borne in mind that he was not "a child lost and found again," but a deception revealed, an annoyance experienced. She had loved the impostor who had for so long supplied his place, intensely, vainly, hopefully; been proud of the beauty of the future possessor of Briarton; she had sorrowed for him; been almost distracted at his death;—and now it turned out that this was the boy who ought to have been dear to her heart, and had not been so; who had been cherished so tenderly by Reginald Ireby; who returned that affection with the whole force of his childish heart, and cared more for his uncle than for father or mother, brother or sister.

And he who was comparatively a stranger to them, though so close a relative, had come back only to enjoy wealth which she had imagined was to be divided equally amongst her other children.

He could not love them; they disliked him. The mother never caressed him as she did the rest; the father's affection was a thing of policy and pity; his brothers and sisters looked coldly on one who had not been educated or brought up with

them, who seemed to have no place in their house. The servants treated him with more respect and cold deference than the rest of their master's offspring; and the boy moped in silence, and each day grew more shy, and reserved, and irritable, and thought with hopeless sadness of his dear Uncle Reginald.

Results such as these have been produced, by similar means, in homes where no pecuniary cause for dissension existed; how, then, could anything different be anticipated at Briarton, when thousands yearly were wrested from father, mother, brothers, and sisters, by a creature who appeared to all of them nothing but a pale-faced, disagreeable child?

Often Delavelle Ireby marvelled what his brother could have seen in the boy to cause such vehement love, such excessive grief: sometimes he concluded there must be something he was powerless to discern; but, again, he arrived at the belief that it was solely because his son was so unlike every other human being that Reginald, wayward and unmanageable himself, had conceived so intense an affection for him.

Ah! it was not for one like Delavelle Ireby to win such love from human being as the man he had injured contrived to do from his son, for he was incapable of feeling an all-absorbing affection, and those who cannot feel a deep attachment can never hope to win it.

Years rolled away, and the child of a wayward destiny remained, an uncomprehended mystery, in his father's house.

And whilst Reginald Ireby fancied the boy had forgotten him, his nephew was clinging—as children will sometimes cling—tenaciously to the hope that some time or other, sooner or later, he should again meet his dear old friend, and go to live with him always.

By the margin of rushing rivers, under the shade of ancient trees, in the wigwam of the Indian, Reginald thought about

the little creature who had, like Briarton, become a passion with him; and always and ever, at his studies, during his hours of recreation, by his father's side, his nephew kept a fond memory, a deep, unspeakable love for him.

During those five years Delavelle's health had been sometimes better, sometimes worse; but finally he became so ill that his physicians ordered a milder climate. They advised Madeira; and as life still seemed sweet in the eyes of the man who had enjoyed it so little, thither Mr. Ireby, when October leaves began to fall, made preparations to go.

His wife was to remain at Briarton, to the end that the expense of removing an entire establishment might be avoided. If he became worse, she could readily join him; if he derived benefit from the change, why, in the spring he should return again; and accordingly he secured berths for himself and Delavelle in the fast-sailing steamer "Pride of the Wave," which having been built (so the owners affirmed) for the express purpose of conveying invalids to the island of health, had, in consequence, been fitted up regardless of expense, and provided with every luxury for that purpose.

It were difficult to say what induced Mr. Ireby to take his son with him; most assuredly it was not love, for there were others of his children who had a much larger place in his heart than Delavelle; most probably it was the old hypocritical "keeping up of appearances," that made him resolutely tell his wife, "he was resolved the boy should go to Madeira; he was not very strong—the change might prove beneficial;" and marvelling much concerning her husband's care for him, the lady beheld them depart.

The father had determined that in Madeira he would make one fresh effort to "fathom his son;" for, as the lad grew up, and seemed to be rapidly striding towards manhood, and consequently towards Briarton, he began to feel it was absolutely necessary for him to establish some hold on the affec-

tions of the young heir, which might render their various monetary arrangements less disagreeable than would otherwise prove the case.

He hoped, when he had his son all to himself, far away from home, amongst total strangers, under a softer sky, in completely different scenes, he might win his heart; at all events, he meant to try; and the boy seemed so pleased at the prospect of a change, he so evidently revelled in the idea of quitting Briarton, that his father fancied half the work was already accomplished, and thought he should find the remainder a matter of, comparatively speaking, little difficulty.

Revolving these projects in his mind, Delavelle Ireby stepped on board the steamer that he fancied was to convey him and his son to Madeira, and with a bright flag floating and waving in the breeze, whilst the clear blue waters rippled and murmured around, and the frosty sun shone propitiously on the departing vessel, it steamed rapidly out of the harbour, carrying its human freight to port.

To which port?—the one they had themselves dreamt of reaching? or that other, at which Fate had decided they should arrive, willing or unwilling, sooner or later?

Days went by; there was no sorrow, no anxiety, at Briarton. Mrs. Ireby was calculating when a letter might be expected from her husband, children's faces were unclouded, when a faint murmur, low as the first breath of a gathering tempest, came to that beautiful home and cast a shadow over it.

Then followed suspense, agonized inquiries, dreadful fears, a night of watching, hours of dread, and doubt, and horror, and then the tidings were confirmed. The "Pride of the Wave" had gone to pieces off the coast of Cornwall: three alone survived to tell the tale; every other soul on board went down; and Mrs. Ireby was a widow and her children orphans.

Yes, it was true; upon that rock-bound shore, whilst the angry waves dashed and howled around the vessel, as though eager to engulph it; whilst the spray dashed high and white over breakers which it was certain death to approach; whilst the tempest roared through the rigging, and lashed the boiling sea into still greater fury—a gallant ship had struck, and all her passengers and crew, save three, sank, never to rise again.

In the clear cold light of an October afternoon that doomed ship had left a friendly port behind; and in less than forty-eight hours afterwards, the same sun that had shone on its departure looked down upon a different scene—where a vessel had been and was not; where men had struggled and fought with the elements for life; where Death had triumphed, and the Ocean swallowed up its prey; where the girl and the matron, the weatherbeaten seaman and the son of the peer, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, the loved and the lonely, the desolate and the fondly cherished, the parent and the child, had met a common fate and found a common grave.

Most on board had passed a sleepless night, for the swelling billows and the sweeping storm alike forbade repose; but absolute fear few experienced, for all had faith in the "Pride of the Wave"—undoubting confidence in the skill of her commander.

They had been tossing about for hours. Hopeful, because ignorant, they dreamed not death was so very near, when, in the faint dawn of morning, a grey-haired sailor shouted out in a voice that was distinctly audible above the roar of the tempest—

"Breakers ahead!"

The rest was a horrid crash, a sudden rush on deck, a wailing of women, a hurried prayer, a wild terror, a confused din of many waters sweeping around and over a rocky shore,

a maddened yearning for and clinging to life, a plunge into the boiling waters, a dim consciousness of struggling forms and piercing shrieks—then time had past and eternity begun. Boats were launched, and men and women and children sprang frantically into them. But what boat could live in such a sea? They swamped almost instantaneously, and all went down.

There was one man, a sailor, who had done his gallant best to succour the helpless and rescue his fellows from a watery grave. He worked at the lowering of the boats, he assisted helpless and almost senseless women into them—alas! only that they might find a speedier death. Whenever a wave swept over the doomed vessel and bore some fresh victim away, he flung a spar overboard, to which they clung till it proved impotent to save them. Ropes were thrown by his hand to those who madly endeavoured to clutch them, whilst the angry waves, hurrying up between, cut off the hope of rescue from the drowning, and bore them back—back from the ship's side, and then down to depths from which they never rose till life had passed away for ever.

When the steamer went to pieces, he contrived to reach a ledge of rock, and maintain an uncertain position there till the tempest subsided, when he swam to shore. There he found one of the passengers whom he had lashed to a spar; and the third who survived that dreadful shipwreck, having clung to one of the boats which capsized, was picked up hours afterwards by a friendly sail.

"There was sorrow on the deep"—yea, and sorrow on the land as well; grief in the home of the sailor's mother; grief in the stately halls; mourning in the lowly hut for the little cabin-boy who had gone down to his last rest; and in the abode of her childhood for the girl who was dying of consumption before she left her native land, but who had met a quicker fate.

Months afterwards a white man, living among the Indians, opened a letter, which came by the hands of a special messenger. The proud, stern savages and their squaws remained at a little distance whilst he read; and they—the sons and daughters of the forest—looked solemnly upon each other to see their brave "white brother" weep.

Forgetful of their presence, forgetful of himself, forgetful of everything in earth, in heaven, save *that* boy, Reginald Ireby buried his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively. It was a passion for a few moments; then a new emotion came swelling up in his soul.

"Friends," he said, rising and addressing the Indians in their own language, "I am going back to my own cold land, to the east, whence my sorrows, like yours, have come. The child of my affections has sought a quiet rest under the waves of the ocean, across which lies my way to that distant shore. In the eternal hunting-grounds we may meet again, but never under the shade of your giant trees, for I am going home to accomplish the purpose of my existence—to regain an inheritance of which I was wrongfully deprived; I am going home to do this, and then to die."

The Indians bowed their heads in silence; but many of them walked far by Reginald's side as he pursued his route through forest glades; and in after years grey-haired warriors and great chiefs spoke, in their mystical language, of the white man who had dwelt with them for years, and who departed so suddenly from among them, after he had covered his face in sudden agony of soul, and shed the first tears they had ever beheld wrung from the eyes of their brother by sickness, or pain, or sorrow. For they, like Walter Martock, had discovered there was gentleness and goodness in the heart of the wayward, unhappy being who could so love a child!

And had there not been mourning for the father and the husband at Briarton?

There was sorrow for months, but at the expiration of that time other thoughts began to mingle with Mrs. Ireby's grief, for then it was whispered that Reginald meant to dispute the possession of Briarton with the daughters of his brother Delavelle.

When the rumour reached Mrs. Ireby's ears, it filled her with a vague terror, a dreadful alarm. True, her husband had, in the course of the last nine years, managed, with prudence and by dint of the greatest labour and economy, to retrieve his at one time almost hopeless fortunes; but still, though a competence might remain, even if Briarton were wrested from her children, it was a horrible idea to her to think that three thousand a year should be taken from them and given to the man who had been her husband's bitterest enemy.

"Is it true?" she asked Mr. D'Evelyn. "Is it true? and if so, has he the faintest chance?"

"I fear he has," gravely returned the solicitor. "We must endeavour to ascertain the precise state of affairs from the only person who saw your husband and son go down, and act accordingly."

The "only person" to whom Mr. D'Evelyn alluded was Robert Mortimer, the seaman previously mentioned, who, in compliance with a note received from Mrs. Ireby, repaired to her house, when, to his utter consternation, he found himself, as he expressed it, "landlocked between a lady and a lawyer."

"What do you know of this affair?" inquired Mr. D'Evelyn.

"I understand, sir, there is to be a trial about it," returned the seaman, cautiously.

"What has that to do with the matter?" asked the solicitor.

"A great deal," was the reply.

"You saw Mr. Ireby washed overboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his son?"

"I did. And now, sir, I'll tell you what I told the other side, and what my counsellor bid me say, that, as I hear it's likely to be a business that I had better have no more hand in than can be helped, I'll say nothing more till I'm on my oath, and then nobody can accuse me of having been bribed or come over in any way."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. D'Evelyn.

"Just what I say, sir," he replied.

"Don't you know by speaking out in time you may prevent a lawsuit?" said the solicitor.

The man shook his head.

"Do you not know it, my good fellow?" persisted Mr. D'Evelyn, in soothing accents.

"I am told not, sir," answered Robert Mortimer.

"Who on earth has been putting such absurd ideas into your mind?"

"One who never was far wrong yet," returned the sailor, ambiguously.

The fact was, whenever a message from Mr. Empson summoned him to that gentleman's presence, he had taken counsel with an old nautical friend on the subject, who, after much cutting of tobacco and an immense expenditure of thought and smoke, had advised Mortimer to reserve his "defence," as he called his evidence, till he was under the "protection of the Court."

"If all I have heard about these Irebys is true," said the man, "the less dealings you have with any of them the better for you. I heard my grandmother say about just such another family, and about a law affair too, 'Those as sups with the devil would need to have a long spoon.' She was an uncommon wise woman, was my grandmother; and

my notion of the matter is, you can't have too long a handle to your spoon to keep your fingers from being burnt, Bob, my boy; so just away to this gentleman, and says you to him, says you, 'Summons me as a witness, sir, and I'll tell you all I know when the proper time comes. But mum's the word and silence is the mark till then.' Now, Bob, if you follow my words, you may sail into port with a fair wind after all."

And so satisfied was the sailor that his friend was right, that, although Mr. Empson entreated, and Mr. D'Evelyn flattered, and Mrs. Ireby wept, he remained firm to the resolution he had first expressed.

"I hear," he said, "you'll law it any way, and I don't want to be giving evidence over and over again."

All the barristers in England could not have altered this determination; he had no faith in them, and he had in his own "counsellor." He could not be convinced but that "the lawyers were wanting to trap him." He said, "they seemed fair-spoken gentlemen, but that it was not always to take people as they seemed; that he would tell all he knew in time, if they wished it; but that he was not going to give information either to the lady or the gentleman till the judge and jury were there to hear what he had to say too."

Perhaps Mr. Empson surmised from the man's manner how matters really stood; perhaps Mr. D'Evelyn feared the worst, or deemed discretion the better part of valour, for he first cautiously proposed "terms" to the other side, which were instantly rejected, and then advised Mrs. Ireby to deliberate well ere she risked the expense and vexation of a lawsuit; but she resolutely replied that she would defend the cause for her children to the last shilling she possessed; that she was sure her husband would have done so had he been living; and that if Briarton could be kept from Reginald Ireby by money or justice, it should never be enjoyed by him.

And Mr. D'Evelyn inwardly wondered if family feuds, like family jewels, could be bequeathed from husband to wife, from wife to children; and he marvelled if obstinacy and the spirit of litigation were capable of being transmitted in like manner; and he began seriously to consider what it was about Briarton which induced each individual who successively possessed it to wrangle with all his or her relatives down to the hundredth cousins; for since time immemorial the Irebys of Briarton had been quarrelling and mortgaging, and making themselves and all with whom they came in contact miserable.

"I have done all I can," said the solicitor, reflectively.

And so he had, but in vain; for Reginald Ireby had scarcely set foot on English soil ere all the world knew the Irebys were going to have another lawsuit, to decide whether Reginald were entitled to the freehold lands and estates of Briarton.

No one seemed to know how the matter would turn. It was said the litigants themselves were even in the dark with regard to the precise nature of the evidence to be expected; but as the spring assizes were close at hand, it was confidently stated the result would be speedily ascertained. And so day after day went by, and at length that fixed for the trial dawned.

CHAPTER XLV.

BRIARTON AT LAST.

THE case was to be tried at Brenslow, and the curiosity of the public was wound up to the highest pitch. The sympathies of many went with the widow and her children, but

most persons affirmed Mr. Reginald Ireby was certain of success because he had retained Mr. Martock on his side; for Walter's reputation was now so firmly established that to say "Mr. Martock had undertaken to plead a cause" was almost tantamount to declaring his client had gained it.

Times were changed with the once hopeless barrister since he sat brooding over his apparently desperate fortunes; times were indeed changed, for now eager clients paid their guineas with alacrity for a few words spoken by him to an attentive Court; times were indeed changed; but was he a happier man because fortune had thought fit at last to shower—what mortals imagine to be till possessed of them—her richest treasures upon the man she had so long neglected?

Was he happier?

In so far as that he could now benefit his fellow-men, that he could now relieve human misery, that he need not close his eyes to grief because unable to alleviate it, for the sake of the good he could do to others—he was happier; but so far as he was individually concerned, "No!"

For fame and wealth, and men's good opinion, and he smiles of fortune, had all come too late. And to how many another has a similar fate been decreed?

Confidence and place to the statesman, reputation to the barrister, the mitre to the bishop, fortune to the merchant, success to the author—ask any of these concerning the gifts fate has laid at his feet—ask if they have brought happiness with them, and the answer of ninety-nine out of a hundred will be—

"No, the tide turned in my favour too late."

There is not a phrase in our language which has more of melancholy reality or terrible import in its sound than this. Who amongst us has not murmured it with a fainting or heard it uttered with a sickening heart? For to all of us, from the

peer to the peasant, from the prince in his palace to the labourer in his cottage, experience and knowledge, and the good we have striven and sighed for, and the meetings we have looked forward to, and the consciousness of error, and the perception of truth, arrive too late.

"Everything in life comes too late," said Mr. Empson to Reginald Ireby, in the course of a conversation recorded in an earlier chapter, "save death, which always appears to come too soon."

The day of the trial came; the Court was crowded to excess: persons who remembered Reginald as a boy, some who had been old friends of his father, many who had dined at Delavelle's table, were present; ladies in the most fashionable and becoming of bonnets; gentlemen in the finest of broadcloth and whitest of collars; yeomen who had succeeded in elbowing their way through the crush, found places somehow, either to stand or sit; people flocked from far and near; lords and baronets, clergymen, doctors, and solicitors—all came to listen to a trial of such local interest. There had not been so much excitement in Brenslow since the days when first a Catholic and then a Protestant prelate was successively burnt in the wide space before the grand old cathedral.

Fair faces bent eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of Mr. Martock, "the great barrister from London." Some gentlemen looked with interest at the man who could speak so eloquently; others with curiosity at one who was capable of making such fabulous sums per annum. The judge took his seat on the bench; the jurors were sworn; the opposing counsel were pointed out; the Court was packed to suffocation; the windows set wide open, and the case began.

Mr. Martock spoke amidst a stillness so profound that no sound, save that of his own voice, fell on the ears of his listeners. The twelve men who had been empanneled to

decide on the merits of Reginald's cause hung upon his every word; the judge took notes. And then the plaintiff's counsel proceeded to call his witnesses, or rather the sole witness, whose yea or nay was to give wealth to the younger son, or deprive him of hope for ever.

Robert Mortimer told his story clearly; there was no quibbling, no embarrassment, no bias to one side or the other perceptible in his manner; but the opposing barrister thought fit to believe there was, and consequently subjected him to a perplexing cross-examination.

The man's face flushed as he was asked, "If he had received or expected to receive any money from Mr. Ireby? If he had known him previously? If he were prejudiced in his favour?"

"Now," said the counsel for the widow, "remember, you are on your oath! remember, you have called God to witness the truth of your assertions! remember, your reply may either send a gentle lady and her daughters desolate into the world, or else place their claim to the property beyond a doubt. Think of all the misery a false reply will entail on the 'widowed and the orphaned;' of the sin you will be committing in suffering any leaning in favour of the man who seeks to dispossess this helpless woman of her just rights through the aid of a contemptible legal quibble, to influence your feelings and affect your answer. Pause, and reflect well, and then say truly, Did you not see Mr. Delavelle Ireby alive after his son went down?"

For an instant not a pin falling disturbed the "silence of the Court;" no one spoke; few seemed to breathe; one man, haggard and wan, rose from his seat and looked with agonizing earnestness at the witness, who, after a moment's reflection, looked full in the face of his questioner, and answered—

"Sir, I am a poor man, but I am also, thank God! an honest one; I never told a lie yet for my own benefit, and I

am not going now to swear one for that of any one else. I know I am on my oath; I did not need you to tell me so, sir; and I answer, as I should answer before my Maker, and with the sight of that awful scene before my eyes, *The gentleman sank first;* the boy stuck to the spar for a few minutes after his father went down."

As he uttered the last words, the individual who had been looking at him so intently reeled, and then fell heavily to the floor: a space was with difficulty cleared, and he was carried into the open air, where Reginald Ireby soon recovered consciousness. It was he who had fainted on hearing the reply, for Briarton was his at last!

After the momentary sensation produced by this event had subsided the case proceeded.

The two barristers ranged on Mrs. Ireby's side successively addressed the jury: they questioned the legal accuracy of Reginald's claim, described the vindictiveness with which he had always pushed his assumptions upon Briarton; they pulled Robert Mortimer's testimony to pieces, distorted the fragments they thus became possessed of, and endeavoured to impugn the veracity of his statement; drew a mournful picture of the widow and her children being driven from the place where they had all lived, wherein they had all hoped to die; they appealed to the jurors as husbands, as fathers, as Englishmen, not to give a verdict so opposed to common sense and common feeling as one for Reginald would involve; they spoke eloquently concerning the "desolate and oppressed," of the "widowed lady and her fatherless children;" in fact, they did everything for their client which they could do.

Ere they concluded the day was far spent, but still Walter Martock begged then to be heard in reply. Slowly he arose, and with a strange light gleaming in his dark, melancholy eyes, began his final speech.

Back he went in his narrative to the very first beginning of the story, further than either of his learned brethren had deemed it needful to commence.

He told of how Reginald, brought up to expect at least a handsome competence, had suddenly found himself a beggar; he spoke of the resentful passions, the mortifying position to which his father's one false step had given rise; rapidly and clearly he touched on all the circumstances. Even as an accomplished musician causes the notes of a familiar instrument to vibrate and quiver beneath the slightest pressure, so, in like manner, did he move the hearts of his auditors by his recital.

Gathering eloquence as he proceeded, he traced, in language that went straight to the souls and comprehensions of all present, as might a rush of mournful melody, the tale of the younger brother's life.

"Only when an author writes from the heart can that of his reader be touched," says one of the lady novelists of our own time; and thus also is it with oratory. Few present, if any, were aware of how near and deep an interest Walter Martock had in the story he told; but all those who heard him bowed beneath the spell of his passionate eloquence.

It was partly a narrative of his own life he thus poured forth in the name of Reginald Ireby; decking him with perfections he never possessed, with aims, views, objects, sensations, higher, nobler, purer than any that ever belonged to or were experienced by him. The suffering and sorrow had been and were common to both; the goodness, and the virtue, and the lofty aims were solely Walter's. But it was for his client, not for himself, he claimed sympathy and forbearance; it was for him he spoke, and argued, and pleaded, as with the tongue of one inspired.

Ladies who, without a thought of the three orphans' trials, had danced in the house where they once dwelt, wept as Mr.

Martock proceeded. Gentlemen who had dined at Delavelle's table, and shared his hospitality, and spoken harshly and cruelly of Reginald in days that were gone, now began to believe that he really had been wronged after all. Yeoman and peasant were astounded at hearing Mr. Ireby made the hero of such a tale, the subject for such wonderful oratory. In short, when sympathy and kindness, and even talent, were unnecessary in his behalf, Reginald's part was taken by every one; and as, in former days, the orphans had been coldly handed over by their "friends" to the forgetfulness or stern judgment of society, so now, in like manner, Mrs. Ireby, and her husband's memory, and her children, were left to the bitter mercies of the world.

There was one who, in silence, read that speech with swimming eyes; who understood thoroughly what feeling had prompted each word; who wept—oh, what scorching tears!—over that sad history, which might seem to others merely an exciting fiction or an interesting tale, but to her, and to him, and to two others had been an agonizing reality, fraught to them with misery untold, unimagined, by the common crowd.

He told the story in a densely thronged Court—he who had lived and suffered for and with her; and she read it in a quiet shaded chamber, where she and disappointment had kept company for years.

In every step of his career Walter Martock followed the younger brother; from place to place, from town to town, from land to land; spoke of his ill success and disappointments, touched on the events of which all were cognizant,—the death of one child, the restoration of the other; and palliated, if he could not altogether justify, Reginald's conduct after the demise of the former.

Succinctly and rapidly he placed each scene before the imaginations of his hearers, even to the closing one, when,

amid the howl of the storm, and the roar of the ocean, and the rush of contending elements, father and son sank never to rise again till that day when the sea shall give up its dead.

He recapitulated the facts Mortimer had sworn to; referred briefly but admiringly to his conduct on the occasion; and, amidst a perfect furore of admiration and excitement, concluded by claiming a verdict for his client.

Then the judge summed up the evidence; the jurors consulted together; intense interest was manifested by all present whilst they did so; a movement of impatience and expectation was just perceptible in the audience; and when, without even leaving the box, a verdict was returned—"For the plaintiff,"—a simultaneous exclamation of pleasure and approbation rang through the Court, which was, so the papers asserted, "immediately suppressed."

Reginald was not there to hear it; he had waited till Mortimer's reply reached his ear; he knew what was to follow might heighten the effect, but could make no change in his circumstances. Let one counsel denounce his character, and another claim compassion for his misfortunes, it was all the same to him. He knew that at length he had grasped what he had struggled, striven, sinned for; the object of his life was accomplished—Briarton was his.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BITTER END.

IT was such another evening as that on which Delavelle freby paid his first visit to his father's house that a carriage, drawn by a pair of fine horses, turned into the avenue at Briarton.

Trees, old and stately, spread their branches across the

drive; the birds were carolling their sweetest melodies; the flowers were blooming brightly as ever; the village bells came wafted on the evening air, mingled with the lowing of cattle and the whistle of the labourer as he turned him from his daily toil; the perfume of honeysuckles, and roses, and sweet clover pervaded the still evening air. It was truly a pleasant hour and a lovely scene. There was peace in the spreading fields, on the distant hills; it lay with a soft mellow shadow on the more remote woods, that stood dark and massive against the clear blue sky; it seemed to murmur in the rippling brook, to rest in the bosom of the flowers, to mingle with the sweet rural sounds, to blend in the harmony of the village bells, to lie sleeping under the shade of the ancient trees; there was peace in the calm pure summer's sky, in every sight that greeted the eye, in every sound that fell on the ear, in every perfume that gratified the sense; there was peace on the far-off upland, on the verdant expanse lying close at hand; peace in heaven above, on earth below; peace around, peace everywhere.

Save in the heart of man, who, ever striving after the unattainable, ever looking eagerly forward, or else glancing sadly behind; ever longing for some good which he desires to obtain, or else sighing for the repossession of something which in former days he flung disdainfully from him; ever restless in the present, anxious for the future, yearning for the days that are gone; always discontented, always repining, always unhappy,—is never completely at peace until six feet of his mother earth contain all that in its turn once confined the immortal spirit, which, while it remained in its house of clay, panted, and pined, and struggled so incessantly for liberty.

And so that sweet English home landscape brought neither peace nor joy to the heart of one who looked away to the distant hills thoughtfully, silently, mournfully. He

was a man who, whilst still young in years, seemed to have lived in experience of grief and suffering twice as long as any of his fellows. Care had wrinkled his brow, laid a hand upon his head, and left grey hairs in abundance behind, furrowed his cheek and emaciated his body. Care and pain, these two conjoined, had stricken the younger son with premature age, for it was Reginald Ireby who looked over the inheritance of his fathers with such earnest mournful eyes; it was he who at length was passing up the avenue of that place—home!

Briarton was now his; he had wrested it back from the family of the man who had blighted his life; he had struggled to obtain that property; he had, in years long gone by, sacrificed his own happiness, that of his sister Marian, and that of another who had been his staunch friend, his true adviser, his faithful ally; he had cast peace from him; he had left his native shore; he had traversed unmeasured wilds; he had separated himself from the child who had been to him as a ray of sunshine; he had nourished feelings of bitter hate and enmity; he had staked the whole of his life's hopes and tranquillity on a single throw; and adopted for his motto through the years of his manhood the old familiar sentence, "Briarton and revenge!"

And now both were his. The man he hated so intensely was dead; the children who had stood between him and the estate had gone home to their long rest too; he had succeeded, in spite of the widow, in spite of her husband, in spite of his own father, to the property all had, as he imagined, combined together to keep him out of. Nor law, nor money, nor hypocrisy, nor treachery, nor cleverness, could wrest it from him now: revenge and Briarton at last were his. And had the accomplishment of his project, the fulfilment of his wishes, brought happiness to the heart of the younger brother?

The sad eyes and mournful glance told a different tale,—of repentance that had come too late; of sorrow that had not lost its bitterness; of now extinguished fires that had first consumed his happiness, and then left nothing but a heap of burnt-out ashes in his breast; of trials that were not yet forgotten; of love that had been disappointed, and which had been thrust from him, but which would not be forgotten; of remorse and pain and misery and discontent, and blasted hopes and blighted affections: this was the end of all!

The very fulfilment of his wishes had been made the instrument of his punishment. He had longed for the children to die—longed to step across their graves to the home of his youth; he had calculated the chances of their demise; he had hated father and sons; he had yearned passionately, wildly, for vengeance; and the accomplishment of his desire had brought no pleasure with it to the heart of the broken-hearted exile who had come home—home to the place of his birth, to the abode of his boyhood, to the house he had dreamed of in foreign lands, from whence he had been sent into the world a beggar; he had come home—home—to die!

Time was when he had said, in the anger and pride and strength of his heart, "For Briarton I mean to live; give me Briarton, and I am content to die." The place was now his to do what he liked with, and yet he would gladly have given up all to recall a few hours from the past, to give health to Marian, to restore the boy to life, to regain the peace and the tranquillity of the days of his youth. His sister's meek eyes seemed to be perpetually haunting him; the clasp of the child's loving arms was still to his imagination around his neck: the former had never reproached him for the agony he had caused her, and the latter was tranquilly sleeping in the depths of the ocean, the blue

waves rippling and dancing over his unmarked resting-place. Whenever Reginald thought of the days when they two were all in all to each other, straying through mighty woods, stemming Indian waters, resting under trees that had grown in solitude for centuries, and then of the boy's untimely end, his very soul died within him, and he groaned aloud.

The "spectres of the past" as he termed them, never left his side nor his sight for a moment. "Take Briarton," they seemed to cry, in tones of bitterness and derision; "take it; but we are fixtures of the property; we will stay with you through life, stand by your bed at death, follow you down to the grave, and haunt your slumbers even there."

What the costliest viands and the rarest wines prove to the man whom sickness has deprived of appetite, Briarton had come to be to Reginald Ireby—a thing to be loathed, a place to be detested. So long as the faintest opposition was raised to his possession of it, he desired to gain it; but now!——

They had reached the house that, for thirteen years, some at least of the party had never entered; they crossed the well-remembered threshold, entered the familiar rooms, took possession of the mansion which once again they might call, if they chose to do so—home!

Oh! how sorrowful a return it was to all. The house and the grounds, the flowers, the fields, the trees, the shrubs—these were all the same as when they had gazed upon them in childhood; but the joy of their own hearts had departed; the bright illusions and lovely dreams of their youth were dispelled; they had contemplated the scene in former years through the mist of happiness and imagination; they gazed steadfastly on it now by the cold light of reality.

And thus quietly they returned to Briarton, and took up their abode there; but the man who had so longed to possess that estate was never destined to enjoy it, for, as he told

the Indians, "he had come home to the land of his birth to work out his destiny, and then to die."

What teachings come to the heart of man by sorrow! not at the first by that violent grief which convulses the soul, and makes all existence seem for a time a horrible nightmare, a frenzy, a fever; but by that silent, quiet sorrow, which sooner or later succeeds to it; which dwells in the hearts of the disappointed! And oh! what knowledge was taught to Reginald Ireby by the accomplishment of his fondest hopes! what bitter knowledge of himself, of life, of the pomps and vanities and vexations of this weary world!

Sitting by Marian's side, he learnt much, and taught her something also—that a life of suffering is preferable to one of unavailing regret—that pain of body is nothing in comparison to agony of mind—that even if her brother were strong and well, her lot would be a happier one than his.

"Do not wish that I may recover," he said to her one day; "I do not desire it. In the days that are gone, I said, 'I have chosen,' and I did choose, and I did persevere; and now I am reaping the harvest of consequences which I never foresaw—of which I never thought. When I am gone, pray that those you love may be kept from the sin of wishing to obtain money and lands through the death or unhappiness of any fellow-creature." And, as he spoke these words, Reginald laid his hand on his heart, where lay the pain which was to cause his death.

"Dear Reginald," said his sister, anxiously.

"It is nothing," he answered.

Weeks wore away: there was a softer beauty on the hills; a deep mellow tint had touched the foliage of the trees; a warmer, brighter glow tinged the wild flowers and the more delicate exotics; the air had a soft, balmy breath; the heavy ears of golden corn bent the yellow straw, and seemed to invite the sickle of the reaper; and then that other reaper,

"whose name is Death," entered once again the mansion of Briarton.

Reginald had never gone more than a few paces from the threshold since his return, and whenever he did take a few steps on the lawn, he was sure to re-enter the mansion with a deeper shadow, a darker gloom, resting on his brow.

To have so longed; to have so triumphed; to have so wished to enjoy; to have discovered, when it was too late, that what he had desired could not confer happiness, which had lain within his grasp in former years, if he would only not have blindly turned him from it; to have so hated and so loved; to have had his vengeance gratified by the uprooting of his affections, by the death of the boy who had been to him more than a son; to have lived just to grasp all; and then, without a moment of enjoyment, to die!

Sometimes he would sit for hours by the windows of his house, gazing over the peaceful landscape—over the estate which had been willed away from him; which had now, by the accident of a child surviving his father for a few minutes, been restored to him—he would sit for hours, with folded arms, contemplating and thinking, but never speaking nor making a sign.

One day he had thus remained silent, whilst Marian regarded him with pity, when his elder sister entered the room.

"Constance," he said, "I was thinking of you: sit down near me."

She complied; and taking her hand in his, and turning his eyes from the window to her face—which was so like what his own had once been—he said—

"By a will I was dispossessed of Briarton, and you were left portionless. Fate, not chance, has restored the property to me, which I have bequeathed to you, subject to no legacies, save one which will ensure to Marian the means of

gratifying her charity. You know, as well as I, what have been my faults; you see in what they have resulted; and when Briarton comes to you, I pray that you and your husband will turn it to a better use than—even if my existence had been prolonged—even after the past, I should, with my nature, have been able to do.

"Let there be peace betwixt you and our brother's wife: how I hated him, how he wronged me, it is worse than useless now to remember; but if ever one of his children stands in need of a friend, do you be that friend to her. And if among your sons there should arise up one that resembles me, tell him my story, that he may take warning from it—that his life may be happy and his death peaceful."

Even as he spoke, a change so sudden came over his face, that Constance started up in terror; but whilst with one hand he clasped hers still more tightly, with the other he made a gesture for her to be calm. A deadly pallor overspread his countenance; a slight convulsion shook his frame; his grasp suddenly relaxed; his head sank forward on his breast, and Constance heard him faintly murmur, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me!"

He had called upon the name of One who is "mighty to save;" and to judge from the placid smile that dwelt on his features after death, it would seem that when standing on the sands of the shore of time, he had heard a voice floating over the waves of eternity's boundless ocean, which whispered softly to his departing soul—"Peace, be still."

Under the trees that had witnessed his first departure and his last return, whilst the birds sang loud and clear, and the village bells tolled mournfully, whilst sunshine lay on the distant hills and lighted up the landscape near at hand, a funeral procession slowly wound; for, sadly and solemnly, men were bearing Reginald Ireby to his last home, "where

the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." From the abode of his boyhood to the grave of his fathers they carried his earthly remains: the tired spirit had found rest, the pained heart had ceased its agonized throbbings, and the soul of the stricken and the suffering one had returned to God, who gave it.

CONCLUSION.

YES, Reginald Ireby was dead, and Constance and her husband inherited the property, and strove to turn it to a better purpose, to a holier end than had previously been attempted.

To the poor and needy they were ever ready to lend an attentive ear; their hearts melted at the sight of distress; their purses were never closed when assistance was required; their voices were ever raised in the cause of the innocent, in excuse of the guilty.

It was a happy home to young, gay children, who dreamed that Paradise must resemble Briarton; to Mr. Ernehulst, who thought his wife perfection; who was never one moment unemployed; whose life, from the period of his marriage, was long and bright as a summer's day, and almost as cloudless; to domestics who idolized their employers, and took a heartfelt interest in their daily work. There was much happiness, great union, perpetual peace at Briarton; but to Constance it was always a sad memory,— she could never forget all the misery it had wrought.

"Good cometh out of evil:" so, when Constance Ernehulst beheld any one tempted, any one wilfully straying from

the right, she laid a gentle hand on the arm of the wrong-doer, and entreated him to reflect; and whilst she pleaded, the memory of what a blasted existence her brother's had been recurred to the mind of the listener, and he often repented him, and turned back ere it was "too late."

For she and hers had suffered; and those who have done so best know how to touch some chord of kindred sympathy in the hearts of the suffering; and often in cases when, had Constance's earlier history been a happier one, she might have spoken and pleaded in vain, her remonstrances exerted a beneficial and lasting influence.

How and where had Constance, once, like Reginald, vehement and impetuous, learned to do all this?

In a shaded room, by the side of her sister, whose life for years was one of pain and resignation.

The most boisterous boy, as well as the quietest girl, esteemed it a privilege to be permitted to enter that apartment; a heavy punishment to be debarred from crossing its threshold. Bright, healthy faces clustered around that beautiful, wasted being, who had a pleasant word for each, a congenial thought with all. She was never irritable, never exacting; always the same patient, placid being. The earliest blossoms of the spring were gathered for her. Constance's children rifled the hedgerows of their loveliest treasures, because Aunt Marian liked wild flowers.

Primroses, the white-starred strawberry, sweet "lady-fingers," the graceful bluebell, that makes one sigh for the land where it thrives so well amidst the glowing heather; hawthorn-buds; wild roses, lovely as they are transitory; the earliest cowslips; the first bunch of gaudy May-flowers—all found their way through the instrumentality of eager, tiny hands, into that room where a dying woman was—a woman who delighted in the things that brought joy to the hearts of children.

And in the summer evenings, when her chair was carried

out and placed on the smooth green lawn; when she reclined in it, the soft breeze fanning her white cheek, and her eyes turned up to the serene sky, across which a few clouds were stealing, or else straying with an earnest longing over the distant landscape,—the children were with her still: they sat at her feet, twining wreaths with which she crowned them, fastening clustering roses amidst the fair hair of the girl who so resembled her aunt, and was called "Marian." They were ever with her, those young creatures, listening, as she narrated to them some old-world tale or fairy legend, which had in former days charmed her. Flowers and children,—these were the companions and delights of her life.

In aftertimes—when the boys went out into the world, and the girls grew up, and exchanged the home of their childhood for others they had chosen for themselves—the memory of those early days, and pleasant lessons, and cheerful stories was never forgotten.

She left a track of light behind in the hearts of each of the dear little ones who had been her solace and her amusement during years of bodily suffering, and it lingered there long after pain with her had ceased for ever.

For many and many a day after Marian had been carried out for the last time, young faces were clouded with loving sorrow; young, bright eyes were dimmed with tears as their mother talked to them of her sister, who was—so the children softly whispered to each other—"now an angel in heaven."

During the long vacation, and at Christmas and other seasons, one also came often amongst them who loved to hear the children speak of their beautiful aunt. He went with them to their favourite haunts; he told them stories, as *she* had done; he seemed almost a boy again when with the romping, noisy, loving-hearted creatures.

He had risen to the Bench. Rich and poor, high and low, all liked and respected him. He had friends of every

degree, but those in whom he took the strongest, deepest interest, who were the nearest and the dearest to his generous heart, were those who needed most his assistance and his kindness, to whom he could be of the greatest use.

Sorrow had not made him selfish; ingratitude never rendered him weary; guilt had no power to induce him to turn harshly aside. Quietly he pursued his unostentatious way: a philanthropist in its most extended sense, a Christian in the truest acceptation of the word.

There were many who wondered why he, apparently so fitted to enjoy domestic felicity, never married; and one unacquainted with his story suggested the idea to him, but he only smiled and shook his head.

"I find quite enough to do in life," he said, "without adding any fresh ties to those which already bind me."

And some thought he must be cold-hearted, and others that he considered matrimony could not increase his happiness; but he himself knew, as you, dear reader, have guessed, that Walter Martock never married because of the love he had borne to the sister of his first client.

* * * * * * *

Where the stately monument of a past age and the rush and bustle of the present meet; where an old cathedral, black, massive, and imposing, stands grandly tranquil, whilst the tramp of pedestrians, and the crush and rattle of conveyances, and the hum of human voices, sound ever and ever round and about it, encircling it with fears, hopes, desires, and passions; where the "Magasin des Modes" of to-day overlooks the last home of those who went down to their graves centuries since; where the genius, and the enterprise, and the intellect of our own time, aspire, and struggle, and reflect, within a few paces of the vaults where patriots, and statesmen, and warriors, and the great departed of former periods sleep quietly; where life and death seem perpetually

contrasting with each other; where, in the noisy street, there seems to be no lull, no pause, no peace by day or by night, whilst inside of the iron railings reigns a perpetual calm; near to where St. Paul's looks silently, darkly down upon the fret and turmoil going on around its massive walls, upon the crowd of eager, anxious faces hurrying past its base, there lies a quiet nook, which, though close to the world, scarcely seems to be of it.

But, oh! what histories could the very stones of its pavement not chronicle—of human folly, and wrong, and suffering, and despair, and passion! what mournful secrets could its archives not reveal! what weary feet have paced its courts! what sickening hearts have come through its low archway and plunged into the world beyond! what tales of domestic dissension and misery are not lying there written on parchment! —tales now unintelligible to mortal ears, for the sufferers, most of them, have passed away from earth, and the grief of the present sweeps that of former days out of sight and out of memory!

It is a quiet, shady corner, which the ghosts of those who during life frequented its courts might be supposed to haunt: it is a deceitful-looking place; for it only seems calm and silent because the secrets of which it has been cognizant are buried so deep, either in the grave or the bosoms of the broken-hearted, that they never rise to light.

The stream that so noisily rushes by it is like a brawling brook, which fumes, and frets, and dashes on its way, but still the bottom may be seen; whilst it resembles a broad, dark, noiseless, dangerous river, that silently flows on, bearing dread secrets under its apparently tranquil surface to the ocean of Eternity.

And if, in these times, when a moral is deemed almost as necessary to a novel as in the days of our forefathers an introduction was considered, you ask me for one—I say, if you

are disposed to disinherit one child for the sake of enriching another, to sacrifice all who are related to you to any mania, whether one of propriety, notoriety, rank, or what is generally termed charity—walk some leisure day into Doctors' Commons, and read the original will of General Delavelle Ireby, of Briarton, in ——shire, which is to be found there, and think of its result;—and if, moreover, you feel evil feelings, and vindictive passions, and unattainable wishes rising in your heart, and threatening to destroy your peace, O reader, whosoever you may be, recollect, no story—no matter how humble its purport, no matter how feebly told—is written without an object; and that the author of this poor tale earnestly hopes some thought of heaven, or loving feeling towards man, may be awakened from the perusal of THE RULING PASSION.

THE END.

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