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A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN AND HIS FAMILY.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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AUTHOR OF "THE WIZARD'S SON," "HESTER," ETC. ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A MINUTE after he was in the room where Lady Markland sat with her great writing table against the light. He did not know how he got there. It seemed impossible that it could have been by mere walking out of one room into another in the ordinary mechanical way. She rose up, dark against the light, when he went in, which was not at all her habit, but he was not sufficiently self-possessed to be aware of that. She turned towards him, which perhaps was an involuntary, instinctive precaution, for against the full daylight in the great window he could but imperfectly see her features. The precaution was unnecessary. His eyes were not clear enough to perceive what was before him. He saw his conception of her, serene in a womanly majesty far above his troubled state of passion, and was quite incapable of perceiving the sympathetic trouble in her face. She held out her hand to him before he could say anything, and said, with a little catch in her breath, "Oh, Mr. Warrender! I—Geoff—we were not sure whether we should see you to-day."

This was a perfectly unintentional speech and

quite uncalled for; for nobody could be more regular, more punctual, than Warrender. It was the first thing she could find to say.

"Did you think I could stay away?" he asked, in a low and hurried tone, which was not at all the beginning he had intended. Then he added, "But I have given Geoff a holiday, if you can accord me a little time,—if I may speak to you."

"Geoff is not like other boys," she said, with a nervous laugh, still standing with her back to the light. "He does not rejoice in a holiday like most children; you have made him love his work."

"It is not about Geoff," he said. "I have—something to say to you, if you will hear me. I—cannot be silent any longer."

"Oh," she said, "you are going to tell me—I know what it is you are going to say—that this cannot continue. I knew that must come sooner or later. Mr. Warrender, you don't need to be told how grateful I am; I thank you, from the bottom of my heart. You have done so much for us. It was clear that it could not—go on for ever." She put out her hand for her chair, and drew it closer, and sat down, still with her back to the window; and now even in his preoccupation with his own overwhelming excitement he saw that she trembled a little, and that there was agitation in her tone.

"Lady Markland, it is not that. It is more than that. The moment has come when I must—when I cannot keep it up any longer. Ah!" for she made a little movement with her hand as if to impose silence. "Must it be so? must I go unheard?" He came closer to her, holding out his hands in the eloquence of

nature, exposing his agitated countenance to the full revelation of the light. "It is not much, is it, in return for a life—only to be allowed to speak, once: for half an hour, for five minutes—once—and then to be silent." Here he paused for breath—still holding out his hands in a silent appeal. "But if that is my sentence I will accept it," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Warrender, do not speak so. Your sentence! from me, that am so deeply in your debt, that never can repay—but I know you never thought of being repaid."

"You will repay me now, tenfold, if you will let me speak."

She put out her hand towards a chair, pointing him to it, and gave him an agitated smile. "Of course you shall speak, whatever you wish or please—as if to your mother, or your elder sister, or an old, old friend."

She put up this little barrier of age instinctively, hastily snatching at the first defensive object she could find. And he sat down as she bade him, but now that he had her permission said nothing,—nothing with his tongue, but with his clasped hands and with his eyes so much, that she covered hers with an involuntary movement, and uttered a little agitated cry. For the moment he was incapable of anything more.

"Mr. Warrender," she said tremulously, "don't, oh, don't say what will make us both unhappy. You know that I am your—friend; you know that I am a great deal older than you are; Geoff's mother, not a woman to whom—not a woman open to—not a——"

"I will tell you," he said, "I know better; this one thing I know better. A woman as far above me as heaven is above earth, whom I am not worth a look

or a word from. Do you think I don't know that? You will say I ought not to have come, knowing what I did, that there was no woman but you in the world for me, and that you were not for me, nor ever would have any thought of me. I should have taken care of myself, don't you think? But I don't think so," he added, almost with violence. "I have had a year of paradise. I have seen you every day, and heard you speak, and touched your hand. To-morrow, I will curse my folly that could not be content with that. But to-day, I am mad and I cannot help myself. I can't be silent, though it is my only policy. Morning and night I think of nothing but you. When I go to sleep, and when I wake, and even when I dream, I can't think of anything but only of what you say. That is what I am going over and over all day long—every little word that you say."

He poured this forth with a haste and fluency utterly unlike his usual mode of speech, never taking breath, never taking his eyes from her, a man possessed; while she, shrinking back in her chair, her eyes cast down, her hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other, listened, beaten down by the tempest of an emotion such as she had never seen before, such as she could scarcely understand. She had been wooed long ago, lightly wooed, herself almost a child; the whole matter little more than a frolic, though it turned into a tragedy; but she did not know and had never met with anything like this. He paused a little to recover his breath, to moisten his parched lips, which were dry and hot with excitement, and then he resumed.

"You talk of a mother, a sister, a friend. I think

you want to mock me, Lady Markland. If you were to say a woman I ought to be content to worship, then I could understand you. I know I ought to have been content. Except that I have gone distracted and can't be silent, can't keep quiet. Oh, forgive me for it. Here is my life which is all yours, and my heart to put your foot on if you please; all of me belongs to you; I wish no better, only forgive me for saying it —just once, once!" In his vehemence he got down on his knees—not by way of kneeling to her, only to get nearer, to come within reach. He touched her hand as if it had been the sceptre of mercy. "Speak to me," he said, "speak to me! even if to tell me that I am a castaway!"

Lady Markland got up quickly, with a look of pain at him, as if she would have fled. "How could you be a castaway?" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Warrender, have pity on me! What can I say? Why should not we live, as we have been doing, in peace and quiet? Why should these dreadful questions be raised? Listen to me a little. Can friends not be friends without this? I am old, I am married! There never could be any question of—— Oh, listen to me! All this that you have been telling me is pity: yes, it is pity. You are so sorry for me. You think I am helpless and want—some one to take care of me, like other women. Stop, stop! it is not so! You must hear me out. I am not so helpless; and you are young; and some one better than me, some fresh girl, some one like yourself—— Theo!" This name came from her lips like a cry, because he had drawn nearer as she drew away from him, and had got her hand in both his and was kissing it desperately, as if he never

would let it go. She never had called him by this name, and yet it was so usual in the house that it did not sound as does a man's Christian name suddenly pronounced by the woman he loves, like a surrender and end of all contention. But she did not, even when she made that cry, withdraw her hand from him. She covered her face with the other, and stood swaying slightly backward away from him, a figure full of reluctance, pain, almost terror; yet without either word or gesture that should send him away.

"Some one," he cried, "like myself! I want no one, nothing in the world, but you! It is not I that have raised the question, it is something stronger than I. Pity! Oh, how dare you! how dare you!" He kissed her hand with a kind of fury between every word. "I sorry for the woman whom I worship—thinking she needs me! Good heavens! are you such a woman as you are and know so little? Or is it true about women that they don't know love, or want love, but only something tame, something quiet, what you call affection?" He stopped with his voice full of scorn, notwithstanding the paroxysm of passion, and looked up at her, though on his knees, in the superiority which he felt. "You want a friend that will be tame and live in peace and quiet; and I, you think, want a fresh girl, like myself. Do you mean to insult us both, Lady Markland? Yes, strike! Order me away from you; but don't mock me! don't mock me!" Then out of scorn and superiority he sank again into the suppliant. "I will be tame, if you like; anything that you like. Only don't send me away!"

She drew her hand away from him, at last, and sank into her chair, with her heart in such a commo-

tion, that she scarcely heard what he was saying for the loud beating in her ears. Then she made a stand again, having been, as it were, beaten from the first parallels; carried away by that fiery charge. She recovered herself a little; controlled the hurrying pulses; called back her strength. She said with a trembling voice, "Oh, let us be calm, if we can! Think a little of my position, and yours. Oh, Theo! think, besides, what I have said, that I am old. How can I bid you go, I who owe to you—you will not let me say it, but I feel it in my heart—so much, so much, of the comfort of my life! I tell you again, you should have said what you have been saying to a girl who would have put her hand in yours and that would have been all——" He put out his hand to take hers once more, but this time she refused him.

"Sit there and let us talk. If I had been that girl!—but I am not, I never can be. I am a woman who have had to act for myself. I am Geoff's mother. I must think of him and what has to be done for him. How can you say I mock you? We are two reasonable beings. We must think; we cannot be carried away by—by—by fancy, by what you call——"

Her voice broke, she could not go on, with the hurrying of her blood, the scrutiny of his looks, the passion in him which infected her. She waved her hand to him to sit down, to be calm, to listen, but she had no voice to speak.

"I am not reasonable," he replied, "no, don't think it; there is no reason in me. Afterwards, I will hear all there is to say. You shall make conditions, explanations, anything you please. Now is not the

time for it. Tell me, am I to go or stay?" He was hoarse, while she was dumb. With both the question had gone far beyond the bounds of that reason to which she had appealed. "That is the only thing," he repeated. "Tell me: am I to go or stay?"

Looking forward to this, it had seemed that there was so much to be said: on his side all the eloquence of passion; on hers the specious arguments of a woman who thinks she may still be able to withhold and restrain. All these possibilities had fled. They looked at each other, almost antagonists, because of being so much the reverse. She drew back, holding herself apart, unwilling to accept that necessity of decision; not knowing how to escape from it; holding her hands clasped together that he might not secure them; her heart fluttering in her throat; her head throbbing with pain and excitement. Ah, if she had been that girl! If he had sought one like himself! He felt it too, even in the scorn with which he repulsed the suggestion; and for a moment it hung on the balance of a thought, on the turn of a look, whether his patience might not give way; whether his fastidious temper might not take fire at the aspect of that reluctance with which she held away from him, kept back, would not yield. But, on the other hand, that very reluctance, was it not a subtle attraction, a charm the more; giving a sweetness beyond all speaking to the certainty that, underneath all that resistance, the real citadel was won? After this momentary armistice and pause, in which they both seemed to regain their hurried breath, and the mist of the combat dispelled a little, he threw himself down by her again, and got both the clasped hands into his own,

saying with something between supplication and authority, "I am to stay?"

"I cannot bid you go," she said, trembling, almost inaudible; and in this way the long battle came to an end in a moment. They looked at each other, scarcely believing it; asking each other, could it be so? Even he scarcely ventured to presume that it was so, though he had forced it and taken the decision into his own hands.

There ensued a half hour or so of bewildered happiness, in which it seemed, to him at least, that the world had turned into a different sphere, and to her that there was in life a sweetness which had come to her too late, of which she could never taste the true flavour, nor forget the bitterness behind; yet which was sweet and wonderful; too wonderful, almost, to believe. She delivered herself over to listen, to behold the flood of the young man's rapture. It filled her with a kind of admiration and almost terror. She was like his mother, though with a difference. She had not known what love was. It was wonderful to her to see it, to know that she was the object of it; but as the warm tide touched her, invaded her being, carrying her away, there was something of fear mingled with her yielding to that delight. She had been so certain that she would not yield; and yet had made so poor a resistance! It was fortunate that he was so lost, on his side, in the wonder of the new bliss, and had so much to pour forth of triumph and ecstasy, that he accepted the silence on her part without comment even in his own mind. It was too completely unhoped for, too extraordinary, what had already happened, that he should ask for more. Her passive posi-

tion, her reticence, but added to the rapture. She was his almost against her will, constrained by the torrent of love which was irresistible, which had carried all her defences away. This gave her a sort of majesty in the young man's dazzled eyes. He was giddy with joy and pride. It had seemed to him impossible that he could ever win this queen of his every thought; and it became her, as a queen still, to stand almost aloof, reluctant, although in all the sweetness of consent she had been made to yield. It was her part, too, in nature and according to all that was most seemly, to bring him back to the consideration of that invading sea of common life which surrounded his golden isle of happiness. She put up her hand as if to stop his mouth. "Oh, Theo, there are so many things which we must think of. It cannot be all happiness as you suppose. You are not thinking how many troublesome things I bring with me."

"Let trouble be for to-morrow," he cried; "nothing but joy on this white day."

She looked at him with a shiver, yet a smile. "Ah, you are so young! your heart has no ghosts like mine."

"Speak respectfully of my heart, for it is yours. The ghosts shall be laid and the troubles will fly away. What are ghosts to you and me? One may be subject to them, but two can face the world."

"O dreamer," she cried, but the reflection of the light in his face came into hers, almost against her will.

"Not dreamer: lover, a better word. Don't spend your strength for nothing, my lady and mistress. Do you really believe that you can make me afraid, to-day?"

She shook her head, not answering, which indeed he scarcely left her time to do, he had so much to say. His very nature seemed changed, the proud, fastidious, taciturn Warrender babbling like a happy boy, in the sudden overflow of a bliss which was too much for him. But while he ran on, a louder voice than hers interrupted him,—the bell that meant the commonest of all events, the bell for luncheon. It fell into the soft retirement of that paradise, which was something of a fool's paradise to Theo, scaring and startling the pair. She made a start from his side with a guilty blush, and even he for a moment paused with something like a sense of alarm. They looked at each other as if they had been suddenly cited to appear before a tribunal and answer for what they had done. Then he broke into a breathless laugh. "I shall have to leave you. I can't face that ordeal. Oh, what a *falling off* is here—luncheon! must I leave everything for that?"

"Yes, go, go—it is too much," she murmured, like a culprit whose accomplice may be saved, but who herself must face the judge. "I could not bear it; I could not hold up my head, if you were there."

"One moment!" She was leaning towards him, when Geoff's hasty steps were heard in the hall and his voice that seemed to sound sharp in her very ears, "Where's mamma?" Lady Markland fell back with a face like a ghost, covering it with her hands. Warrender felt as if a sudden flame was lit in his heart. He seized her almost with violence. "I will come back to-night, when he is in bed. Be in the avenue. I must see you again to-day."

"I will, Theo."

"At nine o'clock." He pulled away the hand which still was over her eyes. "You are mine, remember, mine first. I shall count the minutes till I come back. Mine first, mine always."

"Oh, Theo, yes! for the love of heaven go!"

Was that how to conclude the first meeting of happy lovers? Warrender rushed through the hall, with his blood on fire, almost knocking over Geoff, who presented himself, very curious and sharp-eyed, directly in the way.

"Oh, I say, Theo!" cried Geoff. "Where are you going, Theo? that's lunch! lunch is on the table. Don't you hear the bell? Can't you stay?"

Warrender waved his hand, he could make no reply. He could have taken the child by the collar and flung him far away into the unknown, if that had been practicable. Ghosts, she had said: Geoff was no ghost, but he was insupportable; not to be seen with composure at that tremendous moment. The young man rushed down the steps and struck across the drive at a pace like a race-horse, though he was only walking. He forgot even the big black, munching his hay tranquilly in the stable and thinking no harm.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MARKLAND came out of her room a little after, paler than usual, with a great air of stateliness and gravity, conscious to her finger points of the looks that met her, and putting on an aspect of severity which was very unusual to her. Geoff seized and clung to her arm as he was wont, and found it trembling. He had begun to pour forth his wonder about Theo even before he made this discovery.

"Why, Theo has gone away! He wouldn't stop for lunch. I shouted to him, but he never paid any attention. Is he ill, or is he in trouble, or what's the—— Why, mamma! you are all trembling!"

"Nonsense, Geoff, I have been—sitting with the window open: and it is a little cold to-day."

"Cold!" Geoff was so struck by the absurdity of the statement that he stopped to look at her. "Ah," he said, "you have not been running up and down to the stables or you never would think that."

"No, I have been sitting—writing."

"Oh!" said the child again, "were you writing all the time Theo was there? I thought you were talking to Theo. He gave me a holiday because he had something he wanted to say to you."

"I have told you a great many times, Geoff, that you should not call Mr. Warrender Theo. It is much

too familiar. You must not presume because he is so very kind to you——"

"Oh, he doesn't mind," said Geoff lightly. "What was he saying to you, mamma?"

By this time they were at table, that is, she was at the bar, seated indeed as a concession to her weakness, about to be tried for her life before those august judges, Geoff and old Soames, both of whom had their attention fixed on her with an intentness which the whole bench could scarcely equal. She held her head very high, but she did not dare to lift up her eyes.

"Will you have this, or some of the chicken?" she asked, with a voice of solemnity not quite adapted to the question.

"I say, mamma, was it about me? or was it some trouble he was in?"

"My dear Geoff, let us attend to our own business. The chicken is better for you. And why have you been running up and down to the stables? I thought I had said that I objected to the stables."

By dint of thus carrying the war into the enemy's country, she was able to meet her boy's keen eyes, which were sharp with curiosity, "like needles," as old Soames said. Soames, the other of her judges, gave his verdict without hesitation. "She have given him the sack," he said confidentially to the housekeeper, as soon as he could spare a moment. "And a very good thing too." The housemaids had come to the same conclusion, seeing Theo's hurried exit, and the rate at which he walked down the avenue. The news ran through the house in a moment. "My lady has given him the sack." The old servants were glad, because there would thus be no change; and the young

ones were sorry for the same reason, and partly, too, because of their sympathy for the young lover dismissed, whose distracted departure without his horse went to their tender hearts.

Geoff had to enter into an explanation as to why he had sought the stables as soon as he was dismissed from his books,—an explanation which involved much; for it had already been pointed out to him on various occasions that the coachman and Black were not improving society. Geoff had to confess that it was dull when he had a holiday, that he didn't know where to go, that Black and the coachman were more fun than —any one else—with an expressive glance over his shoulder at old Soames, all which pleas went like so many arrows to Lady Markland's heart. Had she been so neglecting her boy that Black and the coachman had become his valued allies? She who believed in her heart that up to this moment her life had been devoted to Geoff.

The day passed to her like a day in a fever. Geoff liked it, on the whole. There was no Theo to linger after lunch and interfere with his possession of his mother. The long afternoon was all his, and Lady Markland, though she was, he thought, dull, and sometimes did not hear what he said, letting her attention stray, and her eyes go far away, over his head, was yet very tender, more affectionate than ever, anxious to inquire into all his wishes and to find out everything he wanted. He talked to her more than he had done at a stretch for a long time, and made it so apparent how completely he calculated upon her as always his companion that Lady Markland's guilty soul was troubled within her. She faltered once, "But,

Geoff, you know you will have to go to school, they all say, and then to Oxford, when you are a man." "Yes, and you can come and live close by college," the boy said. "Many boys' mothers do, Mr. Sargent told me." Her heart sank more and more as he opened up his plans before her. It was all quite simple to Geoff. He did not dream of any change in himself, and what change could ever come to her? Presently the manner in which the child calculated upon her, ignoring every personal claim of hers, awoke a little spark in Lady Markland's breast. A little while ago she would herself have said (nay, this morning she would have said it) that she had no life but in him, that for her there was no future save Geoff's future. Even now it seemed guilt in her that she should have calculations of her own.

And as for saying anything to him on the subject, how could she do it? It was impossible. Had he been a young man, with some acquaintance with life, she thought it would not have been so hard; or had he been a mere child, to whom she could have said that Theo was to be his new papa. But ten; a judge and a critic; a creature who knew so much and so little. Half a dozen times she cleared her throat to begin; to lead the conversation back to Theo, to make some attempt at disclosure: but another look at his face chilled the words on her lips. She could not do it: how could she ever do it? They went out and had a long drive together; they strolled about the park afterwards before dinner, the boy hanging as was his habit upon her arm, pressed close to her, talking—about everything in heaven and earth: but never loosening that claim which was supreme, that pro-

prietorship in her which she had never contested till now, never herself doubted. Geoff meant to be very good to his mother, her protector, her support, as soon as he should be big enough. She was to be his chief companion, always with him, his alone, all his, as she was now. Any other reading of life was not possible to him. He felt sure there was something about Theo which he had not been told, some story which he would get mamma to tell him sooner or later, but never that this story could interfere with himself and his mother; that was impossible, beyond the range of the boy's wildest misgivings.

As for Lady Markland, she was more than silenced, she was overawed by this certainty. She let him run on, her own thoughts drifting away, pulled up now and then by an importunate, repeated question, then wandering again, but not far, only to this impossibility of making Geoff understand. How should she convey to him the first germ of the fact that mother and son are not one; that they separate and part in the course of nature; that a woman in the flower of her life does not necessarily centre every wish in the progress of a little boy? How to tell him this, how to find a language which could express it, in which such a horrible fact could be told! To herself it was terrible, a thing foreign to all her tenets, to all her principles. Even now that she had done it and bound herself for ever, and raised this wall between herself and her child, between herself and her past life, it was terrible to her. If she had ever been certain of anything in her life, it had been that such a step was impossible. Marriage, for her who was already married; a new life to come in place of the old; a state of affairs in

which Geoff should no longer be first, in which, in fact, it would be better, an ease to her, that Geoff should be away! Oh, horrible thought! an ease to her to be without Geoff! She had lived for him, she had said and felt that he was everything to her, the sole object of her love and her life. And now he was an embarrassment, and it would be well for her if he could be got away.

In this confusion of mind mingled with impulses to flight, with impulses of going and throwing herself on Theo's mercy, begging him to give her up, for she could not do it, the day passed. Geoff clung to her and talked, talked incessantly all the day through, giving her his opinions about Theo as well as about everything else; and she listened hearing some things —that most distinctly as it may be believed—but not all, nor near all; weary, was it possible? of her own child; of the ceaseless voice in her ears. She was conscious of urging him to go to bed, as she would not have thought of doing in other circumstances; urging him against his will, telling him that he was getting later and later, that it made him pale and nervous, that he must go—all because she was anxious to escape, because she had promised to meet—— Could a woman sink into lower humiliation, a woman a mother, not a foolish girl? At last she could escape breathlessly, tying a black veil over her head; stealing out, saying a nervous word to Soames about the beautiful moonlight. Even Soames had to see her humiliation. She had to linger, as if she were looking at the moonlight, while Soames stood upon the steps— and with shame and confusion to cross the space before the door, which was all one flood of light marked

only by her little shadow, small and clinging to her feet. She could have wished that there should never be moonlight more, so shamed and mortified and humiliated did she feel. The darkness would have been better; the darkness would have hidden her at least. In this condition of shame and pain she went along, gliding into what shadow the young trees could throw, brushing against the bushes underneath. And then suddenly, all in a moment, there was calm; ah, more than calm, a refuge from all trouble, a sudden escape from herself and all things that were oppressing her; without any word said, a sudden meeting in the shade of the trees, and two where there had been but one,—a young lover, and a woman who, Heaven help her, was young too, and could still drop her burden off her shoulders and for a moment forget everything, except the arm that supported her, and the whisper close to her ear, and the melting of all her bonds, the melting of her very being into his, the heavenly ease and forgetfulness, the *Vita Nuova* never known before.

It seemed not herself all laden with shame, but another woman, who raised her head, and said to him, shaking as it were her bondage from her: "This is not becoming for you and me. Let us go in. Whatever we have to encounter together, we must not do it in secret. I must not linger about here, Theo, like one of my maids."

"Yet stay a moment," he said. Perhaps the maids have the best of it. The sweet air of the night, the magical light so near them, the contact and close vicinity, almost unseen of each other, added an ethereal atmosphere to the everlasting, always continued tale.

'Twas partly love and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel than see
The swelling of her heart.

After a time, they emerged into the moonlight, slowly moving towards the house, she leaning upon his arm, he stooping over her, a suggestive posture. Soames upon the doorsteps could not believe his eyes. He would have shut up before now, if he had not seen my lady go out. To admire the moonlight! it did not seem to Soames a very sensible occupation; but when he saw her coming back, not alone, wonder and horror crept over him. He watched them with his mouth open, as well as his eyes, and when he went downstairs and told Black, who had made the horses comfortable for the night, to go and bring out Mr. Warrender's horse, a shock ran through the entire house. After all! but then it was possible that he had always intended to come back and ride his horse home.

Black walked about (very unwillingly and altogether indifferent to the beauty of the moonlight) for nearly an hour before Warrender came out. The young man's aspect then was very unlike that of the morning. Happiness beamed from his as he walked, and Lady Markland came out to the door to see him start, and called good-night as he rode away. "Good-night, till to-morrow," he said, turning back as long as he could see her, which was a tempting of providence on the part of a man who was not a great rider, and with a big horse like the black, and so fresh, and irritated to be taken out of the stable at that hour of the night. The servants exchanged looks as my lady

walked back with eyes that shone as they had never shone before, and something of that glory about her, that dazzling and mist of self-absorption which belongs to no other condition of the mind. She went back into the room and shut the door, and sat down where she had been sitting, and delivered herself over to those visions which are more enthralling than the reality; those mingled recollections and anticipations which are the elixir of love. She had forgotten all about herself; herself as she was before that last meeting. Her age, her gravity, the falseness of the position, the terrible Geoff, all floated away from her thoughts. They were filled only with what *he* had been saying and doing, as if she had been that "fresh girl" of whom she had spoken to him. She forgot that she was four years (magnified this morning into a hundred) and a whole life in advance of Theo. She thought only—nay, poor lady, assailed after her time by this love-fever, taking it late and not lightly! she thought not at all, but surrendered herself to that overwhelming wave of emotion which, more than almost anything else, has the power of filling up all the vacant places of life. Her troublous thoughts, her shame, her sense of all the difficulties in her way, went from her in that new existence. They were all there unchanged, but from the moment she thought of them no more.

It was some time after this, when she went upstairs with her candle through the stilled and darkened house, the light in her hand showing still that confused sweet shining in her eyes, the smile that lurked about the corners of her mouth. A faint sound made her look up as she went towards the gallery upon

which all the bedrooms opened. Standing by the banister, looking down into the dark hall, was Geoff, a little white figure, his colourless hair ruffled by much tossing on his bed, his eyes dazzled by the light. "Geoff!" She stood still and her heart seemed to stop beating. To see him there was as if a curtain had suddenly fallen, shutting out all the sweet prospects before her, showing nothing but darkness and danger instead.

"Geoff! Is it you out of bed at this hour?"

"Yes, it is me," he said, in a querulous tone; "there is no one else so little in the house; of course it is me."

"You are shivering with cold; have you——" Her breath seemed to go from her as she came up to him and put her arm round him. "Have you been here long, Geoff?"

"I couldn't sleep," said the child, "and I heard a noise. I saw Theo. Has Theo been back here with you? What did Theo want here so late at night?"

He did not look at her, but stared into the candle with eyes opened to twice their size.

"Come into my room," she said. "You are so cold; you are shivering. Oh, Geoff! if you make yourself ill, what shall I do?"

He let her lead him into her room, wrap him in a fur cloak, and kneel down beside him to chafe his feet with her hands; this helped her in the dreadful crisis which had come so suddenly, which she had feared beyond anything else in the world. "You must have been about a long time or you could not have got so cold, Geoff."

"Yes, I have been about a long time. I thought

you would come up directly, after Theo went away." He looked at her very gravely as she knelt with her face on a level with his. He had filled the place of a judge before, without knowing it; but now Geoff was consciously a judge, and interrogating—one who was too much like a criminal, who avoided the looks of that representative of offended law. "Theo stayed a long time," he said, "and then he rode away. I suppose he came to get his horse." How he looked at her! Her eyes were upon his feet, stretched out on the sofa, which she was rubbing; but his eyes burned into her, through her downcast eyelids, making punctures in her very brain.

"He did come for his horse." She could hardly hear the words she was saying, for the tumult of her heart in her ears; "but that was not all, Geoff."

For a long minute no more was said; it seemed like an hour. The mother went on rubbing the child's feet mechanically, then bent down upon them and kissed them. No Magdalen was ever more bowed with shame and trouble. Her voice was choked; she could not speak a word in her own defence. It had been happiness, but oh, what a price to pay!

At last Geoff said, with great gravity, "Theo was always very fond of you."

"I think so, Geoff," she answered, faltering.

"And now you are fond of him."

She could say nothing. She put her head down upon the little white feet and kissed them, with what humility, with what compunction! her eyes dry and her cheeks blazing with shame.

"It's not anything wrong, mamma?"

"No, Geoff, oh no, my darling! they say not: if only you don't mind."

The brave little eyes blinked and twinkled to get rid of unwelcome tears. He put his hand upon her head and stroked it, as if it had been she that was the child. "I do mind," he said. She thought, as she felt the little hand upon her head, that the boy was about to call upon her for a supreme sacrifice; but for a moment there was nothing more. Afterwards he repulsed her a little, very slightly, but yet it was a repulse. "I suppose," he said, "it cannot be helped, mamma? My feet are quite warm now, and I'll go to bed."

"Geoff, is that all you have got to say to me? It can make no difference, my darling, no difference. Oh, Geoff, my own boy, you will always be my first——"

Would he, could he be her first thought? She paused, conscience-stricken, raising for the first time her eyes to his. But a child does not catch such an unconscious admission. He took no notice of it. His chief object, for the moment, was not to cry, which he felt would be beneath his dignity. His little heart was all forlorn. He had no clear idea of what it was, or of what was going to happen, but only a vague certainty that mamma and Theo were to stand more and more together, and that he was "out of it." He could not talk of grown-up things like them; he would be sent to play as he had been this morning. He who had been companion, counsellor, everything to her, he would be sent to play. The dreary future seemed all summed up in that. He slid out of her arms with his little bare feet on the carpet, flinging

the fur cloak from him. "I was a little cold because the door was open, but I'm quite warm now, and I'm sleepy too. And it's long, long past bedtime, don't you think, mamma? I wonder if I was ever as late before?"

He looked at her when he asked that question, and suddenly before them both, a little vague and confused to the child, to her clear as if yesterday, came the picture of that night when Geoff and she had watched together, he at her feet, curled into her dress, while his father lay dying. Oh, *he* had no right to reproach her, no right! and yet the pale, awful face on the pillow, living, yet already wrapt in the majesty of death, rose up before her. She gave a great cry and clasped Geoff in her arms. She was still kneeling, and his slight little white figure swayed and trembled with the sudden weight. To have that face like a spectre rise up before her, and Geoff's countenance averted, his little eyes twitching to keep in the tears, was there anything in the world worth that? Magdalen! ah, worse than Magdalen! for she poured out her tears for what was past, whereas all this shame was the price at which she was going to buy happiness to come.

And yet it was nothing wrong.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. WARRENDER and Chatty left the Warren in the end of the week in which these events had taken place. They had a farewell visit from the rector and Mrs. Wilberforce, which no doubt was prompted by kindness, yet had other motives as well. The Warren looked its worst on the morning when this visit was paid. It was a gray day, no sun visible, the rain falling by intervals, the sky all neutral tinted, melting in the gray distance into indefinite levels of damp soil and shivering willows,—that is, where there was a horizon visible at all. But in the Warren there was no horizon, nothing but patches of whitish gray seen among the branches of the trees, upon which the rain kept up such an endless, dismal patter as became unendurable after a time—a continual dropping, the water dripping off the long branches, drizzling through the leaves with incessant monotonous downfall. The Wilberforces came picking their way through the little pools which alternated with dry patches along all the approaches to the house, their wet umbrellas making a moving glimmer of reflection in the damp atmosphere. Inside, the rooms were all dark, as if it had been twilight. Boxes stood about in the hall, packed and ready, and there were those little signs of neglect in the usual garnishing of the rooms which is so apt to occur when there is a departure. Chatty,

with her hat on, stood arranging a few very wet flowers in a solitary vase, as if by way of keeping up appearances, the usual decorations of this kind being all cleared away. "Theo is so little at home," she said, by way of explanation, "he would get no good of them." Afterwards when she thought of it, Chatty was sorry that she had mentioned her brother at all.

"Ah, Theo! We have been hearing wonderful things of Theo," said Mrs. Wilberforce, as Mrs. Warrender approached from the drawing-room to meet them and bid them enter. "I have never been so surprised in my life; and yet I don't know why I should be surprised. Of course it makes his conduct all quite reasonable when we look back upon it in that light."

"Who speaks of conduct that is reasonable?" said Mrs. Warrender. "It is kinder than reason to come and see us this melancholy day: for it is very discouraging to leave home under such skies."

"But you don't need to leave in such a hurry, surely. Theo would never press you: and besides, I suppose with a larger house so close at hand they would not live here."

"There is nobody going to live here that I know of, except Theo," said his mother. ("Let me take off your cloak," cried Chatty;) "notwithstanding the packing and all the fuss the servants love to make, we may surely have some tea. I ought to ask you to come and sit down by the fire. Though it is June, a fire seems the only comfortable thing one can think of." Mrs. Warrender was full of suppressed excitement, and talked against time that her visitors might not insist upon the one topic of which she was de-

termined nothing should be said. But the rector's wife was not one whom it was easy to balk.

"A fire would be cosy," she said; "but I suppose now the Warren will be made to look very different. With all the will in the world to change, it does need a new start, doesn't it, a new beginning, to make a real change in a house?"

This volley was ineffective from the fact that it called forth no remark. As Mrs. Warrender had no answer to make, she took refuge in that which is the most complete of all—silence: and left her adversary to watch, as it were, the smoke of her own guns, dispersing vaguely into the heavy air.

"We are going to London, first," Mrs. Warrender said. "No, not for the season, it is too late; but if any little simple gaieties should fall in Chatty's way——"

"Little simple gaieties are scarcely appropriate to London in June," said the rector, with a laugh.

"No, if we were to be received into the world of fashion, Chatty and I—but that doesn't seem very likely. We all talk about London as if we were going to plunge into a vortex. Our vortex means two or three people in Kensington, and one little bit of a house in Mayfair."

"That might be quite enough to set you going," said Mrs. Wilberforce. "It only depends upon whom the people are; though now, I hear that in London there are no invitations more sought after, than to the rich parvenu houses,—people that never were heard of till they grew rich; and then they have nothing to do but get a grand house in Belgravia, and let it be

known how much money they have. Money is everything, alas, now."

"It always was a good deal, my dear," observed the rector mildly.

"Never in my time, Herbert! Mamma would no more have let us go to such houses! It is just one of those signs of the time which you insist on ignoring, but which one day—— This new connection will be a great thing for Chatty, dear Mrs. Warrender. It is such a nice thing for a girl to come out under good auspices."

"Poor Chatty, we cannot say she is coming out," said her mother, "and the Thynnes, I have always understood, were dull people, not fashionable at all."

"Oh, you don't think for a moment that I meant the Thynnes! She has been very quiet, to be sure; but now, of course, with a young husband—and I am sure Chatty does not look more than nineteen; I always say she is the youngest looking girl of her age. And as she has never been presented, what is she but a girl coming out? But I do think I would wait till she had her sister-in-law to go out with. It may be a self-denial for a mother, but it gives a girl such an advantage!"

"But Chatty is not going to have a husband either young or old," said Mrs. Warrender, with a laugh which was a little forced. "Ah, here is the tea. I wish we had a fire too, Joseph, though it is against rules."

"I'll light you a fire, mum," said Joseph, "in a minute. None of us would mind the trouble, seeing as it's only for once, and the family going away."

"That is very good of you not to mind," said his

mistress, laughing. "Light it, then, it will make us more cheerful before we go."

"Ah, Joseph," said the rector's wife, "you may well be kind to your good old mistress, who has always been so considerate to you. For new lords, new laws, you know, and when the new lady comes——"

Joseph, who was on his knees lighting the fire, turned round with the freedom of an old servant. "There ain't no new ladies but in folks' imagination," he said. "The Warren ain't a place for nothing new."

"Joseph!" cried his mistress sharply; but she was glad of the assistance thus afforded to her. And there was a little interval during which Mrs. Wilberforce was occupied with her tea. She was cold and damp, and the steaming cup was pleasant to see; but she was not to be kept in silence even by this much-needed refreshment. "I should think," she resumed, "that the boy would be the chief difficulty. A step-mother is a difficult position; but a step-father, and one so young as dear Theo!"

"Step-fathering succeeds better than step-mothering," said the rector, "so far as my experience goes. Men, my dear, are not so exacting; they are more easily satisfied."

"What nonsense, Herbert! They are not brought so much in contact with the children, perhaps, you mean; they are not called on to interfere so much. But how a mother could trust her children's future to a second husband—— For my part I would rather die."

"Let us hope you will never need to do so, my

dear," said the rector, at which little pleasantry Mrs. Warrender was glad to laugh.

"Happily none of us are in danger," she said. "Chatty must take the warning to heart and beware of fascinating widowers. Is it true about the Elms—that the house is empty and every one gone?"

"Thank heaven! it is quite true; gone like a bubble burst, clean swept out, and not a vestige left."

"As every such place must go sooner or later," said Mrs. Wilberforce. "That sort of thing may last for a time, but sooner or later——"

"I think," said the rector, "that our friend Cavendish had, perhaps, something to do with it. It appears that it is an uncle of his who bought the house when it was sold three years ago, and these people wanted something done to the drainage, I suppose. I advised Dick to persuade his uncle to do nothing, hoping that the nuisance—for, I suppose, however wicked you are, you may have a nose like other people—might drive them out; and so it has done apparently," Mr. Wilberforce said, with some complacency, looking like a man who deserved well of his kind.

"They might have caught fever, too, like other people. I wonder if that is moral, to neglect the drains of the wicked?"

"No," said Mrs. Wilberforce firmly; "they have not noses like other people. How should they, people living in that way? The sense of smell is essentially a belonging of the better classes. Servants never smell anything. We all know that. My cook sniffs and looks me in the face and says, 'I don't get any-

thing, m'm,' when it is enough to knock you down! And persons of *that* description living in the midst of every evil—! Not that I believe in all that fuss about drains," she added, after a moment. "We never had any drains in the old times, and who ever heard of typhoid fever *then?*"

"But if they had been made very ill?" said Chatty, who, up to this time, had not spoken. "I don't think surely Mr. Cavendish would have done that."

She was a little moved by this new view. Chatty was not interested in general about what was said, but now and then a personal question would rouse her. She thought of the woman with the blue eyes, so wide open and red with crying, and then of Dick with his laugh which it always made her cheerful to think of. Chatty had in her mind no possible link of connection between these two: but the absence of any power of comprehending the abstract in her made her lay hold all the more keenly of the personal, and the thought of Dick in the act of letting in poisonous gases upon that unhappy creature filled her with horror. She was indignant at so false an accusation. "Mr. Cavendish," she repeated with a little energy, "never would have done that."

"It is all a freak of those scientific men," said Mrs. Wilberforce. "Look at the poor people, they can do a great deal more, and support a great deal more, than we can: yet they live among bad smells. I think they rather like them. I am sure my nursery is on my mind night and day, if there is the least little whiff of anything; but the children are as strong as little ponies—and where is the drainage there?"

With this triumphant argument she suddenly rose,

declaring that she knew the brougham was at the door, and that Mrs. Warrender would be late for the train. She kissed and blessed both the ladies as she took leave of them. "Come back soon, and don't forget us," she said to Chatty; while to Mrs. Warrender she gave a little friendly pat on the shoulder. "You won't say anything, not even to true friends like Herbert and me? but a secret like that can't be kept, and though you mayn't think so, everybody knows."

"Do you think that is true, mamma?" Chatty asked when the wet umbrellas had again gone glimmering through the shrubberies and under the trees, and the travellers were left alone.

"That everybody knows? It is very likely. There is no such thing as a secret in a little world like ours; everybody knows everything. But still they cannot say that they have it by authority from you and me. It is time enough to talk of it when it is a fact, if it is to be."

"But you have not any doubt of it, mamma?"

"I have doubt of everything till it is done; even," she said, with a smile as the wheels of the brougham cut the gravel and came round with a little commotion to the door, "of our going away: though I allow that it seems very like it now."

They did go away, at last, leaving the Warren very solitary, damp, and gray, under the rain,—a melancholy place enough for Theo to return to. But he was not in a state of mind to think of that or of any of his home surroundings grave or gay. Chatty put her head out of the window to look behind her at the melancholy yet dear old house, with tears in her innocent eyes, but Mrs. Warrender, feeling that at last she had shaken

herself free from that bondage, notwithstanding the anxiety in her heart for her son, had no feeling to spare for the leave-taking. She waved her hand to Mrs. Bagley at the shop, who was standing out at her door with a shawl over her cap to see the ladies go by. Lizzie stood behind her in the doorway saying nothing, while her grandmother curtsied and waved her hand and called out her wishes for a good journey, and a happy return. Naturally Chatty's eyes sought those of the girl, who looked after her with a sort of blank longing as if she too would fain have gone out into the world. Lizzie's eyes seemed to pursue her as they drove past,—poor Lizzie, who had other things in her mind, Chatty began to think, beside the fashion books; and then there came the tall red mass of the Elms, with all its windows shut up, and that air of mystery which its encircling wall and still more its recent history conferred upon it. The two ladies looked out upon it, as they drove past, almost with awe.

"Mamma," said Chatty, "I never told you. I saw the—the lady, just when she was going away."

"What lady?" asked Mrs. Warrender, with surprise.

"I don't think," said Chatty, with a certain solemnity, "that she was any older, perhaps not so old as I. It made my heart sick. Oh, dear mother, must there not be some explanation, some dreadful, dreadful fate, when it happens that one so young——"

"Sometimes it may be so—but these are mysteries which you, at your age, Chatty, have no need to go into."

"At my age—which is about the same as hers," said Chatty; "and—oh, mamma, I wanted in my heart to stop her, to bring her to you. She had been crying

—she had such innocent-looking, distracted eyes—and Lizzie said——"

"Lizzie! what had Lizzie to do with it?"

"I promised to tell no one, but you are not any one, you are the same as myself. Lizzie says she knew her long ago, that she is the same as a child still, not responsible for what she is doing—fond of toys and sweets like a child."

"My dear, I am sorry that Lizzie should have kept up such a friend. I believe there are some poor souls that if an innocent girl were to do what you say, stop them and bring them to her mother, might be saved, Chatty. I do believe that: but not—not that kind."

The tears by this time were falling fast from Chatty's eyes. "I wonder," she said, "if I shall ever see her again."

"Never, I hope; for you could do nothing for her. Shut the window, my dear, the rain is coming in. Poor Theo, how wet he will get coming home! I wonder if he will have the thought to change everything now that there is no occasion to dress, now that we are away."

"Joseph will give him no peace till he does," said Chatty, happily diverted, as her mother had intended, from sadder thoughts. "And don't you think she will make him stay to dinner on such a day? Don't you think she must care a great deal for him, mamma?"

"She must care for him or she would not have listened to him. Poor Theo!" said the mother, with a sigh.

"But he cares very much for her: and he is happy," said Chatty, with a certain timidity, a half question; for to her inexperience there were very serious draw-

backs, though perhaps not such as might have occurred to a more reasonable person. Mrs. Warrender had to change this subject, too, which Chatty showed a disposition to push too far, by making an inquiry into the number of their bags and parcels, and reminding her daughter that they were drawing near the station. It was a very forlorn little station, wet and dismal, with a few men lounging about, the collars of their coats up to their ears, and Mrs. Warrender's maid standing by her pile of boxes, having arrived before them. It had been an event long looked for, much talked of, of late, but it was not a cheerful going away.

But the rain had gone off by the time they reached town, and a June day has a power of recovering itself, such as youth only possesses. But no, that is an error, as Mrs. Warrender proved. She had been leaning back in her corner very quiet, saying little, yet with an intense sense of relief and deliverance. She came in to London with as delightful a consciousness of novelty and freedom as any boy coming to seek his fortune. Chatty's feelings were all very mild in comparison with her mother's. She was greatly pleased to see the clouds clear off, and the humid sweetness of the skies, which even the breath of the great city did not obscure. "After all, Theo will have a nice evening for his drive home," she said, unexcited. Though it was all very agreeable, Chatty did not know of anything that might await her in town. She knew more or less, she believed, what awaited her,—a few parties, a play or two, the Row in the morning, the pictures, a pleasant little glimpse of the outside of that fashionable life which was said to be "such a whirl," which she had no expectation, nor any desire to see much

of. There was no likelihood that she and her mother would be drawn into that whirl. If all the people they knew asked them to dinner, or even to a dance, which was not to be thought of, there would still be no extravagant gaiety in that. Driving from the railway to Half Moon Street was as pleasant as anything —to a girl of very highly raised expectations, it might have been the best of all: but Chatty did not anticipate too much, and would not be easily disappointed. She neither expected nor was afraid of any great thing that might be coming to her. Her quiet heart seemed beyond the reach of any touch of fate.

CHAPTER IV.

On the mantelpiece of the little lodging-house drawing-room in Half Moon Street, supported against the gilt group that decorated the timepiece, was a note containing an invitation. "Why, here is the whirl beginning already," Mrs. Warrender said. "Don't you feel that you are in the vortex, Chatty?" Her mother laughed, but was a little excited even by this mild matter; but Chatty did not feel any excitement. To the elder woman, the mere sense of the population about her, the hurry in the street, the commotion in the air, was an excitement. She would have liked to go out at once, to walk about, to get into a hansom like a man, and drive through the streets, and see the lights and the glimmer of the shops, and the crowds of people. To be within reach of all that movement and rapidity went into her veins like wine. After the solitude and silence of so many years,—nothing but the rustle of the leaves, the patter of the rain, the birds or the winds in the branches, and the measured voices indoors, to vary the quiet,—the roar of Piccadilly mingling with everything was a sort of music to this woman. To many others, perhaps the majority, the birds and breezes would be the thing to long for; but Mrs. Warrender was one of the people who love a town and all that seems like a larger life in the collection together of many human lives. Whether it is

so or not is another question, or if the massing together of a multitude of littles ever can make a greatness. It seems to do so, which is enough for most people; and though the accustomed soul is aware that no desert can be more lone than London, to the unaccustomed its very murmur sounds like a general consent of humanity to go forth and do more than in any other circumstances. It is the constitution of the ear which determines what it hears. For Chatty took the commotion rather the other way. She said, "One can't hear one's self speak," and wanted to close the windows. But Mrs. Warrender liked the very noise.

The dinner to which they were invited was in Curzon Street, in a house which was small in reality, but made the most of every inch of its space, and which was clothed and curtained and decorated in a manner which made the country people open their eyes. The party was very small, their hostess said; but it would have been a large party at the Warren, where all the rooms were twice as big. Chatty was a little fluttered by her first party in London; but this did not appear in her aspect, which was always composed and simple, not demanding any one's regard, yet giving to people who were *blasé* or tired of much attraction (as sometimes happens) a sense of repose and relief. She must have been more excited, however, than was at all usual with her; for though she thought she had remarked everybody in the dim drawing-room,—where the ladies in their pretty toilets and the men in their black coats stood about in a perplexing manner, chiefly against the light, which made it difficult to distinguish them, instead of sitting down all round the room, which in the country would have

seemed the natural way,—it proved that there was one very startling exception, one individual, at least, whom she had not remarked. She went down to dinner with a gentleman, whose name of course she did not make out, and whose appearance, she thought, was exactly the same as that of half the gentlemen in the procession down the narrow stair-case. Chatty, indeed, made disparaging reflections to herself as to society in general, on this score; the thought flashing through her mind that in the country there was more difference between even one curate and another (usually considered the most indistinguishable class), than between these men of Mayfair. She was a little bewildered, too, by the appearance of the dining-room, for at that period the *dîner à la Russe* was just beginning to establish itself in England, and a thicket of flowers upon the table was novel to Chatty, filling her first with admiration, then with a little doubt whether it would not be better to see the people more distinctly on the other side. Dinner had gone on a little way, and her companion had begun to put the usual questions to her about where she had been, and where she was going, questions to which Chatty, who had been nowhere, and had not as yet one other invitation (which feels a little humiliating when you hear of all the great things that are going on), could make but little reply, when in one of the pauses of the conversation, she was suddenly aware of a laugh, which made her start slightly, and opened up an entirely new interest in this as yet not very exciting company. It was like the opening of a window to Chatty, it seemed to let in pure air, new light. And yet it was only a laugh, no more. She looked about her with a little eagerness:

and then it was that she began to find the flowers and the ferns, which had filled her with enthusiasm a moment before, to be rather in the way.

"I suppose you go to the Row every morning," said her entertainer. "Don't you find that always the first thought when one comes to town? You ride, of course. Oh, why not in the Row? there is nothing alarming about it. A little practice, that is all that is wanted, to know how to keep your horse in hand. But you hunt? then you are all right——"

"Oh no, we never hunted." It struck Chatty with a little surprise to be talked to as if she had a stud at her command. Should she tell him that this was a mistake; that there were only two horses beside Theo's, and that Minnie and she had once had a pony between them—which was very different from hunting, or having nerve to ride in the Row? Chatty found afterwards that horses and carriages, and unbounded opportunities for amusing yourself, and a familiar acquaintance with the entire peerage, were always taken for granted in conversation whenever you dined out; but at first she was unacquainted with this peculiarity and did not feel quite easy in her mind about allowing it to be supposed that she was so much greater a person. Her little hesitations, however, as to how she should reply and the pauses she made when she heard that laugh arrested the current of her companion's talk, and made it necessary for her, to her own alarm, to originate a small observation which, as often happens to a shy speaker, occurred just at the time when there was a momentary lull in the general talk. What she said was, "Do you ride often in the Row?" in a voice which though very soft was quite audible. Chatty retired into

herself with the sensation of having said something very ridiculous when she caught a glance or two of amusement, and heard a suppressed titter from somebody on the other side of the fashionable young man to whom she had addressed this very innocent question. She thought it was at her they were laughing, whereas the fact was that Chatty was supposed by those who heard her to be a satirist of more than usual audacity, putting a coxcomb to deserved but ruthless shame. Naturally she knew nothing of this, and blushed crimson at her evidently foolish remark, and retired in great confusion into herself, not conscious even of the stumbling reply. She was almost immediately conscious, however, of a face which suddenly appeared on the other side of the table round the corner of a bouquet of waving ferns, lit up with smiles of pleasure and eager recognition. "Oh, Mr. Cavendish! then it was you," she said, unawares; but the tumult of the conversation had arisen again, and it seemed very doubtful whether her exclamation could have reached his ear.

When the gentlemen came upstairs, Chatty endeavoured to be looking very naturally the other way; not to look as if she expected him; but Dick found his way to her immediately. "I can't think how I missed you before. I should have tried hard for the pleasure of taking you down, had I known you were here," he said, with that look of interest which was the natural expression in his eyes when he addressed a woman. "When did you come to town, and where are you? I do not know anything that has been going on, I have heard nothing of you all for so long. There must be quite a budget of news."

Chatty faltered a little, feeling that Mr. Cavendish

had never been so intimate in the family as these questions seemed to imply. "The Wilberforces were quite well when we left," she said, with the honesty of her nature, for to be sure it was the Wilberforces rather than the Warrenders who were his friends.

"Oh, never mind the Wilberforces," he said, "tell me something about you."

"There is something to tell about us, for a wonder," said Chatty. "My sister Minnie is married: but perhaps you would hear of that."

"I think I saw it in the papers, and was very glad——" here he stopped and did not finish his sentence. A more experienced person than Chatty would have perceived that he meant to express his satisfaction that it was not she: but Chatty had no such insight.

"Yes, he has a curacy quite close, for the time: and he will have an excellent living, and it is a very nice marriage. We came to town for a little change, mamma and I."

"That is delightful news. And Theo? I have not heard from Theo for ages. Is he left behind by himself?"

"Oh! Theo is very well. Theo is—— Oh, I did not mean to say anything about that."

Chatty did not know why she was so completely off her guard with Dick Cavendish. She had almost told him everything before she was aware.

"Not in any trouble, I hope. Don't let me put indiscreet questions."

"It is not that. There is nothing indiscreet, only I forgot that we had not meant to say anything."

"I am so very sorry," cried Cavendish. "You must

not think I would ask anything you don't wish to tell me."

"But I should like to tell you," said Chatty, "only I don't know what mamma will say. I will tell her it came out before I knew: and you must not say anything about it, Mr. Cavendish."

"Not a syllable, not even to your mother. It shall be something between you and me."

The way in which this was said made Chatty's eyes droop for a moment: but what a pleasure it was to tell him! She could not understand herself. She was not given to chatter about what happened in the family, and Dick was not so intimate with Theo that he had a right to know; but still it was delightful to tell him. "We don't know whether to be glad or sorry," she said. "It is that perhaps Theo, after a while, is going to marry."

"That is always interesting," said Dick; but he took the revelation calmly. "What a lucky fellow! No need to wait upon fortune like the rest of us. To marry—whom? Do I know the lady? I hope she is all that can be desired."

"Oh, Mr. Cavendish, that is just the question. There is mamma coming, perhaps she will tell you herself, which would be so much better than if you heard it from me."

Mrs. Warrender came up at this moment very glad to see him, and quite willing to disclose their number in Half Moon Street, and to grant a gracious permission that he should call and be "of use," as he offered to be. "I am not a gentleman at large, like Warrender, I am a toiling slave, spending all my time in Lincoln's Inn. But in the evening I can spare a little

time—and occasionally at other moments," he added, with a laugh, "when I try. A sufficient motive is the great thing. And of course you will want to go to the play, and the opera, and all that is going on."

"Not too much," said Mrs. Warrender. "The air of London is almost enough at first; but come, and we shall see."

She said nothing, however, about Theo, nor was there any chance of saying more. But when Cavendish took Chatty downstairs to put her in the carriage (only a cab, but that is natural to country people in town), he hazarded a whisper as they went downstairs, "Remember there is still something to tell me." "Oh yes," she replied, "but mamma herself, I am sure——" "No," he said, "she has nothing to do with it. It is between you and me." This little conference made her wonderfully bright and smiling when she took her place beside her mother. She did not say anything for a time, but when the cab turned into Piccadilly, with its long lines of lights,—an illumination which is not very magnificent now, and was still less magnificent then, but very new and fine to Chatty, accustomed to little more guidance through the dark than that which is given by the light of a lantern or the oil lamp in Mrs. Bagley's shop,—she suddenly said, "Well! London is very pleasant," as if that was a fact of which she was the first discoverer.

"Is it not?" said her mother, who was far more disinterested and had not had her judgment biassed by any whisper on the stairs. "I am very glad that you like it, Chatty. That will make my pleasure complete."

"Oh, who could help liking it, mamma?" She blushed a little as she said this, but the night was kind and covered it; and how could Mrs. Warrender divine that this gentle enthusiasm related to the discovery of what Chatty called a friend among so many strangers, and not to the mere locality in which this meeting had taken place? Who could help liking it? To be talked to *like that*, with eyes that said more than even the words, with that sudden look of pleasure, with the delightful little mystery of a special confidence between them, and with the prospect of meetings hereafter,—who could tell how many?—of going to the play. Chatty laughed under her breath with pleasure, at the thought. It was a most admirable idea to come to London. After all, whatever Minnie might say, there was nobody for understanding how to make people happy like mamma!

Dick's sensations were not so innocent nor so sweet. He walked home to his chambers, smoking his cigar, and chewing the cud of fancy, which was more bitter than sweet. What right had he to bend over that simple girl, to lay himself out to please her, to speak low in her ear? Dick knew unfortunately too well what was apt to come of such a beginning. Without being more of a coxcomb than was inevitable, he was aware that he had a way of pleasing women. And he had a perception that Chatty was ready to be pleased, and that he himself wished—oh, very much, if he dared—to please her. In these circumstances it was perfectly evident that he should peremptorily take himself out of all possibility of seeing Chatty. But this was utterly contrary to the way in which he had greeted her, and in which he had immediately flung

himself into the affairs of the family. It was his occupation while he walked home to defend and excuse himself for this to himself. In the first place, which was perfectly true, he had not known at all that the Warrenders were to be of the party; he had thus fallen into the snare quite innocently, without any fault of his. Had he known, he might have found an excuse and kept away. But then he asked himself, why in the name of heaven should he have kept away? Was he so captivating a person that it would be dangerous to Miss Warrender to meet him—once; or such a fool as to be unable to meet a young lady whom he admired—once: without harm coming to it? To be sure he had gone farther: he had thrown himself, as it were, at the feet of the ladies, with enthusiasm, and had made absurd offers of himself to be "of use." There could be no doubt that in the circumstances this was mad enough, and culpable too; but it was done without premeditation, by impulse, as he was too apt to act, especially in such matters; and it could be put a stop to. He was pledged to call, it was true; but that might be once, and no more. And then there was the play, the opera, to which he had pledged himself to attend them; once there could not do much harm, either. Indeed, so long as he kept, which he ought to do always, full control over himself, what harm could it at all do to be civil to Theo Warrender's mother and sister, who were, so to speak, after a sort, old friends? He was not such an ass (he said to himself) as to think that Chatty was at his disposal if he should lift up his finger; and there was her mother to take care of her; and they were not people to be asking each other what he "meant," as two experienced

women of society might do. Both mother and daughter were very innocent; they would not think he meant anything except kindness. And if he could not take care of himself, it was a pity! Thus in the course of his reflections Dick found means to persuade himself that there was nothing culpable in pursuing the way which was pleasant, which he wanted to pursue; a result which unfortunately very often follows upon reflection. The best way in such an emergency is not to reflect, but to turn and fly at once. But that, he said to himself, not without some complaisance, would be impulse, which he had just concluded to be a very bad thing. It was impulse which had got him into the scrape, he must trust to something more stable to get him out.

In the course of his walking, and, indeed, before these thoughts had gone very far, he found himself at the corner of Half Moon Street, and turned along with the simple purpose of seeing which was No. 22. There were lights in several windows, and he lingered a moment wondering which might be Chatty's. Then with a stamp of his foot, and a laugh of utter self-ridicule, which astounded the passing cabmen (for in any circumstances he was not surely such a confounded sentimental ass as *that*), he turned on his heel and went straight home without lingering anywhere. It was hard upon him that he should be such a fool; that he should not be able to restrain himself from making idiotic advances, which he could never follow out, and for a mere impulse place himself at the mercy of fate! But he would not be led by impulse now in turning his back. It should be reason that should be his guide; reason and reflection and a calm working out

of the problem, how far and no farther he could with safety go.

And yet if it had been so that he could have availed himself of the anxiety of his family to get "a nice girl" to take an interest in him! Where could there be a nicer girl than Chatty? There were prettier girls, and as for beauty, that was not a thing to be spoken of at all in the matter. Beauty is rare, and it is often (in Dick's opinion) attended by qualities not so agreeable. It was often inanimate, he thought, apt to rest upon its natural laurels, to think it did enough when it consented to look beautiful. He did not go in, himself, for the sublime. But to see the light come over Chatty's face as if the sun had suddenly broken out in the sky; to see the pleased surprise in her eyes as she lifted them quickly, without any affectation, in all the sweetness of nature. She was not clever either; all that she said was very simple. She was easily pleased, not looking out for wit as some girls do, or insisting upon much brilliancy in conversation. In short, if he had been writing a poem or a song about her (with much secret derision he recognised that to be the sort of thing of which in the circumstances foolish persons were capable), the chief thing that it occurred to him any one could say would be that she was Chatty. And quite enough too! he added, to himself, with a curious warmth under his waistcoat, which was pleasant. Wasn't there a song that went like that? Though this was fair, and that was something else, and a third was so-and-so, yet none of them was Mary Something-or-other. He was aware that the verse was not very correctly quoted, but that

was the gist of it; and a very sensible follow, too, was the man who wrote it, whoever he might be.

With this admirable conclusion, showing how much reason and reflection had done for him, Dick Cavendish wound up the evening—and naturally called at 22 Half Moon Street next day.

CHAPTER V.

DICK CAVENDISH called at Half Moon Street next day: and found the ladies just returned from a walk, and a little tired and very glad to see a friendly face, which his was in the most eminent degree. They had been out shopping, that inevitable occupation of women, and they had been making calls, and informing their few acquaintances of their arrival. Mrs. Benson, at whose house the dinner had been, was one of the few old friends with whom Mrs. Warrender was in habits of correspondence, and thus had known of their coming beforehand. Dick found himself received with the greatest cordiality by Mrs. Warrender, and by Chatty with an air of modest satisfaction which was very sweet. Then Mrs. Warrender was desirous to have a little guidance in their movements, and took so sincerely his offer to be of use that Dick found no means at all of getting out of it. Indeed, when it came to that, he was by no means so sure that it was so necessary to get out of it, as when he had begun his reflections on the subject. He even proposed—why not?—that they should all go to the play that very evening, there being nothing else on hand. In those days the theatre was not so popular an institution as at present, and it was not necessary to engage places for weeks in advance. This sudden rush, however, was too much for the inexperienced country

lady. "We are not going to be so prodigal as that," she said, "it would deprive us of all the pleasure of thinking about it; and as everything is more delightful in anticipation than in reality——"

"Oh, mamma!" said Chatty, shocked by this pessimistic view.

"And what am I to do with myself all the evening?" said Dick, with mock dismay, "after anticipating this pleasure all day? If anticipation is the best part of it, you will allow that disappointment after is doubly——"

"If you have nothing better to do, stay and dine with us," Mrs. Warrender said. This proposal made Chatty look up with pleasure, and then look down again lest she should show, more than was expedient, how glad she was. And Dick, who had reflected and decided that to call once and to go to the theatre once could do no harm, accepted with enthusiasm, without even pausing to ask himself whether to dine with them once might be added without further harm to his roll of permissions. The dinner was a very commonplace, lodging-house dinner, and Chatty got out her muslin work afterwards, and had a quiet industrious evening, very much like her evenings at home. She was like a picture of domestic happiness impersonified, as she sat in the light of the lamp with her head bent, the movement of her arm making a soft rustle as she worked. She wore a muslin gown after the fashion of the time, which was not in itself a beautiful fashion, but pretty enough for the moment, and her hair, which was light brown, fell in little curls over her soft cheeks. She looked up now and then, while the others talked, turning from one to another, sometimes saying a word,

most frequently giving only a smile or look of assent. Let us talk as we will of highly educated women and of mental equality and a great many other fine things, but as a matter of fact, this gentle auditor and sympathiser, intelligent enough to understand without taking much part, is a more largely accepted symbol of what the woman ought to be, than anything more prominent and individual. Just so Eve sat and listened when Adam discoursed with the angel, putting by in her mind various questions to ask when that celestial but rather long-winded visitor was gone. Perhaps this picture is not quite harmonious with the few facts in our possession in respect to our first mother, and does scant justice to that original-minded woman: but the type has seized hold upon the imagination of mankind. Dick thought of it vaguely, as he looked (having secured a position in which he could do so without observation) at this impersonation of the woman's part. He thought if another fellow should look in for a talk, which was his irreverent way of describing to himself the visit of the angel, it would be highly agreeable to have her there listening, and to clear up the knotty points for her when they should be alone. He had little doubt that Eve would have an opinion of her own, very favourable to *his* way of stating the subject, and would not mind criticising the other fellow, with a keen eye for any little point of possible ridicule. He kept thinking this as he talked to Mrs. Warrender, and also that the little cluster of curls was pretty, and the bend of her head, and, indeed, everything about her; not striking, perhaps, or out of the common, but most soothing and sweet.

And next evening, having had those pleasures of

anticipation which Mrs. Warrender thought so much of, he went with them to the play, and spent an exceedingly pleasant evening, pointing out such people as he knew (who were anybody) to Mrs. Warrender between the acts, and enjoying the sight of Chatty's absorption in the play, which made it twice as interesting to himself. The play was one in which there was a great deal of pretty love-making along with melodramatic situations of an exciting kind. The actors, except one, were not of sufficient reputation to interest any reader save those with a special inclination to the study of the stage. But though the performance was not on the very highest level, there was a great deal in it that thrilled this young man and woman sitting next to each other, and already vaguely inclined towards each other in that first chapter of mutual attraction which is, perhaps, in its vagueness and irresponsibility, the most delightful of all. Dick would have laughed at the idea of feeling himself somehow mixed up with the lover on the stage, who was not only a good actor, but a much handsomer fellow than he was; but Chatty had no such feeling, and with a blush and quiver felt herself wooed in that romantic wooing, with a half sense that the lights should be lowered and nobody should see, and at the same time an enchantment in the sight which only that sense of a personal share in it could have given.

After this beginning Dick's reflections went to the wind. He felt injured when he found that, not knowing their other friends in town, he had no invitation to accompany them, when those persons did their duty by their country acquaintances, and asked them, one to dinner, another—oh, happiness to Chatty—to a

dance. But it did not turn out unmingled happiness for Chatty after all, though she got a new dress for it, in which she looked prettier (her mother thought, who was no flattering mother) than she had ever done in her life. Mrs. Warrender saw the awakening in Chatty's face which gave to her simple good looks a something higher, a touch of finer development; but the mother neither deceived herself as to the cause of this, nor was at all alarmed by it. Dick was a quite suitable match for Chatty; he was well connected, he was not poor, he was taking up his profession, if somewhat late, yet with good prospects. If there had been escapades in his youth, these were happily over, and as his wild oats had been sown on the other side of the Atlantic, no one knew anything about them. Why, then, should she be alarmed to see that Chatty opened like a flower to the rising of this light which in Dick, too, was so evident as to be unmistakable? In such circumstances as these the course of true love would be the better of a little obstacle or two; the only difficulty was that it might run too smooth. Mrs. Warrender thought that, perhaps, it was well to permit such a little fret in the current as this dance proved to be. She could have got Dick an invitation had she pleased, but was hard-hearted and refrained. And Chatty did not enjoy it. She said (with truth) that there was very little room for dancing; that to sit outside upon the stairs with a gentleman you didn't know, among a great many other girls and men whom you didn't know, was not her idea of a ball; and that if this was the London way, she liked a dance in the country much better. The time when she did enjoy it was next day, when she gave her impressions of it

to Dick, who exulted as having not been there secretly over Mrs. Warrender, who would not have him asked. Chatty grew witty in the excitement of her little revenge on society, and on fate which had drifted her into that strange country, without the ever-ready aid to which she had grown accustomed of "some one she knew." "Yes, I danced," she said, "now and then, as much as we could. It was not Lady Ascot's fault, mamma; she introduced a great many gentlemen to me, but sometimes I could not catch their names, and when I did, how was I to remember which was Mr. Herbert and which was Mr. Sidney, when I had never seen either of them before? and gentlemen," she said, with a little glance (almost saucy: Chatty had developed so much) at Dick, "are so like each other in London."

At which Dick laughed, not without gratification, with a secret consciousness that though this little arrow was apparently levelled at him, he was the exception to the rule, the one man who was recognisable in any crowd. "Yes," he said, "we should wear little labels with our names. I have heard that suggested before."

"They put down initials on my progamme. I don't know what half of them mean: and I suppose they came and looked for me when the dance was going to begin, or perhaps in the middle of the dance, or towards the end; they didn't seem to be very particular," proceeded Chatty, with a certain exhilaration in the success of her description. "And how were they to find me among such a lot of girls? I saw two or three prowling about looking for me."

"And never made the smallest sign?"

"Oh, it is not the right thing for a girl to make any sign, is it, mamma? One can't say, Here I am! If they don't manage to find you, you must just put up with it, though you may see them prowling all the time. It is tiresome when you want very much to dance; but when you are indifferent——"

"The pleasures of society are all for the indifferent," said Dick; "everything comes to you, so the wise people say, when you don't care for it: but my brothers, who are dancing men, don't know how malicious ladies are, who make fun of their prowling. I shall remember it next time when I can't find my partner, and imagine her laughing at me in a corner."

"The amusement is after," said Chatty, with candour. "I think it funny now when I think of it, but it seemed stupid at the time. I don't think I shall care to go to a dance in London again."

But as she said these words there escaped a mutual glance from two pairs of eyes, one of which said in the twitching of an eyelash, "Unless I am there!" while the other, taken unawares, gave an answer in a soft flash, "Ah, if you were there!" But there was nothing said: and Mrs. Warrender, though full of observation, never noticed this telegraphic, or shall we say heliographic, communication at all.

This little hindrance only made them better friends. They made expeditions to Richmond, where Dick took the ladies out on the river; to Windsor and Eton, where Theo and he had both been to school. Long before now he had been told the secret about Theo, which in the meantime had become less and less of a secret, though even now it was not formally made known. Lady Markland! Dick had been startled by

the news, though he declared afterwards that he could not tell why: for that it was the most natural thing in the world. Had not they been thrown together in all kinds of ways; had not Theo been inevitably brought into her society, almost compelled to see her constantly?

"The compulsion was of his own making," Mrs. Warrender said. "Perhaps Lady Markland, with more experience, should have perceived what it was leading to."

"It is so difficult to tell what anything is leading to, especially in such matters. What may be but a mutual attraction one day becomes a bond that never can be broken the next."

Dick's voice changed while he was speaking. Perhaps he was not aware himself of the additional gravity in it, but his audience was instantly aware of it. That was the evening they had gone to Richmond; the softest summer evening, twilight just falling; Chatty, very silent, absorbed (as appeared) in the responsibilities of steering; the conversation going on entirely between her mother and Dick, who sat facing them, pulling long, slow, meditative strokes. Even when one is absorbed by the responsibilities of the steerage, one can enter into all the lights and shades of a conversation kept up by two other people, almost better than they can do themselves.

"That is true in some cases. Not in Theo's, I think. It seems to me that he gave himself over from the first. I am not sure that I think her a very attractive woman."

"Oh yes, mamma!" from Chatty, in an undertone.

"I am not talking of looks. She has a good deal

of power about her, she will not be easily swayed: and after having suffered a great deal in her first marriage I think she has very quickly developed the power of acting for herself which some women never attain."

"So much the better," said Dick. "Theo doesn't want a puppet of a wife."

"But he wants a wife who will give in to him," said Mrs. Warrender slightly shaking her head.

"I suppose we all do that, in theory: then glide into domestic servitude and like it, and find it the best for us."

"Let us hope you will do that," she said, with a smile; "but not Theo, I fear. He has been used to be made much of. The only boy, they say, is always spoiled. You have brothers, Mr. Cavendish,—and he has a temper which is a little difficult."

"Oh, mamma," from Chatty again. "Theo is always kind."

"That does not make much difference, my dear. When a young man is accustomed to be given in to, it is easy to be kind. But when he meets for the first time one who will not give in, who will hold her own —I do not blame her for that: she is in a different position from a young girl."

"And how is it all to be settled?" asked Dick; "where are they to live? how about the child?"

"All these questions make my heart sink. He is not in the least prepared to meet them. Her name even; she will of course keep her name."

"That always seems a little absurd: that a woman should keep her own name, as they do more or less everywhere but in England—yes; well, a Frenchwoman

says *née* So-and-so; an Italian does something still more distinct than that, I am not quite clear how she does it. That's quite reasonable I think: for why should she wipe out her own individuality altogether when she marries? But to keep one husband's name when you are married to another——"

"It is because of the charm of the title. I suppose when a woman has been once called my lady, she objects to come down from those heights. But I think if I were a man, I should not like it, and Theo will not like it. At the same time there is her son, you know, to be considered. I don't like complications in marriages. They bring enough trouble without that."

"Trouble!" said Dick, in a tone of lively protest, which was a little fictitious. And Chatty, though she did not say anything, gave her mother a glance.

"Yes, trouble. It breaks as many ties as it makes. How much shall I see of Theo, do you think, when this marriage takes place? and yet by nature you would say I had some right to him. Oh, I do not complain. It is the course of nature. And Minnie is gone; she is entering into all the interests of the Thynnes, by this time: and a most bigoted Thynne she will be, if there are any special opinions in the family. I don't know them well enough to know. Fancy giving up one's child to become bigoted to another family, whom one doesn't even know!"

"It seems a little hard, certainly. The ordinary view is that mothers are happy when their daughters marry."

"Which is also true in its way: for the mother has a way of being older than her daughter, Mr. Cavendish,

and knows she cannot live for ever; besides, marriage being the best thing for a woman, as most people think, it should be the mother's duty to do everything she can to secure it for her daughter. Yes, I go as far as that—in words," Mrs. Warrender added, with a little laugh.

"But not for her son?"

"I don't say that: no, not at all. I should rejoice in Theo's marriage, but for the complications, which I think he is not the right person to get through, with comfort. You, now, I think," she added, cheerfully, "might marry Lady——Anybody, with a family of children, and make it succeed."

"Thank you very much for the compliment. I don't mean to try that mode of success," he said quickly.

"Neither did Theo mean it until he was brought in contact with Lady Markland: and who can tell but you too—Oh yes, marriage almost always makes trouble; it breaks as well as unites; it is very serious; it is like the measles when it gets into a family." Mrs. Warrender felt that the conversation was getting much too significant, and broke off with a laugh. "The evening is delightful, but I think we should turn homewards. It will be quite late before we get back to town."

Dick obeyed without the protest he would have made half an hour before. He resumed the talk when he was walking up with the ladies to the hotel, where they had left their carriage. "One laughs, I don't know why," he said, "but it is very serious in a number of ways. A man when he is in love doesn't ask

himself whether he's the sort of man to make a girl happy. There are some things, you know, which a man has to give up too. Generally, if he hesitates, it seems a sort of treason; and often he cannot tell the reason why. Now Theo will have a number of sacrifices to make."

"He is like Jacob, he will think nothing of them for the love he bears to Rachel," said Theo's mother. "I wish that were all."

"But I wish I could make you see it from a man's point of view." Dick did not himself know what he meant by this confused speech. He wanted to make some sort of plea for himself, but how, or in what words, he did not know. She paused for a moment expecting more, and Chatty, on the other side of her mother, felt a little puncture of pain, she could scarcely tell why. "There are some things which a man has to give up too." What did he mean by that? A little vague offence which flew away, a little pain which did not, a sort of needle point, which she kept feeling all the rest of the evening, came to Chatty from this conversation. And Mrs. Warrender paused, thinking he was going to say more! But he said no more, and when he had handed them into the carriage, broke out into an entirely new subject, and was very gay and amusing all the way home.

The two ladies did not say a syllable to each other on this subject, neither had they said anything to each other about Dick, generally, except that he was very nice, that it was kind of him to take so much trouble, and so forth. Whether experienced mothers do discuss with their daughters what So-and-so meant, or

whether he meant anything, as Dick supposed, is a question I am not prepared to enter into. But Mrs. Warrender had said nothing to Chatty on the subject, and did not now: though it cannot be said that she did not ponder it much in her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ladies were in town three weeks, which brought them from June into July, when London began to grow hot and dusty, and the season to approach its close. They were just about to leave town, though whether to continue their dissipations by going to the seaside, or to return to Highcombe and put their future residence in order, they had not as yet made up their minds. Cavendish gave his vote for the seaside. "Of course you mean to consult me, and give great weight to my opinion," he said. "What I advise is the sea, and I will tell you why: I am obliged to go to Portsmouth about some business. If you were at the Isle of Wight, say, or Southsea——"

"That would be very pleasant: but we must not allow ourselves to be tempted, not even by your company," said Mrs. Warrender, who began to fear there might be enough of this. "We are going home to set our house in order, and to see if, perhaps, Theo has need of us. And then the Thynnes are coming home."

"Is it Miss Warrender who has developed into the Thynnes?"

"Indeed it is; that is how everybody inquires for her now. I have got quite used to the name. That is one of the drawbacks of marrying one's daughters, which I was telling you of. One's Minnie becomes in a moment the Eustace Thynnes!"

They were not a smiling party that evening, and

Mrs. Warrender's little pleasantry fell flat. It flew, perhaps, across the mind of all, that Chatty might be changed, in a similar way, into the Cavendishes. Dick grew hot and cold when the suggestion flashed through him. Then it was that he recollected how guilty he had been, and how little his reflections had served him. He who had determined to call but once, to go with them once to the play, had carried out his resolution so far that the once had been always. And now the time of recompense was coming. The fool's paradise was to be emptied of its tenants. He went away very gloomy, asking himself many troubled questions. It was not that he had been unaware, as time went on, what it was that went along with it,—a whole little drama of simple pleasure, of days and evenings spent together, of talks and expeditions. Innocent? Ah, more than innocent, the best and sweetest thing in his life, if—— But that little monosyllable makes all the difference. It was coming to an end now, they were going away; and Dick had to let them go, without any conclusion to this pretty play in which he had played his part so successfully. Oh, he was not the first man who had done it! not the first who had worn a lover's looks and used all a lover's assiduities, and then —nothing more. Perhaps that was one of the worst features in his behaviour to himself. To think that he should be classed with the men who are said to have been amusing themselves! and Chatty placed in the position of the victim, on whose behalf people were sorry or indignant! When he thought that there were some who might presume to pity her, and who would say of himself that he had behaved ill, the shock came upon him with as much force as if he had

never thought of it before; although he had thought of it, and reflected upon how to draw out of the intercourse which was so pleasant, before he gave himself up to it, with an abandon which he could not account for, which seemed now like desperation. Desperation was no excuse. He saw the guilt of it fully, without self-deception, only when he had done all the harm that was possible, had yielded to every temptation, and now found it impossible to go any further. To repent in these circumstances is not uncommon; there is nothing original in it. Thousands of men have done it before him,—repented when they could sin no more. For a moment it flashed across his mind to go and throw himself on Mrs. Warrender's mercy and tell her all, and make what miserable excuse he could for himself. Was it better to do that, to part for ever from Chatty, or to let them think badly of him, to have it supposed that he had trifled or amused himself, or whatever miserable words the gossips chose to use, and yet leave a door open by which he might some time, perhaps, approach her again? Some time! after she had forgotten him, after his unworthiness had been proved to her, and some other fellow, some happier man who had never been exposed to such a fate as had fallen upon him, some smug Pharisee (this fling at the supposed rival of the future was very natural and harmed nobody) had cut him out of all place in her heart! It was so likely that Chatty would go on waiting for him, thinking of him, for years perhaps, the coxcomb that he was!

"I said very suddenly that we must go home," said Mrs. Warrender, after he had left them. "You did not think me hard, Chatty? It seemed to me the best."

"Oh no, mamma," said Chatty, with a slight faltering.

"We have seen a great deal of Mr. Cavendish, and he has been very nice, but I did not like the idea of going to the Isle of Wight."

"Oh no, mamma," Chatty repeated, with more firmness. "I did not wish it at all."

"I am very glad you think with me, my dear. He has been very nice; he has made us enjoy our time in town much more than we should have done. But of course, that cannot last for ever, and I do really think now that we should go home."

"I have always thought so," said Chatty. She was rather pale, and there was a sort of new-born dignity about her, with which her mother felt that she was unacquainted. "It has been very pleasant, but I am quite ready. And then Minnie will be coming back as you said."

"Yes." Then Mrs. Warrender burst into a laugh which might as well have been a fit of crying. "But you must prepare yourself to see not Minnie, but the Eustace Thynnes," she said. And then the mother and daughter kissed each other and retired to their respective rooms, where Chatty was a long time going to bed. She sat and thought, with her pretty hair about her shoulders, going over a great many things, recalling a great many simple little scenes and words said,—which were but words after all,—and then of a sudden the tears came, and she sat and cried very quietly, even in her solitude making as little fuss as possible, with an ache of wonder at the trouble that had come upon her, and a keen pang of shame at the thought that she had expected more than was coming,

more perhaps than had ever been intended. A man is not ashamed of loving when he is not loved, however angry he may be with himself or the woman who has beguiled him; but the sharpest smart in a girl's heart is the shame of having given what was not asked for, what was not wanted. When those tears had relieved her heart, Chatty put up her hair very neatly for the night, just as she always did, and after a while slept, —much better than Dick.

He came next day, however, for a final visit, and the day after to see them away, without any apparent breach in the confidence and friendship with which they regarded each other. There might be, perhaps, a faint almost imperceptible difference in Chatty, a little dignity like that which her mother had discovered in her, something that was not altogether the simple girl, younger than her years, whom Mrs. Warrender had brought to town. On the very last morning of all, Dick had also a look which was not very easy to be interpreted. While they were on their way to the station he began suddenly to talk of Underwood and the Wilberforces, as if he had forgotten them all this time, and now suddenly remembered that there were such people in the world. "Did I ever tell you," he said, "that one of the houses in the parish belongs to an uncle of mine, who bought it merely as an investment, and let it?"

"We were talking of that," said Mrs. Warrender. "Mr. Wilberforce hoped you had persuaded your uncle to leave the drainage alone in order to make a nuisance and drive undesirable tenants away."

He laughed in a hurried, breathless way, then said

quickly, "Is it true that the people who were there are gone?"

"Quite true. They seem to have melted away without any one knowing, in a single night. They were not desirable people."

"So I heard: and gone without leaving any sign?"

"Have they not paid their rent?" said Mrs. Warrender.

"Oh, I don't mean to say that. I know nothing about that. My uncle——" and here he stopped, with an embarrassment which, though Mrs. Warrender was an unsuspicious woman, attracted her notice. "I mean," said Cavendish, perceiving this, and putting force upon himself, "he will of course be glad to get rid of people who apparently could do his property no good."

And after this his spirits seemed to rise a little. He told them that he had some friends near Highcombe, who sometimes in the autumn offered him a few days' shooting. If he got such an invitation this autumn might he come? "It is quite a handy distance from London, just the Saturday-to-Monday distance," he added, looking at Mrs. Warrender with an expression which meant a great deal, which had in it a question, a supplication. And she was so imprudent a woman! and no shadow of Minnie at hand to restrain her. It was on her very lips to give the invitation he asked. Some good angel of a class corresponding in the celestial world to that of Minnie in this, only stopped her in time, and gave a little obliqueness to the response.

"I hope we shall see you often," she said, which was pleasant but discouraging, and then began to

talk about the Eustace Thynnes, who were at present of great use to her as a diversion to any more embarrassing subject of conversation. Chatty scarcely spoke during this drive, which seemed to her the last they should take together. The streets flying behind them, the scenes of the brief drama falling back into distance, the tranquillity of home before, and all this exciting episode of life becoming as if it had never been, occupied her mind. She had settled all that in her evening meditation. It was all over; this was what she said to herself. She must not allow even to her own heart any thought of renewal, any idea that the break was temporary. Chatty was aware that she had received all his overtures, all his amiabilities (which was what it seemed to come to) with great and unconcealed pleasure. To think that he had nothing but civility in his mind all the time gave a blow to her pride, which was mortal. She did not wear her pride upon her sleeve, though she had worn her heart upon it. Her nature indeed was full of the truest humility; but there was a latent pride which, when it was reached, vibrated through all her being. No more, she was saying to herself. Oh, never more. She had been deceived, though most likely he had never wished to deceive her. It was she who had deceived herself; but that was not possible, ever again.

"We have not thanked you half enough," said Mrs. Warrender, as he stood at the door of the railway carriage. "I will tell Theo that you have been everything to us. If you are as good to all the mothers and sisters of all your old schoolfellows——"

"You do me a great wrong," he said, "as if I thought of you as the mother of——" His eyes

strayed to Chatty, who met them with a smile which was quite steady. She was a little pale, but that was all. "Some time," he added hastily, holding Mrs. Warrender's hand, "I may be able to explain myself a little better than that."

"Shall I say if you are as kind to all forlorn ladies astray in London?"

Dick's face clouded over as if (she thought) he were about to cry. Men don't cry in England, but there is a kind of mortification, humiliation, a sense of being persistently misunderstood, and of having no possibility of mending matters, which is so insupportable that the lip must quiver under it, even when garnished with a moustache. "I hope you don't really think that of me," he cried. "Don't! there is no time to tell you how very different—But surely you know—something more than that——"

The train was in motion already and Chatty had shaken hands with him before. She received the last look of his eyes, half indignant, appealing, though in words it was to her mother he was speaking; but made no sign. And it was only Mrs. Warrender who looked out of the window and waved her hand to him, as he was left behind. Chatty—Chatty who was so gentle, so little apt to take anything upon her, even to judge for herself, was it possible that on this point she was less soft-hearted than her mother? This thought went through him like an arrow as he stood and saw the carriages glide away in a long curving line. She was gone and he was left behind. She was gone, was it in resentment, was it in disdain? thinking of him in his true aspect as a false lover, believing him to have worn a false semblance, justly

despising him for an attempt to play upon her. Was this possible? He thought (with that oblique sort of literary tendency of his) of Hamlet with the recorder. Can you play upon this pipe?—and yet you think you can play upon me! As a matter of fact there could nothing have been found in heaven or earth less like Hamlet than Chatty Warrender; but a lover has strange misperceptions. The steady soft glance, the faint smile, not like the usual warm beaming of her simple face, seemed to him to express a faculty of seeing through and through him which is not always given to the greatest philosophers. And he stood there humiliated to the very dust by this mild creature, whom he had loved in spite of himself, to whom even in loving her he had attributed no higher gifts, perhaps had even been tenderly disrespectful of as not clever. Was she the one to see through him now?

If she only knew! but when Dick, feeling sadly injured and wounded, came to this thought, it so stung him that he turned round on the moment, and, neglecting all the seductions of waiting cabmen, walked quickly, furiously, to Lincoln's Inn, which he had been sadly neglecting. If she knew everything! it appeared to Dick that Chatty's clear dove's eyes (to which he all at once had attributed an insight and perception altogether above them) would slay him with the disdainful dart which pierces through and through subterfuge and falsehood. That he should have ventured, knowing what he knew, to approach her at all with the semblance of love: that he should have dared,—oh, he knew, well he knew, how, once the light of clear truth was let down upon it, his conduct would appear,—not the mere trifler who had amused himself

and meant no more, not the fool of society, who made a woman think he loved her, and "behaved badly," and left her *plantée là*. What were these contemptible images to the truth! He shrank into himself as he pursued these thoughts and skulked along. He felt like a man exposed and ashamed, a man whom true men would avoid. "Put in every honest hand a whip,"—ah no, that was not wanted. Chatty's eyes, dove's eyes, too gentle to wound, eyes that knew not how to look unkindly, to conceal a sentiment, to veil a falsehood—one look from Chatty's eyes would be enough.

Chatty knew nothing of the tragic terror which had come upon him at the mere apprehension of this look of hers. She had no thought of any tragedy, except that unknown to men which often becomes the central fact in a life such as hers; the tragedy of an unfinished chapter in life, the no-ending of an episode which had promised to be the drama in which almost every human creature figures herself (or himself) as the chief actor, one time or other. The drama indeed had existed, it had run almost all its course, for the time it lasted it had been more absorbing than anything else in the world. The greatest historical events beside it had been but secondary. Big London, the greatest city in the world, had served only as a little bosquet of evergreens in a village garden might have done, as the background and scene for it. But it had no end; the time of the action was accomplished, the curtain had fallen, and the lights had been put out, but the comedy had come to no conclusion. Comedy-tragedy; it does not matter much which words you use. The scenes had all died away in incompleteness,

and there had been no end. To many a gentle life such as that of Chatty might be, this is all that ever happens beyond the level of the ordinary and common. It was with a touch of insight altogether beyond her usual intellectual capacity that she realised this as she travelled very quietly with her mother from London to Highcombe, not a very long way. Mrs. Warrender was very silent too. She had meant the visit to town to be one of pleasure merely,—pleasure for herself, change after the long monotony, and pleasure to her child who had never known anything but that monotony. It was not, this little epoch of time only three weeks long, to count for anything. It was to be a holiday and no more. And lo! with that inexplicableness, that unforeseenness which is so curious a quality of human life, it had become a turning point of existence, the pivot perhaps upon which Chatty's being might hang. Mrs. Warrender was not so decided as Chatty. She saw nothing final in the parting. She was able to imagine that secondary causes, something about money, some family arrangements that would have to be made, had prevented any further step on Dick's part. To her the drama indeed was not ended: the curtain had only fallen legitimately upon the first act without prejudice to those which were to follow. She did not talk, for Chatty's silence, her unusual dignity, her retirement into herself, had produced a great effect upon her mother; but her mind was not moved as Chatty's was, and she was able to think with pleasure of the new home awaiting them, and of what they were to find there. The Eustace Thynnes! she said to herself, with a laugh, thanking Providence within herself that there had been no Minnie to in-

spect the progress of the relations between Dick and Chatty, and probably to deliver her opinion very freely on that subject and on her mother's responsibility. Then there was the more serious chapter of Theo and his affairs which must have progressed in the meantime. Mrs. Warrender caught herself up with a little fright as she thought of the agitation and doubt which wrapped the future of both her children. It was a wonderful relief to turn to the only point from which there was any amusement to be had, the visit of the Eustace Thynnes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE return of the Warrenders to their home was not the usual calm delight of settling again into one's well-known place. The house at Highcombe was altogether new to their experiences, and meant a life in every way different, as well as different surroundings. It was a tall red brick house, with a flight of steps up to the door, and lines of small, straight, twinkling windows facing immediately into the street, between which and the house there was no interval even of a grass plot or area. The garden extended to the right with a long stretch of high wall, but the house had been built at a period when people had less objection to a street than in later times. The rooms within were of a good size but not very high; some of them were panelled to the ceiling with an old-fashioned idea of comfort and warmth. The drawing-room was one of these, a large oblong room to the front with a smaller one divided from it by folding-doors, which looked out upon the garden. It possessed, as its great distinction, a pretty marble mantelpiece, which some one of a previous generation had brought from Italy. It is sad to be obliged to confess that the panelling here had been painted, a warm white, like the colour of a French salon, with old and dim pictures of no particular merit let in here and there,—pictures which would have been more in keeping with the oak of the

original than with the present colour of the walls. The house had been built by a Warrender, in the end of the seventeenth century, and though it had been occupied by strangers often, and let to all sorts of people, a considerable amount of the furniture, and all the decorations, still belonged to that period. The time had not come for the due appreciation of these relics of ancestral taste. Chatty thought them all old-fashioned, and would gladly have replaced them by fresh chairs and tables from the upholsterers: but this was an expense not to be thought of, and, perhaps, even to eyes untrained in any rules of art, there was something harmonious in the combination. Something harmonious, too, with Chatty's feelings was in the air of old tranquillity and long established use and wont. The stillness of the house was as the stillness of ages. Human creatures had come and gone, as the days went and came, sunshine coming in at one moment, darkness falling the next, nothing altering the calm routine, the established order. Pains and fevers and heartbreaks, and death itself, would disappear and leave no sign, and all remain the same in the quaint rose-scented room. The quiet overawed Chatty, and yet was congenial. She felt herself to have come "home" to it, with all illusions over. It was not just an ordinary coming back after a holiday,—it was a return, a settling down for life.

It would be difficult to explain how it was that this conviction had taken hold of her so strongly. It was but a month since she had left the Warren with her mother, with some gentle anticipations of pleasure, but none that were exaggerated or excessive. All that was likely to happen, as far as she knew, was that

dinner party at Mrs. Benson's, and a play or two, and a problematical ball. This was all that the "vortex" meant about which her mother had laughed; she had not any idea at that time that the vortex would mean Dick Cavendish. But now that she fully understood what it meant, and now that it was all over, and her agitated little bark had come out of it, and had got upon the smooth calm waters again, there had come to Chatty a very different conception both of the present and the past. All the old quiet routine of existence seemed to her now a preface to that moment of real life. She had been working up to it vaguely without knowing it. And now it had ended, and this was the Afterwards. She had come back—after. These words had to her an absolute meaning. Perhaps it was want of imagination which made it so impossible for her to carry forward her thoughts to any possible repetition, any sequel of what had been; or perhaps some communication, unspoken, unintended, from the mind of Cavendish had affected hers and given a certainty of conclusion, of the impossibility of further development. However that might be, her mind was entirely made up on this subject. She had lived (for three weeks), and it was over. And now existence was all Afterwards. She found scarcely any time for her habitual occupations while she was in London, but now there would be time for everything. Afterwards is long, when one is only twenty-four, and it requires a great deal of muslin work and benevolence to fill it up in a way that will be satisfactory to the soul; but still, to ladies in the country it is a very well known state, and has to be faced, and lived through all the same. To a great many people life is

all afternoon, though not in the sense imagined by the poet: not the lotus-eating drowsiness and content, but a course of little hours that lead to nothing, that have no particular motive except that mild duty which means doing enough trimming for your new set of petticoats and carrying a pudding or a little port wine to the poor girl who is in a consumption in the lane behind your house. This was the Afterwards of Chatty's time, and she settled down to it, knowing it to be the course of nature. Nowadays, matters have improved: there is always lawn tennis and often ambulance lectures, and far more active parish work. But even in those passive days it could be supported, and Chatty made up her mind to it with a great, but silent courage. But it made her very quiet, she who was quiet by nature. The land where it is always afternoon chills at first and subdues all lively sentiments. The sense of having no particular interest, took possession of her mind as if it had been an absorbing interest, and drew a veil between her and the other concerns of life.

This was not at all the case with Mrs. Warrender, who came home with all the agreeable sensations of a new beginning, ready to take up new lines of existence, and to make a cheerful centre of life for herself and all who surrounded her. If any woman should feel with justice that she has reached the Afterwards, and has done with her active career, it should be the woman who has just settled down after her husband's death to the humbler house provided for her widowhood apart from all her old occupations and responsibilities. But in reality there was no such sentiment in her mind. "You'll in your girls again

be courted." She had hanging about her the pleasant reflection of that wooing, never put into words, with which Dick Cavendish had filled the atmosphere, and which had produced upon the chief object of it so very different an effect; and she had the less pleasurable excitement of Theo's circumstances, and of all that was going on at Markland, a romance in which her interest was almost painful, to stimulate her thoughts. The Eustace Thynnes did not count for much, for their love-making had been very mild and regular, but still, perhaps, they aided in the general quickening of life. She had three different histories thus going on around her, and she was placed in a new atmosphere, in which she had to play a part of her own. When Chatty and she sat down together in the new drawing-room for the first time with their work and their plans, Mrs. Warrender's talk was of their new neighbours and the capabilities of the place. "The rector is not a stupid man," she said, in a reflective tone. The proposition was one which gently startled Chatty. She lifted her mild eyes from her work, with a surprised look.

"It would be very sad for us if he was stupid," she said.

"And Mrs. Barham still less so. What I am thinking of is society, not edification. Then there is Colonel Travers, whom we used to see occasionally at home, the brother, you know, of ——. An old soldier is always a pleasant element in a little place. The majority will of course be women like ourselves, Chatty."

"Yes, mamma, there are always a great many ladies about Highcombe."

Mrs. Warrender gave forth a little sigh. "In a country neighbourhood we swamp everything," she said; "it is a pity. Too many people of one class are always monotonous: but we must struggle against it, Chatty."

"Dear mamma, isn't ladies' society the best for us? Minnie always said so. She said it was a dreadful thing for a girl to think of gentlemen."

"Minnie always was an oracle. To think of gentlemen whom you were likely to fall in love with, and marry, perhaps—but I don't think there are many of that class here."

"Oh no," said Chatty, returning to her work, "at least I hope not."

"I am not at all of your opinion, my dear. I should like a number of them; and nice girls too. I should not wish to keep all these dangerous personages for you."

"Mamma!" said Chatty, with a soft reproachful glance. It seemed a desecration to her to think that ever again—that ever another——

"That gives a little zest to all the middle-aged talks. It amuses other people to see a little romance going on. You were always rather shocked at your light-minded mother, Chatty."

"Mamma! it might be perhaps very sad for—for those most concerned, though it amused you."

"I hope not, my darling. You take things too seriously. There is, to be sure, a painful story now and then, but very rarely. You must not think that men are deceivers ever, as the song says."

"Oh no," said Chatty, elevating her head with simple pride, though without meeting her mother's eyes, "that is not what I would say. But why talk of

such things at all? why put romances, as you call them, into people's heads? People may be kind and friendly without anything more."

Mrs. Warrender here paused to study the gentle countenance which was half hidden from her, bending over the muslin work, and for the first time gained a little glimpse into what was going on in Chatty's heart. The mother had long known that her own being was an undiscovered country for her children; but it was new to her and a startling discovery that perhaps this innocent creature, so close to her, had also a little sanctuary of her own, into which the eyes more near to her had never looked. She marked the little signs of meaning quite unusual to her composed and gentle child—the slight quiver which was in Chatty's bent head, the determined devotion to her work which kept her face unseen—with a curious confusion in her mind. She had felt sure that Dick Cavendish had made a difference in life to Chatty; but she had not thought of this in any but a hopeful and cheerful way. She was more startled now than she dared say. Had there been any explanation between them which she had not been told of? Was there any obstacle she did not know? Her mind was thrown into great bewilderment, too great to permit of any exercise of her judgment suddenly upon the little mystery—if mystery there was.

"I did not mean to enter into such deep questions," she said, in a tone which she felt to be apologetic. "I meant only a little society to keep us going. Though we did not go out very much in London, still there was just enough to make the blank more evident if we see nobody here."

Chatty's heart protested against this view: for her part she would have liked that life which had lasted three weeks to remain as it was, unlike anything else in her experience, a thing which was over, and could return no more. Had she not been saying to herself that all that remained to her was the Afterwards, the long gray twilight upon which no other sun would rise? In her lack of imagination, the only imagination she had known became more absolute than any reality, a thing which once left behind would never be renewed again. She felt a certain scorn of the attempt to make feeble imitations of it, or even to make up for that light which never was on sea or shore, by any little artificial illuminations. A sort of gentle fury, a wild passion of resistance, rose within her at the thought of making up for it. She did not wish to make up for it: the blank could not be made less evident whatever any one might do or say. But all this Chatty shut up in her own heart. She made no reply, but bent her head more and more over her muslin work, and worked faster and faster, with the tears collecting, which she never would consent to shed, hot and salt behind her eyes.

Mrs. Warrender was silent too. She was confounded by the new phase of feeling, imperfectly revealed to her, and filled with wonder, and self-reproach, and sympathy. Had she been to blame to leave her child exposed to an influence which had proved too much for her peace of mind?—that was the well-worn conventional phrase, and it was the only one that seemed to answer the occasion, too much for her peace of mind! The mother, casting stealthy glances at her daughter, so sedulously, nervously busy,

could only grope at a comprehension of what was in Chatty's mind. She thought it was the uncertainty, the excitement of suspense, and all that feverish commotion which sometimes arises in a woman's mind when the romance of her life comes to a sudden pause and silence follows the constant interchange of words and looks, and the doubt whether anything more will ever follow, or whether the pause is to be for ever, turns all the sweeter meditations into a whirl of confusion and anxiety and shame. A mother is so near that the reflection of her child's sentiments gets into her mind, but very often with such prismatic changes, and oblique catchings of the light, that even sympathy goes wrong. Mrs. Warrender thus caught from Chatty the representation of an agitated soul in which there was all the sensitive shame of a love that is given unsought, mingled with a tender indignation against the offender who perhaps had never meant—But the mother on this point took a different view, and there rose up in her mind on the moment, a hundred cheerful, hopeful plans to bring him back and to set all right. Naturally there was not a word said on the subject, which was far too delicate for words; but this was how Mrs. Warrender followed, as she believed, with an intensity which was full of tenderness, the current of her daughter's thoughts.

And yet these were not Chatty's thoughts at all. If she felt any excitement it was against those plans for cheering her, and the idea that any little contrivances of society could ever take the place of what was past —conjoined with a sort of jealousy of that past, lest any one should interfere with it, or attempt to blur the perfect outline of it as a thing which had been,

and could be no more, or any copy of it. This was what the soul most near her own did not divine. They sat together in the silence of the summer parlour, the cool sweet room full of flowers, with the July sun shut out, but the warm air coming in, so full of mutual love and sympathy, and yet with but so disturbed and confused an apprehension each of each. After some time had passed thus, without any disturbance, nothing but the softened sounds of morning traffic in the quiet street, a slow cart passing, an occasional carriage, the voices of the children just freed from school, there came the quick sound of a horse's hoofs, a pause before the door, and then the bell echoing into the silence of the house.

"That must be Theo," cried Mrs. Warrender. "I was sure he would come to-day. Chatty, after luncheon, will you leave us a little, my dear? Not that we have any secrets from you: but he will speak more freely, if he is alone with me."

"I should have known that, mamma, without being told."

"Dear Chatty, you must not be displeased. You know many things more than I had ever thought."

"Displeased, mamma!"

"Hush, Chatty, here is my poor boy."

Her poor boy! the triumphant lover, the young man at the height of his joy and pride. They both rose to meet him, eager, watching to take the tone which should be most in harmony with his. But Mrs. Warrender had a pity in her heart for Theo which she did not feel for Chatty—perhaps because in her daughter's case her sympathy was more complete.

CHAPTER VIII.

WARRENDER met his mother and sister with a face somewhat cloudy, which, however, he did his best to clear as he came in, in response to their pleasure at the sight of him. It did not become him in his position to look otherwise than blessed: but a man has less power of recognising and adapting himself to this necessity than a woman. He did his best, however, to take an interest in the house, to have all its conveniencies pointed out to him, and the beauty of the view over the garden, and the coolness of the drawing-room in which they sat. What pleased him still more, however, or at least called forth a warmer response, was the discovery of some inconveniencies which had already been remarked. "I am very glad you told me," he said. "I must have everything put right for you, mother. A thing that can be put right by bricks and mortar is so easy a matter."

"It is the easiest way, perhaps, of setting things right," she said, not without an anxious glance; "but even bricks and mortar are apt to lead you further than you think. You remember Mr. Briggs, in *Punch?*"

"They will not lead me too far," said Theo. "I am all in the way of renovation and restoration. You should see—or rather, you should not see, for I am afraid you would be shocked—our own house——"

"What are you doing? No, I should not be

shocked. I never was a devotee of the Warren. I always thought there were a great many improvements I could make."

"Oh, mamma!"

"You must remember, Chatty, I was not born to it, like you. What are you doing? Are you building? Your letters are not very explicit, my dear."

"You shall see. I cannot describe. I have not the gift." Here the cloud came again over Theo's face, the cloud which he had pushed back on his entrance as if it had been a veil. "We have let in a little light at all events," he said, "that will always be something to the good. Now, mother, let me have some lunch; for I cannot stay above an hour or so. I have to see Longstaffe. There has been a great deal to do."

"Mr. Longstaffe, I am sure, will not give you any trouble that he can help."

"He is giving me a great deal of trouble," said the young man, with lowering brows. Then he cleared up again with an effort. "You have not told me anything about your doings in town."

"Oh, we did a great deal in town." Here Mrs. Warrender paused for a moment, feeling that neither did the auditor care to hear, nor the person concerned in those doings care to have them told. Between these two, her words were arrested. Chatty's head was more than ever bent over her muslin, and Theo had walked to the window, and was looking out with the air of a man whose thoughts were miles away. No one said anything more for a full minute, when he suddenly came back, so to speak, and said, with a sort of smile—

"So you were very gay?" as if in the meantime she had been pouring forth an account of many gaieties into his ear. So far as Theo was concerned, it was evidently quite unnecessary to say any more, but there was now the other silent listener to think of, who desired that not a word should be said, yet would be equally keen to note and put a meaning to the absence of remark. Between the two, the part of Mrs. Warrender was a hard one. She said, which, perhaps, was the last thing she ought to have said: "We saw a great deal of your friend Mr. Cavendish."

"Ah, Dick! yes, he's about town I suppose—pretending to do law, and doing society. Mother, if you want me to stay to luncheon——"

"I will go and see after it," said Chatty. She gave her mother a look, as she put down her work. A look —what did it mean, a reproach for having mentioned him? an entreaty to ask more about him? Mrs. Warrender could not tell. When they were left alone, her son's restlessness increased. He felt, it was evident, the dangers of being left with her *tête-à-tête*.

"I hope you didn't see too much of him," he said hastily, as if picking up something to defend himself. "Cavendish is a fellow with a story, and no one knows exactly what it is."

"I am sure he is honourable and good," said Mrs. Warrender, and then she cried, "Theo! don't keep me in this suspense—there is something amiss."

He came at once, and sat down opposite to her, gazing at her across the little table. "Yes," he said with defiance, "you have made up your mind to that beforehand. I could see it in your eyes. What should be amiss?"

"Theo, you do me wrong. I had made up my mind to nothing beforehand—but I am very anxious. I know there must be difficulties. What are your negotiations with Mr. Longstaffe? It is about settlements?—is it——"

"Longstaffe is an old fool, mother: that is about what it is."

"No, my dear. I am sure he is a kind friend, who has your interests at heart."

"Whose interests?" he said, with a harsh laugh. "You must remember there are two sides to the question. I should say that the interests of a husband and wife were identical, but that is not the view taken by those wretched little pettifogging country lawyers."

"Dear Theo, it is never, I believe, the view taken by the law. They have to provide against the possibility of everything that is bad—they must suppose that it is possible for every man to turn out a domestic tyrant."

"Every man!" he said, with a smile of scorn: "do you think I should be careful about that? They may bind me down as much as they please. I have held out my hands to them ready for the fetters. What I do grudge," he went on, as if, the floodgates once opened, the stream could not be restrained, "is all that they are trying to impose upon her, giving her the appearance of feelings entirely contrary to her nature—making her out to be under the sway of—— That's what I can't tolerate. If I knew her less, I might imagine—but thank God, I am sure on that point," he added, with a sharpness in his voice which did not breathe conviction to his mother's ear.

She laid her hand upon his arm, soothing him.

"You must remember, that in the circumstances a woman is not her own mistress. Oh, Theo, that was always the difficulty I feared. You are so sensitive, so ready to start aside like a restive horse, so intolerant of anything that seems less than perfect."

"Am I so, mother?" He gathered her hand into his, and laid down his head upon it, kissing it tremulously. "God bless you for saying so. My own mother says it—a fastidious fool, always looking out for faults, putting meanings to everything—starting at a touch, like a restive horse."

How it was that she understood him, and perceived that to put his faults in the clearest light was the best thing she could do for him, it would be hard to tell. She laid her other hand upon his bent head. "Yes, my dear, yes, my dear! that was always your fault. If your taste was offended, if anything jarred—though it might be no more than was absolutely essential, no more than common necessity required."

"Mother, you do me more good than words can say. Yes, I know, I know—I never have friends for that cause. I have always wanted more, more——"

"More than any one could give," she said softly. "Those whom you love should be above humanity, Theo: their feet should not tread the ground at all. I have always been afraid, not knowing how you would take it when necessary commonplaces came in."

"I wonder," he said, raising his head, "whether mothers are always as perfect comforters as you are. That was what I wanted: but nobody in the world could have said it but you."

"Because," she said, carrying out her rôle un-

hesitatingly, though to her own surprise and without knowing why, "only your mother could know your faults, without there being the smallest possibility that any fault could ever stand between you and me."

His eyes had the look of being strained and hot, yet there seemed a little moisture in the corners, a moisture which corresponded with the slight quiver in his lip, rather than with the light in his eyes. He held her hand still in his and caressed it almost unconsciously. "I am not like you in that," he said. Alas no! he was not like her in that: though the accusation of being fastidious, fantastic, intolerant of the usual conditions of humanity, was, for the moment, the happiest thing that could be said to him, yet a fault! a fault would stand between him and whosoever was guilty of it, mother even—love still more. A fault: he was determined that she should be perfect, the woman whom he had chosen. To keep her perfect he was glad to seize at that suggestion of personal blame, to acknowledge that he himself was impatient of every condition, intolerant even of the bonds of humanity. But if there ever should arise the time when the goddess should be taken from her pedestal, when the woman should be found fallible like all women, heaven preserve poor Theo then. The thought went through Mrs. Warrender's mind like a knife. What would became of him? He had given himself up so unreservedly to his love, he had sacrificed his own fastidious temper in the first place, had borne the remarks of the county, had supported Geoff, had allowed himself to be laughed at and blamed. But now if he should chance to discover that the woman for whom he had done all this was not in herself

a piece of perfection—— His mother felt her very heart sink at the thought. No one was perfect enough to satisfy Theo; no one was perfect at all so far as her own experience went. And when he made this terrible discovery, what would he do?

In the meantime they went to luncheon, and there was talk of the repairs wanted in the house, and of what Theo was doing "at home." He was very unwilling, however, to speak of "home," or of what he had begun to do there. He told them indeed of the trees that had been cut down, over which Chatty made many exclamations, mourning for them; but even Chatty was not vigorous in her lamentations. They sat and talked, not interested in anything they were saying, the mother seated between them, watching each, herself scarcely able to keep up the thread of coherent conversation, making now and then incursions on either side from which she was obliged to retreat hurriedly; referring now to some London experience which Chatty's extreme dignity and silence showed she did not want to be mentioned, or to something on the other side from which Theo withdrew with still more distinct reluctance to be put under discussion. It was not till this uncomfortable meal was over that Theo made any further communication about his own affairs. He was on his way to the door, whither his mother had followed him, when he turned round as if accidentally. "By the bye," he said, "I forgot to tell you. *She* will be here presently, mother. She wanted to lose no time in seeing you."

"Lady Markland!" said Mrs. Warrender, with a little start.

He fixed his eyes upon her severely. "Who else?

She is coming about three. I shall come back, and go home with her."

"Theo, before I meet your future wife—— You have never given me any details. Oh, tell me what has happened and what is going to happen. Don't leave me to meet her in ignorance of everything."

"What is it you want to know?" he said, with his sombre air, setting his back against the wall. "You know all that I know."

"Which is no more than that she has accepted you, Theo."

"Well, what more would you have? That is how it stands now, and may for months for anything I can tell."

"I should have thought it would have been better to get everything settled quickly. Why should there be any delay?"

"Ah, why? You must ask that of Mr. Longstaffe," he said, and turned away.

Mrs. Warrender was much fluttered by the announcement of this visit. She had expected no doubt to meet Lady Markland very soon, to pay her perhaps a solemn visit, to receive her so to speak as a member of the family, which had been an alarming thought. For Lady Markland, though always grateful to her, and on one or two occasions offering something that looked like a close, confidential friendship, had been always a great lady in the opinion of the squire's wife, a more important person than herself, intimacy with whom would carry embarrassments with it. She had not been even, like other people in her position, familiarly known in the society of the county. Her seclusion during her husband's lifetime, the almost hermit life

she led, the pity she had called forth, the position as of one apart from the world which she had maintained, all united to place Lady Markland out of the common circle on a little eminence of her own. She had been very cordial, especially on the last evening they had spent together, the summer night when she had come to fetch Geoff. But still they had never been altogether at their ease with Lady Markland. Mrs. Warrender went back into the drawing-room, and looked round upon it with eyes more critical than when she had regarded it in relation to herself, wondering if Lady Markland would think it a homely place, a residence unworthy her future husband's mother. She made some little changes in it instinctively, put away the work on which she had been engaged, and looked at Chatty's little workbox with an inclination to put that too out of the way. The rooms at Markland were not so fine as to make such precautions necessary; yet there was a faded splendour about them very different from the limitation and comfortable prim neatness of this. When she had done all that it was possible to do, she sat down to wait for her visitor, trying to read though she could not give much attention to what she read. "Lady Markland is to be here at three," she said to Chatty, who was slightly startled for a moment, but much less than her mother, taking a strip of muslin out of her box, and beginning to work at it as if this was the business of life and nothing else could excite her more. The blinds were all drawn down for the sunshine, and the light came in green and cool though everything was blazing out-of-doors. These lowered blinds made it impossible to see the arrival though Mrs. Warrender heard it acutely—every prance

of the horses, every word Lady Markland said. It seemed a long time before, through the many passages of the old-fashioned house, the visitor appeared. She made a slight pause on the threshold, apparently waiting for an invitation, for a special reception. Mrs. Warrender, with her heart beating, had risen, and stood with her hands clasped in tremulous expectation. They looked at each other for a moment across the parlour maid, who did not know how to get out of the room from between the two ladies, neither of whom advanced towards the other. Then Mrs. Warrender went hurriedly forward with extended hands.

"Theo told me you were coming. I am very glad to see you." They took each other's hands, and Mrs. Warrender bent forward to give the kiss of welcome. They were two equal powers, meeting on debatable ground, fulfilling all the necessary courtesies. Not like this should Theo's mother have met his wife. It should have been a young creature whom she could have taken into her arms, who would have flung herself upon the breast of his mother, or at her knees, like a child of her own. Instead of this, they were two equal powers, if, indeed, Lady Markland were not the principal, the one to give and not receive. Mrs. Warrender felt herself almost younger, less imposing altogether than the new member of the family, to whom it should have been her part to extend a tender patronage, to draw close to her, and set at her ease. Things were better when this difficult first moment was over. It was suitable and natural that Lady Markland should give to Chatty that kiss of peace—and then they all seated themselves in a little circle. "You have just arrived," Lady Markland said.

"Yesterday. We have scarcely settled down."

"And you enjoyed your stay in town? Chatty at least—Chatty must have enjoyed it." Lady Markland turned to her with a soft smile.

"Oh yes, very much," said Chatty, almost under her breath.

And then there was a brief pause, after which, "I hope Geoff is quite well," Mrs. Warrender said.

"Quite well, and I was to bring you his love." Lady Markland hesitated a little, and said, "I should like, if I might—to consult you about Geoff."

"Surely," Mrs. Warrender replied, and again there was a pause.

In former times, Chatty would not have perceived the embarrassment of her two companions: but she had learned to divine since her three weeks' experience. She rose up quietly. "I think, mamma, you will be able to talk better if I go away."

"I don't know, my dear," said Mrs. Warrender, with a slight tremulousness. Lady Markland did not say anything. She retained the advantage of the position, not denying that she wished it, and Chatty accordingly, putting down her work, went away. Mrs. Warrender felt the solemnity of the interview more and more; but she did not know what to say.

Presently Lady Markland took the initiative. She rose and approached nearer to Mrs. Warrender's side. "I want you to tell me," she said, herself growing for the first time a little tremulous, "if you dislike this very much—for Theo."

"Dislike it! oh, how can you think so? His happiness is all I desire, and if you——"

"If I can make him happy? that is a dreadful

question, Mrs. Warrender. How can any one tell that? I hope so; but if I should deceive myself——"

"That was not what I meant: there is no happiness for him, but that which you can give: if you think him good enough—that was what I was going to say."

"Good enough! Theo? Oh then, you do not know what he is, though he is your son; and so far I am better than you are."

"Lady Markland, you are better in a great many ways. It is this that frightens me. In some things you are so much above any pretensions of his. He has so little experience, he is not rich, nor even is he clever (though he is very clever) according to the ways of the world. I seem to be disparaging my boy. It is not that, Lady Markland."

"No; do you think I don't understand? I am too old for him; I am not the kind of woman you would have chosen, or even that he would have chosen, had he been in his right senses."

"It is folly to say that you are old. You are not old; you are a woman that any man might be proud to love. And his love—has been a wonder to me to see," said his mother, her voice faltering, her eyes filling. "I have never known such adoration as that."

"Ah, has it not!" cried the woman who was the object of it, a sudden melting and ineffable change coming over her face. "That was what gave me the courage," she said, after a moment's pause. "How could I refuse? It is not often, is it, that a man—that a woman"—here her voice died away in a confusion and agitation which melted all Mrs. Warrender's reluctance. She found herself with her arms round the great lady, comforting her, holding her head against

her own breast. They shed some tears together, and kissed each other, and for a moment came so close that all secondary matters that could divide them seemed to fade away.

"But now," said Lady Markland, after this little interval, "he is worried and disturbed again, by all the lawyers think it right to do. I should like to spare him all that, but I am helpless in their hands. Oh, dear Mrs. Warrender, you will understand. There are so many things that make it more difficult. There is—Geoff."

Mrs. Warrender pressed her hands and gave her a look full of sympathy; but she said nothing. She did not make a cheerful protest that all these things were without importance, and that Geoff was no drawback, as perhaps it was hoped she might do. Lady Markland drew back a little, discouraged—waiting for some word of cheer which did not come.

"You know," she said, her voice trembling, "what my boy has been to me: everything! until this new light that I never dreamed of, that I never had hoped for, or thought of. You know how we lived together, he and I. He was my companion, more than a child, sharing every thought. You know——"

"Lady Markland, you have had a great deal of trouble, but how much with it—a child like that, and then——"

"And then—Theo! Was there ever a woman so blessed—or so—— Oh, help me to know what I am to do between them! You can understand better than any of the young ones. Don't you see," said Lady Markland, with a smile in which there was a kind of despair, "that though I am not old, as you say, I am

on your level rather than on his, that *you* can understand better than he?"

If it were possible that a woman who is a mother could cease to be that in the first place and become a friend, first of all a sympathiser in the very difficulties that overwhelm her son, that miracle was accomplished then. The woman whom she had with difficulty accepted as Theo's future wife became, for a moment, nearer to her in this flood of sympathy than Theo himself. The woman's pangs and hindrances were closer to her experience than the man's. To him, in the heat of his young passion, nothing was worth considering that interfered with the perfect accomplishment of his love. But to her—the young woman, who had to piece on the present to the past, who though she might have abandoned father and mother could never abandon her child—the other woman's heart went out with a pang of fellow-feeling. Mrs. Warrender, like most women, had an instinctive repugnance to the idea of a second marriage at all, but that being determined and beyond the reach of change, her heart ached for the dilemma which was more painful than any which enters into the possibilities of younger life. As Lady Markland leant towards her, claiming her sympathy, her face full of sentiments so conflicting, the joy of love and yet the anguish of it, and all the contrariety of a heart torn in two, the youthfulness, when all was said, of this expressive countenance, the recollection that, after all, this woman who claimed to be on her own level was not too old to be her child, seized upon Mrs. Warrender. Nothing that is direct and simple can be so poignant as those complications in which right and wrong and all the duties of human life are so confused

that no sharply cut division is possible. What was she to do? She would owe all her heart to her husband, and what was to remain for her child? Geoff had upon her the first claim of nature; her love, her care, were his right—but then Theo? The old mother took the young one into her arms, with an ache of sympathy. "Oh, my dear, what can I say to you? We must leave it to Providence. Things come round when we do not think too much of them, but do our best."

How poor a panacea, how slight a support! and yet in how many cases all that one human creature can say to another! To do our best and to think as little as possible, and things will come round! The absolute mind scorns the mild consolation. To Theo it would have been an irritation, a wrong, but Theo's betrothed received it with humbler consciousness. The sympathy calmed her, and that so moderate, so humble, voucher of experience that things come round. Was it really so? was nothing so bad as it appeared? was it true that the way opened before you little by little in treading it, as she who had gone on so much farther on the path went on to say? Lady Markland regained her composure as she listened.

"You are speaking to me like a true mother," she said. "I have never known what that was. Help me, only help me! even to know that you understand me is so much—and do not blame me."

"Dear Lady Markland——"

"I have a name," she said, with a smile which was full of pain, as if marking another subject of trouble, "which is my own, which cannot be made any question of. Will you call me Frances? It would please him. They say it would be unusual, unreasonable, a thing

which is never done—to give up—— Is that Theo? Dear Mrs. Warrender, I shall be far happier, now that I know I have a friend in you."

She grasped his mother's hands with a hurried gesture, and an anxious, imploring look. Then gave a hasty glance into the glass, and recovered in a moment her air of gentle dignity, her smile. It was this that met Theo when he came in eager, yet doubtful, his eyes finding her out, with a rapid question, the instant that he entered. Whatever her troubles might be, none of them were made apparent to him.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT day Mr. Longstaffe called upon Mrs. Warrender, nominally about the alterations that had to be made in her house, but really with objects much more important. He made notes scrupulously of what she wanted, and hoped that she would not allow anything to be neglected that was necessary for her comfort. When these necessary preliminaries were over, there was a pause. He remained silent with an expectant air, waiting to be questioned, and though she had resolved if possible to refrain from doing so, the restriction was more than her faculties could bear.

"My son tells me," she said, as indifferently as possible, "that there is a great deal going on between him and you."

"Naturally," cried Mr. Longstaffe, with a certain heat of indignation. "He is making a marriage which is not at all a common kind of marriage, and yet he would have liked it to be without any settlements at all."

"He could not wish anything that was not satisfactory to Lady Markland."

"Do you think so? then I must undeceive you. He would have liked Lady Markland to give herself to him absolutely with no precautions, no restrictions."

"Mr. Longstaffe, Theo is very much in love. He has always been very sensitive: he cannot bear (I sup-

pose) mixing up business matters, which he hates, with——"

"It is all very well for him to hate business, though between you and me, if you will allow me to say so, I think it very silly. Ladies may entertain such sentiments, but a man ought to know better. If you will believe me, he wants to marry her as if she were sixteen and had not a penny! To make her Mrs. Theodore Warrender and take her home to his own house!"

"What should he do else? is not that the natural thing that every man wishes to do?"

"Yes, if he marries a girl of sixteen without a penny, as I said. Mrs. Warrender, I know you are full of sense. Perhaps you will be able to put it before him in a better light. When a man marries a lady, with an established position of her own like Lady Markland, and a great many responsibilities, especially when she is a sort of queen mother and has a whole noble family to be accountable to——"

"I do not wonder that Theo should be impatient, Mr. Longstaffe; all this must be terrible to him, in the midst of his—— Why should not they marry first, and then these things will arrange themselves?"

"Marry first! and leave her altogether unsecured."

"I hope you know that my son is a man of honour, Mr. Longstaffe."

"My dear madam, we have nothing to do with men of honour in the law. I felt sure that you would understand at least. Suppose we had left Miss Minnie dependent upon the honour (though I don't doubt it at all) of the Thynne family."

"I don't mean in respect to money," said Mrs. War-

render, with a slight flush. "He will not interfere with her money, of that I am certain."

"No: only with herself; and she has been left the control of everything; and she must be free to administer her son's property and look after his interests. If you will allow me to say it, Mrs. Warrender, Lady Markland is a much better man of business than Theo."

Mr. Longstaffe had known Theo all his life, and had never addressed him otherwise than by that name, but it seemed an over-familiarity, a want of respect, even a sign of contempt in the position in which Theo now stood. She replied with a little offence:

"That is very possible. He has had little experience, and he is a scholar, not a person of business. But why should the marriage be delayed? This is the worst moment for them both. I know my son, Mr. Longstaffe. All this frets him beyond description now; but when the uncertainty is over, and all these negotiations, everything will come round. He will never interfere or prevent her from doing what is necessary for her son. When they are once married all will go well."

This was a long speech for Mrs. Warrender, and she made it with interruptions, with trepidation, not quite so sure perhaps of her own argument as she had thought she was. The lawyer looked at her with a kind of respectful contempt.

"There may be a certain justice in what you say, that this is the worst moment: but I for one could never agree to anything so unbusiness-like as you seem to suggest. Marriage first, and business afterwards—no, no—and then there is the little boy. You

would not have him sent off to nurse while his mother goes upon her honeymoon. Poor little fellow, so devoted as she was to him before!"

"A second marriage," said Mrs. Warrender, subdued, "can never be so simple, so easy, as one in which there are no complications."

"They are better, if they so abide," said Mr. Longstaffe. "I agree with St. Paul for my part. But it would be hard upon a young woman, poor thing, that made such a failure in her first. If Theo were not so restive, if you could get him to take things a little more easy—— Dear me, of course I trust in his honour; no one doubts that. But he will lead her a pretty dance, whether it will be better for her to have a good crotchety high-tempered young fellow who adores her, or a rough young scamp who neglected her——"

"There can be no comparison between the two."

"No," said Mr. Longstaffe ruefully, but perhaps his judgment did not lean to Theo's side.

"And why should not they live at the Warren?" she asked. "It is not a fine house, but it is a good house, and with the improvements Theo is making——"

"My dear lady, to me the Warren is a delightful little place, or at least it could be made delightful. But Markland—Markland is a very different matter. To change the one for the other would be—well it would be, you won't deny, something like a sacrifice. And why should she? when Markland is all ready, wanting no alteration, an excellent house, and in the middle of the property which she has to manage, whereas the Warren——"

"I have lived in the Warren all my life," said Mrs. Warrender, with a little natural indignation. It wounded her sore that he should talk of it patronisingly as "a delightful little place." She was not in any way devoted to the Warren; still this patronage, this unfavourable comparison irritated her, and she began to range herself with more warmth upon her own side. "I can see no reason why my son's wife should not live there."

"But there are reasons why Lady Markland should not live there."

Mrs. Warrender's eyes shot forth fire. She no longer wondered that Theo was driven to the verge of distraction. Oh that he had loved some young creature on his own level, some girl who would have gone sweetly to his home with him and glorified the old life! His mother had wept over and soothed the woman of his choice only yesterday, entering into all the difficulties that beset her path, and pledging her own assistance to overcome them; but now she was all in arms in behalf of her boy, whose individuality was to be crushed among them, who was to be made into an appendage to Lady Markland, and have no place of his own. Instead of giving her assistance to tame Theo, she felt herself take fire in his defence.

"You are very right, no doubt, to consider Lady Markland in the first place," she said, "but I don't think we can argue the question further, for to me my son must be the first."

"It is the right way," said the lawyer, "but when a young man lifts his eyes——"

"We will say no more on the subject," she said quickly. And Mr. Longstaffe was too judicious to do

anything else than resume the question about the garden palings, and then to bow himself out. He turned, indeed, at the door to express his regrets that he had not brought her to his way of thinking, that he lost her valuable help, upon which he had calculated: but this did not conciliate Mrs. Warrender. She had no carriage at her orders, or she would have gone to the Warren at once, with the impulsiveness of her nature, to see what Theo was doing, what he was thinking of. But Theo was at Markland, alternating between the Paradiso and the Inferno, between the sweetness of his betrothed's company and all the hard conditions of his happiness, and the Warren was in the hands of a set of leisurely country tradespeople, who if Theo had meant to carry his bride there must have postponed that happiness for a year or two—not much wonder, perhaps, since they were left by the young master to dawdle on their own way.

Mrs. Warrender, however, had another and a surprising visitor on this same day. The ladies were sitting together in their usual way, in the heat of the afternoon, waiting, until it should be cool enough for their walk, when the parlour maid, not used, perhaps, to such visitors, opened the door with a little excitement, and announced, "Lord Markland." Mrs. Warrender rose quickly to her feet, with a low cry, and a sudden wild imagination such as will dart across a troubled mind. Lord Markland! had he never died then, was it all a dream, had he come back to stop it in time? A small voice interrupted this flash of thought, and brought her back to herself with a giddy sense of the ridiculous and a sensation of shame quite out of proportion to the momentary illusion. "It is

only me, Geoff: but I thought when she asked me my name, I was obliged to give my right name." He seemed smaller than ever, as he came across the room twitching his face as his habit was, and paler, or rather grayer, with scanty locks and little twinkling eyes. "Did you think it was some one else?" he said.

"Of course it could be no one but you. I was startled for the moment, not thinking of you by that title. And have you come all this way alone—without any——"

"Oh, you were thinking of that other time. There is a great deal of difference since that other time. It is nearly a year since—and now I do a great many things by myself," said the boy, looking at her keenly. "I am let to go wherever I please."

"Because you are now old enough to take care of yourself," said Mrs. Warrender, "with the help of Black."

"Yes," said Geoff, "how did you know? I have got Black. But there is more in it than that. Would mamma have ruined me, if she had kept on always coddling me, Mrs. Warrender? that is what the servants say."

"My dear, one never allows the servants to say things of that kind. You should understand your mother's meaning much better than they can do."

"I see a great deal of the servants now," said Geoff —then he corrected himself with a look of sudden recollection—"that is, I am afraid I disobey mamma, Mrs. Warrender. I am rather fond of the servants, they are more amusing than other people. I go to the stables often when I know I oughtn't. To know

you oughtn't, and yet to do it, is very bad, don't you think?"

"I am afraid it is, Geoff. Don't you have any lessons now?"

"They say this is holiday time," said the boy. "Of course I am glad of the holidays, but it is a little stupid too, not having any one to play with—but I may come out a great deal more than I used to. And that is a great advantage, isn't it? I read too, chiefly stories; but a whole day is a very long time, don't you think so? I did not say where I was coming this afternoon, in case the pony might get tired, or Black turn cross, or something, but it appears Black likes to come to Highcombe, he has friends here." The boy had come close to Mrs. Warrender's work-table, and was lifting up and putting down again the reels of silk, the thimbles and scissors. He went on with his occupation for some time very gravely, his back turned to the light. At length he said, "I want you to tell me one thing. They say Warrender is coming to live at our house."

"I am afraid it is true, Geoff."

"Don't you like it, then?" said the boy. "I thought if you did not like it you would not let it be."

"My dear, my son Theo is a man. I cannot tell him what he must do as your mother does to you. And if I do not like it, it is because he has a good house of his own."

"Ah, the Warren!" said Geoff: then he added, pulling all the reels about in the work-table, and without raising his eyes to her face, "If he is coming, I wish he would come, Mrs. Warrender, then perhaps I

should go to school. Don't you think school is a good thing for a boy?"

"Everybody says so, Geoff."

"Yes, I know—it is in all the books. Mrs. Warrender, if—Warrender is coming to live with us, will you be a sort of grandmother to me?"

This startled her very much. She looked at the odd child with a sensation almost of alarm.

"Because," he continued, "I never had one, and I could come and talk to you when things were bad."

"I hope you will never have any experience of things being bad, Geoff."

He gave a glance at her face, his hands still busy among the threads and needles.

"Oh no, never, perhaps—but, Mrs. Warrender, if—Warrender is coming to Markland to live, I wish he would do it now, directly. Then it would be settled what was going to be done with me—and—and other things." Geoff's face twitched more than ever, and she understood that the reason why he did not look at her was because his little eyelids were swollen with involuntary tears. "There are a lot of things—that perhaps would get—settled then," he said.

"Geoff," she said, putting her arm round him, "I am afraid you don't like it any more than I. My poor boy."

Geoff would not yield to the demoralising influence of this caress. He held himself away from her, swaying backwards, resisting the pressure of her arm. His eyelids grew bigger and bigger, his mouth twitched and quivered. "Oh, it is not that," he said, with a quiver in his voice, "if mamma likes it. I am only little, I am rather backward, I am not—company enough for mamma."

"That must be one of the things that the servants say. You must not listen, Geoff, to what the servants say."

"But it is quite true. Mamma knows just exactly what is best. I used to be the one that was always with her—and now it is Warrender. He can talk of lots of things—things I don't understand. For I tell you I am very backward, I don't know half, nor so much as half, what some boys do at my age."

"That is a pity, perhaps; but is does not matter, Geoff, to your—to the people who are fond of you, my dear."

"Oh yes, it does," cried the boy; "don't hold me, please! I am a little beast, I am not grateful to people nor anything! the best thing for me will just be to be sent to school." Here Geoff turned his back upon her abruptly, forced thereto by the necessity of getting rid of those tears. When he had thus relieved himself, and cleared his throat of the climbing sorrow that threatened to shake his voice, he came back and stood once more by her table. The great effort of swallowing down all that emotion had made him pale, and left the strained look which the passage of a sudden storm leaves both upon the human countenance and the sky. "They say it's very jolly at Eton," he resumed suddenly, taking up with his hot little nervous fingers Mrs. Warrender's piece of work.

But at this point Geoff's confidences were interrupted by the entrance of visitors, who not only meant to make themselves agreeable to Mrs. Warrender on her first arrival at Highcombe, but who were very eager to find out all that they could about the marriage of Theo, if it really was going to take place, and when,

and everything about it. It added immensely to the excitement, but little to the information acquired, when in answer to the first question Mrs. Warrender indicated to her visitors that the little boy standing at her side, and contemplating them with his hands in his pockets, was little Lord Markland. "Oh, the boy," they said under their breath, and stopped their questioning most unwillingly, all but the elder lady, who got Mrs. Warrender into a corner, and carried on the interrogatory. Was she quite pleased? but of course she was pleased. The difference of age was so little that it did not matter, and though the Markland family were known not to be rich, yet to be sure it was a very nice position. And such a fine character, not a woman that was very popular, but quite above criticism. "There never was a whisper against her—oh, never a whisper! and that is a great thing to say." Geoff did not hear, and probably would not have understood, these comments. He still stood by the work-table, taking the reels of silk out of their places and putting them back again with the gravity of a man who has something very important in hand. He seemed altogether absorbed in this simple occupation, bending over it with eyebrows contracted over his eyes, and every sign of earnestness. "What a curious thing for a boy to take pleasure in: but I suppose being always with his mother has rather spoiled him. It will be so good for the child to have a man in the house," said the lady who was interviewing Mrs. Warrender. There was a little group of the younger ladies round Chatty, talking about the parish and the current amusements, and hoping that she would join the archery club, and that she loved croquet. The conversation was very

animated on that side, one voice echoing another, although the replies of Chatty were mild. Geoff had all the centre of the room to himself, and stood there as on a stage, putting the reel of red silk into the square which was intended for the blue, and arranging the colours in squares and parallels. He was much absorbed in it, and yet he did not know what he was doing. His little bosom swelled high with thought, his heart was wrung with the poignancy of love rejected —of loss and change. It was not that he was jealous; the sensations which he experienced had little bitterness or anger in them. Presently he turned round and said, "I think I shall go home, Mrs. Warrender," with a disagreeable consciousness that everybody paused and looked at him, when his small voice broke the murmur of the feminine conversation. But what did that matter to Geoff? He had much to occupy him, too much to leave him free to think how people looked, or what they said.

CHAPTER X.

GEOFF'S heart was full. He pondered all the way home, neglecting all the blandishments of Black's conversation, who had visited a friend or two in Highcombe, and was full of cheerfulness and very loquacious. Geoff let him talk, but paid no attention. He himself had gone to Mrs. Warrender, whom he liked, with the hope of disburdening from his little bosom some of the perilous stuff which weighed upon his soul. He had wanted to *sfogarsi*, as the Italians say, to relieve a heart too full to go on any longer: but Geoff found, as so many others have found before him, that the relief thus obtained but made continued silence more intolerable. He could not shut up the doors again which had thus been forced open. The sensation which overwhelmed him was one which most people at one time or another have felt,—that the circumstances amid which he was placed had become insupportable, that life could no longer go on, under such conditions, —a situation terrible to the maturest man or woman, but what word can describe it in the heart of a child? In his mother was summed up all love and reliance, all faith and admiration for Geoff. She had been as the sun to him. She had been as God, the only known and visible representative of all love and authority, the one unchangeable, ever right ever true. And now she had changed, and all life was out of gear. His heart

was sick, not because he was wronged, but because everything had gone wrong. He did not doubt his mother's love, he was not clear enough in his thoughts to doubt anything, or to put the case into any arrangement of words. He felt only that he could not bear it, that anything would be better than the present condition of affairs. Geoff's heart filled and his eyes, and there came a constriction of his throat when he realised the little picture of himself wandering about with nobody to care for him, no lessons; for the first time in his life forbidden to dart into his mother's room at any moment, with a rush against the door, in full certainty that there could never be a time when she did not want him. Self-pity is very strong and very simple in a child, and to see, as it were, a little picture in his mind of a little boy, shut out from his mother, and wanted by no one, was more poignant still than the reality. The world was out of joint: and Geoff felt with Hamlet that there was nobody but he to set it right. The water came into his eyes, as he rode along, but except what he could get rid of by winking violently, he left it to the breeze to dry, no hand brushing it off, not even a little knuckle piteously unabsorbent, would he employ to show to Black that he was crying. Crying! no, he would not cry, what could that do for him? But something would have to be done, or said; once the little floodgates had been burst open they could not close any more.

Geoff pondered long, though with much confusion in his thoughts. He was very magnanimous: not even in his inmost soul did he blame his mother, being still young enough to believe that unhappy events come of themselves and not by anybody's fault. To think that

she liked Theo better than himself made his heart swell, but rather with a dreadful sense of fatality than with blame. And then he was a little backward boy, not knowing things like Theo, whom, by the way, he no longer called Theo, having shrunk involuntarily, unawares, out of that familiarity as soon as matters had grown serious. As he thought it all over, Geoff's very heart was rent. His mother had cried when she took him into her arms, he remembered that she had kissed his cold feet, that she had looked as if she were begging his pardon, kneeling by his side on that terrible night when he had come dimly to an understanding of what it all meant. Geoff, like Hamlet, in his little way felt that nothing that could be done could ever undo that night. It was there, a fact which no after resolution could change. No vengeance could have put back the world to what it was before Hamlet's mother had married her brother-in-law, and the soft Ophelia turned into an innocent traitor, and all grown false: neither could anything undo to little Geoff the dreadful revolution of heaven and earth through which his little life had gone. All the world was out of joint, and what could he do to mend it, a little boy of ten —a backward little boy, not knowing half so much as many at his age? His little bosom swelled, his eyes grew wet, and that strange sensation came in his throat. But he kept on riding a little in front of Black so that nothing could be seen.

Lady Markland was in the avenue as he rode up to the gate. Geoff knew very well that she had walked as far as the gate with Warrender, whom he had seen taking the road to the right, the short way across the fields. But when he saw his mother he got

down from his pony, and walked home with her. "Where have you been?" she cried, "I was getting very anxious; you must not go those long rides by yourself."

"I had Black," said Geoff, "and you said I should have to be independent, to be able to take care of myself."

"Did I say so, dear? Perhaps it is true: but still you know how nervous I am, how anxious I grow."

Geoff looked his mother in the face like an accusing angel, not severely, but with all the angelic regret and tenderness of one who cannot be deceived, yet would fain blot out the fault with a tear. "Poor mamma!" he said, clasping her arm in his old childish way.

"Why do you call me poor mamma? Geoff, some one has been saying something to you, your face is not like the face of my own boy."

She was seized with sudden alarm, with a wild desire to justify herself, and the sudden wrath with which a conscious culprit takes advantage of the suggestion that ill tongues alone or evil representations have come between her and those whom she has wronged. The child on his side took no notice of this. He had gone so much further; beyond the sphere in which there are accusations or defences—indeed he was too young for anything of the kind. "Mamma," he said clasping her arm, "I think I should like to go to school. Don't you think it would be better for me to go to school?"

"To school!" she cried, "do you want to leave me, Geoff?" in a tone of sudden dismay.

"They say a boy ought to go to school, and they

say it's very jolly at Eton, and I'm very backward, don't you know—Warrender says so."

"Geoff! he has never said it to me."

"But if it is true, mamma! There is no difference between me and a girl staying at home: and there I should have other fellows to play with. You had better send me. I should like it."

She gave him an anxious look, which Geoff did not lift his eyes to meet, then with a sigh, "If you think you would like it, Geoff. To be sure it is what would have to be sooner or later." Here she made a hurried breathless pause, as if her thoughts went quicker than she could follow. "But now it is July, and you could not go before Michaelmas," she said.

Was she sorry he could not go at once, though she had exclaimed at the first suggestion that he wanted to leave her? Geoff was too young to ask himself this question, but there were was a vague sensation in his mind of something like it, and of a mingled satisfaction and disappointment in his mother's tone.

"Warrender says there are fellows who prepare you for Eton," the boy said, holding his breath hard that he might not betray himself. "He is sure to know somebody. Send me now."

"You are very anxious to leave me," she cried in a tone of piteous excitement and misery. "Why, why should you wish it so much?" Then she paused and cried suddenly, "Is it Mr. Warrender who has put this in your mind?"

"I don't know nothing about Warrender," said Geoff, blinking his eyes to keep the tears away. "I

never spoke to Warrender. He said that when he was not thinking about me."

And then she clasped her arms about him suddenly in a transport of pain and trouble and relief. "Oh, Geoff, Geoff," she cried, "why, why do you want to leave me?" The boy could not but sob, pressed closely against her, feeling her heart swell as his own was doing, but neither did he make any attempt to answer, nor did she look for any reply.

CHAPTER XI.

VARIOUS scenes to which Markland was all unaccustomed had been taking place in these days, alternations of rapture and gloom on the part of Warrender, of shrinking and eagerness on the part of Lady Markland, which made their intercourse one of perpetual vicissitude. From the quiet of her seclusion she had been roused into all the storms of passion, and though this was sweetened by the absolute devotion of the young man who adored her, there were yet moments in which she felt like Geoff that the position was becoming insupportable. Everything in her life was turned upside down by this new element in it, which came between her and her child, between her and her business, the work to which she had so lately made up her mind to devote herself as to the great object of her existence. All that was suspended now. When Theo was with her, he would not brook, nor did she desire, any interruption; and when he was not with her the bewildering thoughts that would rush upon her, the questions in her mind as to what she ought to do, whether it might not even now be better for everybody to break, if it was possible, those engagements which brought so much agitation, which hindered everything, which disturbed even the bond between herself and her child, would sometimes almost destroy her moral balance altogether. And then her

young lover would arrive, and all the miseries and difficulties would be forgotten, and it would seem as if earthly conditions and circumstances had rolled away, and there were but these two in a new life, a new world, where no troubles were. Then Lady Markland would say to herself that it was the transition only that was painful, that they were all in a false position, but that afterwards, when the preliminaries were over and all accomplished, everything would be well. When she was his, and he hers, beyond drawing back or doubt, beyond the possibility of separation, then all that was over-anxious, over-sensitive in Theo would settle down in the sober certainty of happiness secured, and Geoff, who was so young, would reconcile himself to that which would so soon appear the only natural condition of life, and the new would seem as good, nay, better than the old. She trembled herself upon the verge of the new, fearing any change and shrinking from it as is natural for a woman, and yet in her heart felt that it would be better this great change should come and be accomplished rather than to look forward to it, to go through all its drawbacks, and pay its penalties every day.

A few days after these incidents Theo came to Markland one morning with brows more than usually cloudy. He had been annoyed about his house, the improvements about which had been going on very slowly: one of his trades-people worse than another, the builder waiting for the architect, the carpenter for the builder, the new furniture and decorations naturally lagging behind all. And to make these things more easy to bear he had met Mrs. Wilberforce, who had told him that she wondered to see so much

money being spent at the Warren, as she heard his home was to be at Markland, and so natural, as it was so much better a house: and that she had heard little Lord Markland was going to school immediately, which no doubt was the best thing that could be done, and would leave his mother free. After this he had rushed to Markland in hot impetuosity. "I am never told," he cried. "I do not wish to exact anything, but if you have made up your mind about Geoff, I think I might have heard it from yourself."

"Dear Theo!" Lady Markland said, and that was all.

Then he threw himself at her feet in sudden compunction. "I am a brute," he said. "I come to you with my idiotic stories and you listen to me with that sweet patience of yours, and never reprove me. Tell me I am a fool and not worthy of your trust; I am so, I am so! but it is because I can't bear this state of affairs—to be everything and yet nothing, to know that you are mine, and yet have a stranger informing me what you are going to do."

"No stranger need inform you, Theo. Geoff has asked me to send him to school. I can't tell how any one could know. He wishes to go—directly. He is not happy either. Oh, Theo, I think I make everybody unhappy instead of——"

"Not you," he cried, "not you, those men with their idiotic delays. Geoff is wise, wiser than they are. Let us follow his example, dearest. You don't distrust me; you know that whatever is best for you, even what they think best, all their ridiculous conditions, I will carry out. Don't you know, that the less my hands are bound, the more I should accept the fetters, all, as much as they please, that they think

needful for you—but not as conditions of having you. That is what I cannot bear."

"You have me," she said, smiling upon him with a smile very close upon tears, "you know, without any conditions at all."

"Then let it be so," he cried. "Oh let it be so—directly, as Geoff wishes: dear little Geoff, wise Geoff—let him be our example."

"Theo—oh, try to love my boy!"

"I will make him my model, if you will take his example, directly, directly! The child is wise, he knows better than any of us. Darling, let us take his example, let us cut this knot. When the uncertainty is over, all these difficulties will melt away."

"He *is* wise, Theo—you don't know how right you are. Oh, my boy! and I am taking so little thought of him. I felt my heart leap when he asked to go away. Can you believe it? My own boy, my only one! I was glad, and I hate myself for it, though it was for you."

"All that," he said, eagerly addressing himself with all the arts he knew to comfort and reassure her, "is this state of miserable delay. We are in the transition from one to another. What good can we do to keep hanging on, to keep the whole county in talk, to make Geoff unhappy? He goes by instinct and he sees it—my own love, let us do so too. Let us do it—without a word to any one, my dearest!"

"Oh, Theo," she cried, "if you will but promise me to love my boy."

In the distracted state in which she was, this no-argument of Geoff's little example went to her heart. It seemed to bring him somehow into the decision, to

make it look like a concession to Geoff, a carrying out of his wishes, and at the same time a supreme plea with Theo for love and understanding of Geoff. Yet it was with falterings and sinkings of soul indescribable that Lady Markland went through the two following days. They were days wonderful, not to be ever forgotten. Theo did not appear, he had gone away, she said, for a little while upon business, and Geoff and she were left alone. They went back into all the old habitudes as if nothing were changed; and the house fell again into a strange calm, a quietness almost unnatural. There were no lessons, no business, nothing to be done, but only an abandonment to that pleasure of being together which had been so long broken. He went with her for her drives, and she went with him for his walk. She called for Geoff whenever he disappeared for a moment, as if she could not bear him away from her side. They were as they had been before Theo existed for them, when they were all in all to each other. Alas, they were, yet were not, as they had been. When they drove through the fair country where the sheaves were standing in the fields and everything aglow with the mirth of harvest, they were both lost in long reveries, only calling themselves back by intervals, with a recollection of the necessity of saying something to each other. When they walked, though Geoff still clung to his mother's arm, his thoughts as well as hers were away. They discovered in this moment of close reunion that they had lost each other. Not only did the mother no longer belong to the child, but the child even, driven from her side he knew not how, was lost to the mother; they had set out unconsciously each upon

a new and separate way. Geoff was not grieved, scarcely even startled, when she told him on the second evening that she was going to town next day—for shopping, she said. He did not ask to be taken with her, nor thought of asking; it appeared to Geoff that he had known all along that she would go. Lady Markland proposed to him that he should pay Mrs. Warrender a visit, and he consented, not asking why. He drove in with her to the station at Highcombe, where Chatty met him, and took leave of his mother, strangely, in a curious, dreamy way, as if he were not sure what he was doing. To be sure it was a parting of little importance. She was going to town, to do some shopping, and in less than a week she was to be back. It had never happened before, which gave the incident a distinguishing character, that was all. But she seated herself on the other side of the railway carriage and did not keep him in her eye till she could see him no more. And though she cried under her veil some tears which were salt and bitter, yet in her heart there was a feeling of relief—of relief to have parted with her boy! Could such a thing be possible? Geoff on his side went back with Chatty very quietly, saying little. He sat down in a corner of the drawing-room, with a book, his face twitching more than usual, his eyes puckered up tight, but after became, as Chatty said, "very companionable," which was indeed the chief quality of this little forsaken boy.

It was not till nearly a week after that Lady Markland came back. She arrived suddenly, one evening, with Theo, unexpected, unannounced. Dinner was over, and they had all gone into the garden in the

warm summer twilight when these unlooked-for visitors came. Lady Markland was clad from head to foot in gray, the colour of the twilight, she who had been for so long all black. Theo followed her closely, in light attire also, and with a face all alight with happiness, more bright than in all his life his face had ever been before. He took Geoff by the shoulders with a sort of tender roughness, which was almost like an embrace. "Is that you, my old boy?" he said, with an unsteady laugh, pushing him into his mother's arms. And then there was some crying and kissing, and Geoff heard it said that they had thought it better so, to avoid all fuss and trouble, and that it had taken place in town five days ago. To him no further explanations were made, but he seemed to understand it as well as the most grown-up person among them all.

This sudden step, which put all the power in Theo's hands to thwart the lawyers and regulate matters at his own pleasure, made him at once completely subservient to them, accepting everything which he had struggled against before. He took up his abode at Markland with his wife without so much as a protest; from thence he found it an amusement to watch the slow progress of the works at the Warren, riding over two or three times a week, sometimes accompanied by Geoff on his pony, sometimes by Geoff's mother, who it appeared could ride very well too. And when they went into society it was as Lady Markland and Mr. Warrender. Even on this point, without a word, Theo had given in.

There was, of course, a great outcry in the county about this almost runaway marriage. It was not digni-

fied for Lady Markland, people said; but there were some good-natured souls who said they did not wonder, for that a widow's wedding was not a pretty spectacle like a young girl's, and of course there were always embarrassments, especially with a child so old as Geoff. What could his mother have done with him, had he been present at the wedding, and he must have been present at the wedding, if it had been performed in the ordinary way. Poor little Geoff! If only the new husband would be good to him, everybody said.

CHAPTER XII.

"Of course it was perfectly right. No one could say that I was in any way infatuated about Lady Markland, never from the first: but I quite approve of that. Why should she call herself Mrs. Theodore Warrender, when she has the title of a viscountess? If it had been a trumpery little baronetcy," said Minnie, strong in her new honours, "that would have been quite a different matter; but why should one give up one's precedency, and all that? I should not at all like to have Mrs. Wilberforce, for instance, or any other person of her class, walk out of a room before me—now."

"Nor me, I suppose," Mrs. Warrender said, with a smile.

"Oh, you! that is different of course," said the Hon. Mrs. Eustace Thynne; but though she was good enough to say this, it was very evident that even for her mother Minnie had no idea of waiving her rights. "When a thing is understood it is so much easier," she added, "every one must see that. Besides it was not her fault," said Minnie triumphantly, "that her first husband died."

"It was her fault that she married again, surely."

"Oh, what do you know about it, Chatty? An unmarried girl can't really have any experience on that subject. Well, to be sure it was her own doing

marrying again: but a lady of any rank *never* gives up her title on marrying a commoner. A baronet's wife, as I say,—but then a baronet is only a commoner himself."

"You seem to have thoroughly studied the subject, Minnie."

"Yes, I have studied it; marrying into a noble family naturally changes one's ideas. And the Thynnes are very particular. You should have seen my mother-in-law arranging the dinner-party she asked to meet us. *I* went first of course as the bride, but there was Lady Highcourt and Lady Grandmaison, both countesses, and the creation within twenty years of each other. Eustace said nobody but his mother could have recollected without looking it up that the Grandmaisons date from 1425 and the Highcourts only from 1450—not the very oldest nobility either of them," said Minnie, with a grand air. "The Thynnebroods date from 1395."

"But then," said Mrs. Warrender, much amused, shooting a bow at a venture, "their descent counts in the female line."

Upon which a deep blush, a wave of trouble and shame, passed over Minnie's countenance. "Only in one case," she cried, "only once; and that you will allow is not much in five hundred years."

This bridal pair had arrived on their visit only the day before: they had taken a long holiday, and had been visiting many friends. It was now about two months since their marriage, and the gowns in Minnie's trousseau began to lose their obtrusive newness: nor can it be said that her sentiments were new. They were only modified a little by her present *milieu*,

"I suppose," she said, after an interval, "that Lady Markland will come to see me as soon as she knows I am here. Shall they have any one there for the shooting this year? Eustace quite looks forward to a day now and then. There is the Warren at least, which poor dear papa never preserved, but which I hope Theo—Eustace says that Theo will really be failing in his duty if he does not preserve."

"I know nothing about their plans or their visitors. Theo is very unlikely to think of a party of sportsmen, who were never much in his way."

Chatty in the meantime had gone out of the room about her flowers, which were always her morning's occupation. When she closed the door, Minnie, who had been waiting eagerly, leaned forward to her mother. "As for being in his way, Theo has no right to be selfish, mamma. He ought to think of Chatty. *She* ought to think of Chatty. I shall not have nearly so good an opinion of her, if she does not take a little trouble and do something for Chatty now she is going out again and has it in her power."

"For Chatty—but Chatty does not shoot!"

"You never will understand, mamma," said Mrs. Eustace Thynne with gentle exasperation. "Chatty ought to be thought of now. I am sure I never was; if it had not been for Eustace coming to Pierrepoint, I should have been Miss Warrender all my life: and so will Chatty be Miss Warrender all her life, if no one comes to the rescue. Of course it should lie with me in the first place: but except neighbouring clergymen, we are likely to see so few people just at present. To be sure I have married a clergyman myself, but Eustace was quite an exceptional case, and

clergymen as a rule can scarcely be called eligible: so there is nothing for it but that Lady Markland should interfere."

"For Chatty? I beg your pardon, my dear. You are much wiser than I am; but in the present case I think Chatty's mother is sufficient for all needs."

"That was always your way, mamma, to take one up at a word without thinking. Don't you remark Chatty, how awfully quiet she is? Eustace remarked it the very first day. He is very quick to see a thing, and he has a lot of sisters of his own. He said to me, Either Chatty has had a disappointment or she is just bored to death staying at home. I think very likely it is my marriage that has done it, for of course there could have been no disappointment," Minnie added calmly. "Seeing both me and Theo happy, she naturally asks herself, Am I always to sit here like an old person with mamma?"

Mrs. Warrender felt the prick, but only smiled. "I don't think she asks herself that question: but in any case I am afraid she must just be left, however dull it may be, with mamma."

"Oh, I hope you will be reasonable," said Minnie, "I hope you will not stand in poor Chatty's way. It is time she saw somebody, and that people saw her. She is twenty-four. She has not much time to lose, Eustace says."

"My dear Minnie, I don't object to what you say about your sister—that is, I allow you have a right to speak: but Eustace is quite a different matter. We will leave him out of the question. What he may think or say about Chatty is of no consequence to me;

in short, I think it is very bad taste, if you will allow me to say so—"

"Mamma!" Minnie rose up to much more than her full height, which was by no means great. "Is it possible that you would teach your own daughter to disregard what her husband says?"

The righteous indignation, the lofty tone, the moral superiority of Minnie's attitude gave her mother a kind of painful amusement. She said nothing, but went to the writing-table at the other side of the room. Everything was very peaceful around and about, no possibility of any real disturbance in the calm well-being of the family so far as any ordinary eye could see: Theo gone with his bride into a sphere a little above that which belonged to him by nature; Minnie with her husband in all the proud consciousness of virtuous bliss; Chatty quiet and gentle among her flowers; a soft atmosphere of sunshine and prosperity, shaded by blinds at the windows, by little diversities and contrarieties in the spirit, from being excessive and dazzling, was all about. In the midst of the calm Minnie's little theories of the new-made wife made a diverting incident in the foreground. Mrs. Warrender looked at her across the writing-table, with a smile in her eyes.

"I knew," cried Minnie, "that you had many ways of thinking I did not go in with—but to throw any doubt upon a woman's duty to her husband! Oh, mamma, that is what I never expected. Eustace is of course the first in all the world to me, what he says is always of consequence. He is not one to say a word that he has not weighed, and if he takes an

interest in his sister-in-law, it is because he thinks it his duty to me."

"That is all very well, my dear," said Mrs. Warrender, with some impatience, "and no doubt it is a great matter for Chatty to have a sister so correct as yourself, and a brother-in-law to take an interest in her. But as long as I live I am the first authority about Chatty, and Eustace is not the first in the world to me. Chatty——"

"Were you calling me, mamma?"

Chatty was coming in with a tall vase of flowers held in both hands. The great campanulas, with their lavish, magnificent bells, flung up a flowery hedge between her face and the eyes of the others. It was not that she had anything to conceal, but undeniably, Chatty felt herself on a lower level of being, subdued by Minnie's presence. There is often in young married persons a pride in their new happiness, an ostentation of superiority in their twofold existence, which is apt to produce this effect upon the spectators. Minnie and her husband stood between the two ladies, neither of whom possessed husbands, as the possessors of conscious greatness stand between those who have fallen and those who have never attained. And Chatty, who had no confidence to give, whose little story was all locked in her own bosom, had been fretted by her sister's questions, and by Mr. Eustace Thynne's repeated references to the fact that she "looked pale."

"No, my dear. We were talking of you, that was all. Minnie is anxious that you should see—a little more of the world."

"Mamma, be correct at least. I said that it would

be a duty for myself if I had any opportunity, and for Frances—"

"Do you mean Lady Markland?"

"Well, she is Frances, I hope, to her husband's sisters. I said it was Frances' duty, now that she is going into society, to take you about and introduce you to people. A little while ago," said Minnie with dignity, "mamma was all for gadding about; and now she finds fault when I say the simplest things, all because I said that Eustace—of course Eustace takes an interest in Chatty; next to his own sisters of course he naturally takes an interest in you."

Chatty placed her tall vase in the corner which she had chosen for it, in silence. She expressed no thanks for the interest Eustace took in her. Neither did Mrs. Warrender say anything further. The chill of this ingratitude had upon Minnie a contrary effect to that which might have been anticipated. She grew very hot and red.

"I don't know what you all mean," she cried; "it is what we have never met with yet, all the places we have been. Everybody has been grateful to Eustace for his good advice. They have all liked to know what he thought. 'Try and find out what Eustace thinks' is what has been said—and now my own mother and sister——" Here words failed and she wiped away a few angry tears.

At this Chatty's tender heart was touched. She went to her sister and gave her a gentle kiss. "Dear Minnie, I am sure you are very kind, and if there was anything to take an interest about—— But mamma and I have just settled down. We want nothing, we are quite happy." Chatty looked across the

room at her mother, which was natural enough, but then Mrs. Warrender observed that the girl's eyes went farther, that they went beyond anything that was visible within those white panelled walls. "Oh, quite happy," Chatty repeated very softly, with that look into the distance, which only her mother saw.

"That is all very well for the present—but you don't suppose you will always be quite satisfied and happy with mamma. That is exactly what Eustace says. I never knew anybody take so little interest in her girls as mamma does. You will be thrown among the little people here—a curate in Highcombe, or somebody's son who lives in the town. Mamma, you may say what you please, but to have a little nobody out of a country town for a brother-in-law, a person probably with no connections, no standing, no——" Minnie paused out of mere incapacity to build up the climax higher.

It is not solely characteristic of women that a small domestic controversy should excite them beyond every other: but perhaps only a woman could have felt the high swelling in her breast of that desire to cast down and utterly confound Minnie and all her pretensions by the mention of a name—and the contrariety of not being able to do it, and the secret exultation in the thought of one day cutting her down, down to the ground, with the announcement. While she was musing her heart turned to Cavendish—a relation within well authenticated lines of the duke, very different from the small nobility of the Thynnes, who on their side were not at all related to the greater family of the name. Mrs. Warrender's heart rose with this thought so that it was almost impossible for her to

keep silence, to look at Minnie and not overwhelm her. But she did refrain, and the consciousness that she had this unanswerable retort behind kept her, as nothing else could, from losing her temper. She smiled with a sense of the humour of the situation, though with a little irritation.

"It will be very sad, my dear, if Chatty provides Eustace with an unsuitable brother-in-law; but we must not look so far ahead. There is no aspirant for the moment who can give your husband any uneasiness. Perhaps he would like a list of the ineligible young men in the neighbourhood? there are not very many, from all I can hear."

"Oh, mamma, I never knew any one so unsympathetic as you are," said Minnie, with an angry flush of colour. Chatty had not stayed to defend herself. She had hurried away out of reach of the warfare. No desire to crush her sister with a name was in Chatty's mind. It had seemed to her profane to speak of such a possibility at all. She realised so fully that everything was over, that all idea of change in her life was at an end for ever, that she heard with a little shiver, but with no warm personal feeling, the end of this discussion. She shrank, indeed, from the idea of being talked over—but then, she reflected, Minnie would be sure to do that, Minnie could not be expected to understand. While Mrs. Warrender began to write her letters Chatty went softly in and out of the room in her many comings and goings about the flowers. She had them on a table in the hall, with a great jug of fresh water and a basket to put all the litter, the clippings of stalks and unnecessary leafage in, and all her pots and vases ready. She was very

tidy in all her ways. It was not a very important piece of business, and yet all the sweet orderly spirit of domestic life was in Chatty's movements. There are many people who would have been far more pleased and touched to see her at this simple work than had she been reading Greek, notwithstanding that the Greek, too, is excellent; but it was not Chatty's way.

Mrs. Warrender sat at her writing-table with a little thrill of excitement and opposition in her. She saw the angry flush on Minnie's face, and watched without seeming to watch her as she rose suddenly and left the room, almost throwing down the little spindle-legged table beside her. Just outside the door Mrs. Warrender heard Chatty's calm voice say to her sister, "Will you have these for your room, Minnie?" evidently offering her some of her flowers. (It was a pretty blue and white china pot, with a sweet-smelling nosegay of mignonette and a few of the late China roses, sweet enough to scent the whole place.) "Oh, thanks, I don't like flowers in my room, Eustace thinks they are not healthy," said Minnie, in tones that were still full of displeasure, the only interruption to the prevailing calm. Mrs. Warrender was not a wise woman. She was pleased that she and the child who was left to her were having the better of the little fray. "Eustace thinks"—Minnie might quote him as much as she pleased, she would never get her mother to quail before these words. A man may be Honourable and Reverend both, and yet not be strong enough to tyrannise over his mother-in-law and lay down the law in her house. This is a condition of affairs quite

different from the fashionable view, but then Mrs. Warrender was in her own house, and quite independent of her son-in-law. She had a malicious pleasure in the thought of his discomfiture. Cavendish! She imagined to herself how they would open their eyes, and tasted in advance the pleasure of the letter which she should write to Minnie, disclosing all that would happen. It seemed to her that she knew very well what would happen. The young man was honourable and honest, and Chatty was most fit and suitable, a bride whom no parents could object to. As for mysterious restraining influences, Mrs. Warrender believed in no such things. She had not lived in a world where they exist, and she felt as sure of Dick Cavendish as of herself—that is to say, *almost* as sure.

All this might have been very well and done no harm, but in the energy of her angry, excited, exasperated, exhilarated mood, it occurred to Mrs. Warrender to take such a step as she had never done before nor thought herself capable of doing. To make overtures of any sort to a man who had shown a disposition to be her daughter's lover, yet had not said anything or committed himself in any way, would, twenty-four hours before, have seemed to her impossible. It would have seemed to her inconsistent with Chatty's dignity and her own. But opposition and a desire to have the better of one's domestic and intimate opponents is very strong, and tempts people to the most equivocal proceedings. Mrs. Warrender did not wait to think, but took out a fresh sheet of paper and dipped her pen in the ink with that impulsiveness which was characteristic of her. A note

or two had already passed between Dick Cavendish and herself, so that it was not so extraordinary a proceeding as it seemed. This was what she wrote:—

DEAR MR. CAVENDISH—Is it worth while coming to us only from Saturday to Monday as your modesty suggests? I fear Chatty and I in our quietness would scarcely repay the long journey. But Minnie is with us (with her husband), and she was always a much more practical person than her mother. She has just been suggesting to me that Theo has now the command of covers more interesting from the sportsman point of view than our old thicket at the Warren. If, therefore, you really feel inclined to come down for a few days, there will, it appears, be a real inducement —something more in a young man's way than the tea-parties at Highcombe. So bring your gun, and let it be from Monday to Saturday instead of the other way.

We think of our brief campaign in town with great pleasure, and a strong sense of obligation to you who did so much for the pleasure of it. Most truly yours,

M. WARRENDER.

She sent this epistle off with great satisfaction, yet a little sense of guilt, that same evening, taking particular care to give it to the parlour maid with her own hand, lest Chatty should see the address. It was already September, and the time of the partridges had begun.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN the ladies left London, Dick Cavendish had felt himself something like a wreck upon the shore. The season was very near its end, and invitations no longer came in dozens. To be sure there were a great many other wrecks whose society made life tolerable; but he felt himself out of heart, out of temper, seized by that sudden disgust with life in general which is often the result of the departure of one person who has given it a special interest. It was a strong effect to be produced by Chatty's unpretending personality, but it affected him more than if she had been in herself a more striking personage. For it was not so much that her presence made a blank in any of the gay scenes that still remained, but that she suggested another kind of scene altogether. He felt that to say it was a bore to go out was no longer that easy fiction which it usually is. It *was* a bore to go out into those aimless assemblies where not to go was a social mistake, yet to go was weariness of the flesh and spirit. In the midst of them his thoughts would turn to the little group in Half Moon Street which had made the commonplace drawing-room of the lodging-house into a home. Chatty over her muslin work—he laughed to himself when he thought of it. It was not lovely; there was no poetry about it; the little scissors and sharp pointed blade that made the little holes; the

patient labour that sewed them round. So far as he was aware there was not much use in the work, and no prettiness at all; a lover might linger over an embroidery frame, and rave of seeing the flowers grow under her hand; but the little checkered pattern of holes—there was nothing at all delightful in that. Yet he thought of it, which was amazing, and laughed at himself, then thought of it again. He was not what could be called of the domestic order of man. He had "knocked about," he had seen all sorts of things and people, and to think that his heart should be caught by Chatty and her muslin work! He was himself astonished and amused, but so it was. He could not take kindly to anything now that she was gone, and even in the rapidity of the last expiring efforts of the season, he felt himself yawn and think of quite another scene: of a little house to go home to, and say what a bore it was, while Chatty took out her muslin work. He was so far gone that he scrawled patterns for that muslin work over his blotting books, arrangements of little holes, in squares, in rounds, in diagonal formations, in the shape of primitive leaf and berry, at which he would laugh all by himself and blush, and fling them into the fire—which did not, however, by any means, withdraw the significance from these simple attempts at ornamental art.

This would have been simple indeed had it been all. All the Cavendishes, small and great, even the highest divinities of the name, would have stooped from their high estate to express their pleasure that Dick had found the "nice girl" who was to settle him and make him everything a Cavendish should be. Ah, had that been but all! Dick was no coxcomb; but he

had read so much in Chatty's modest eyes as warranted him in believing that he would not woo in vain. Though he could still laugh, being of that nature of man, his heart, in fact, was overwhelmed with a weight of trouble such as might have made the strongest cry out. But crying out was not in his constitution. He went about his occupations, his work, which, now that Chatty was gone, had few interruptions, chewing the cud of the bitterest fancy and the most painful thought. He walked about the streets, turning it over and over in his mind. He thought of it even when he made the patterns of the holes and laughed at them, tossing them into the fire. Underneath all his lightest as well as his most serious occupations ran this dark and stern current. The arrival of Mrs. Warrender's note made it still darker and more urgent, carrying him away upon its tide. It was not the first letter he had received from her. He had insisted upon hearing whether their journey home had heen a pleasant one, how they had liked their new house, and many other trivial things, and he had asked for that invitation from Saturday to Monday, which now was reversed and turned into an almost-week, from Monday to Saturday. He did not know whether he meant or not to go: but anyhow the invitation, the power of going if he pleased, was sweet to him. He kept it by him as an anticipation, a sweetmeat which took the bitter taste of life out of his mouth.

But this letter was more formal, more business-like than anything that had gone before. To go to see the woman whom you think of most in the world, that is a vague thing which other engagements may push aside; but an invitation to go for the partridges is

business and has to be answered. Dick got it at his club, where he was lingering though it was September, making little runs into the country, but avoiding his home, where he knew many questions would be put to him about what he was going to do. It is a sad thing when there is nobody who cares what you are going to do—but this is not the view of the matter most apparent to young men. Dick very much disliked the question. It was not one to which he could give any reply. He was going to do—nothing, unless life and feeling should be too much for him and he should be driven into doing what would be a villainy —yes a villainy, though probably no harm would ever come of it; most probably, almost certainly, no harm would come of it—and yet it would be a villainy. These were the thoughts that were with him wherever he went or came. And after he got Mrs. Warrender's letter they grew harder and harder, more and more urgent. It was this which took him one day to the rooms of an old gentleman who had not Dick's reasons for staying in town, but others which were perhaps as weighty, which were that he was fond of his corner in the club, and not of much else. His corner in the club, his walk along the streets, his cosy rooms, and the few old fogies, like himself, sharp as so many needles, giving their old opinions upon the events of the time with a humour sharpened by many an experience of the past: who counted every day only half a day when it was spent out of town. This old gentleman was a lawyer of very high repute, though he had retired from all active practice. He was a man who was supposed to know every case that had ever been on the registers of justice. He had refused the Bench,

and he might even have been, if he would, Attorney-General, but to all these responsibilities he preferred freedom and his corner at the club. To him Dick went with a countenance fresh and fair, which contrasted with the parchment of the old lawyer's face, but a heart like a piece of lead lying in his breast, weighing down every impulse, which also contrasted strongly, though no one could see it, with the tough piece of mechanism screwed up to a very level pitch and now seldom out of order, which fulfilled the same organic functions under the old gentleman's coat.

"What, Dick! what ill wind—it must be an ill wind—sends you here in September? You ought to be among the partridges, my boy."

"It is an ill wind," said Dick.

"No need to tell me that: but judging by your complexion nothing of a tremendous character. Money? or love?"

"Well, sir, it is not really my own business at all. As for my complexion, that don't matter. I don't show outside."

"Some men don't," said the old lawyer laconically; "but if the trouble is not your own that is easy to understand."

At this Dick gave a short laugh. He wanted it to be believed that the trouble was not his own, and yet he did not quite care to be supposed indifferent to it.

"It's an old story," he said. "It is something that happened to—Tom Wyld, an old crony of mine out on the other side."

"I suppose you mean in America. No more slang than you can help, please. It's admirably expressive

sometimes, I allow: but not being used to it in my youth I have some difficulty in following. Well, about Tom Wyld—one of the old judge's sons or grandsons, I suppose."

Dick's complexion heightened a little.

"Oh, not any one you ever heard of—a fellow I picked up—out there."

"Oh, a fellow you picked up out there?"

"It was in one of the new States far West; not the sort of place for nicety of any sort, sir, to tell the truth. Judge Lynch and not much else, in the way of law."

"Works very well I don't doubt—simplifies business immensely," said the old lawyer, nodding his head.

"Makes business, too—lots of it. Well, sir, my friend met with a girl there." Dick seemed to have great difficulty in getting this out. He stammered and his healthy complexion grew now pale, now red.

"Most likely—they generally do, both in novels and out of them," the old gentleman said. "You had better tell me your story straight off. I shall interrupt you no more."

"Well, sir, the girl was very young, very pretty, I might say beautiful—not like anything he had ever met before. Without training, but he thought at her pliable age it was so easy to remedy that." (The old lawyer shook his head with a groan but said nothing.) "She had never seen anything but the rough people about, and knew only their manners and ways. Everything went on well enough for a little while after they were married."

"Good Lord, they were married!"

"What else?" said Dick, turning scarlet. "He re-

spected her as every man must respect the woman he —the woman he—thinks he loves."

"I am glad you have the sense to see that he only thought he——Well, and what was the end of it, Mr. Dick?"

"The end of it was—what you have foreseen, sir," said Dick, bowing his head. "The fellow is my friend, that's to say Tom did all he could. I don't think he was without patience with her. After, when she left him for good, or rather for bad, bad as could be, he did everything he could to help her. He offered, not to take her back, that was not possible, but to provide for her and—and all that. She had all the savage virtues as well as faults. She was honourable in her way. She would take nothing from him. She even made out what she called a paper, poor thing, to set him free. She would not take her freedom herself and leave him bound, she said. And then she disappeared."

"Leaving him the paper?"

"Yes," said Dick, with a faint smile, "leaving him the paper. He found it on his table. That is six years ago. He has never seen her since. He came home soon, feeling—I can't tell you how he felt."

"As if life were not much worth living, according to the slang of the day."

"Well, sir," said Dick, "he's a droll sort of a fellow. He—seemed to get over it somehow. It took a vast deal out of him, but yet he got over it in a kind of a way. He came back among his own people; and what have they been doing since ever he came back but imploring him to marry! It would settle him they all said, if he could get some nice girl: and they have

done nothing but throw nice girls in his way—some of the nicest girls in England, I believe,—one——"

"Good Lord!" said the old man, "you don't mean to say this unlucky young fellow has fallen in love again?"

Dick shook his head with a rueful air, in which it was impossible not to see a touch of the comic, notwithstanding his despair. "This is precisely why he wants your opinion, that is, some one's opinion—on, for of course he has not the honour of knowing you."

"Hasn't he? Ah! I began to think I remembered something about your Tom—or was it Dick—Wyld? Tom Wyld—I think I have heard the name."

"If you should meet him in society," cried Dick, growing very red, "don't for heaven's sake make any allusion to this. I ought not to have mentioned his name."

"Well, get on with the story," said the old man. "He thinks, perhaps, he is free to make love to the other girl and marry—because of that precious paper."

"He is not such a fool as that; I, even," said Dick, faltering, "know law enough to warn him that would be folly. But you know, sir, in some of the wild States, like the one he lived in, divorce is the easiest thing in the world."

"Well: and he thinks he can get a divorce? He had better do it then without more ado. I suppose the evidence—is sufficient?"

Dick gave vent to a hoarse, nervous laugh. "Sufficient—for twenty divorces," he said, then he added quickly: "But that's not the question."

"Why, what is the question then? He should be very thankful to be able to manage it so easily instead

of being dragged through the mud for everybody to gloat over in London. What does the fellow want?" said the old man peevishly. "Many a man would be glad to find so easy a way."

Dick's embarrassment was great, he changed colour, he could not keep still, his voice grew husky and broken. "I don't say that I agree with him, but this is what he thinks. It's easy enough: but he would have to summon her by the newspapers to answer for herself, which she wouldn't do. And who can tell what hands that newspaper might fall into? He says that nobody knows anything about it here; no one has the slightest suspicion that he ever was married or had any entanglement. And she, poor soul, to do her justice, would never put forth a claim. She never would molest him, of that he is sure. He thinks——"

"You take a great deal of interest in your friend's cause, Dick!" For Dick had paused with parted lips, unable to say any more.

"I do. It's a case that has been very interesting to me. He asks why he should take any notice of it at all—a thing done when he was scarcely of age, thousands of miles away, a mistake—an utter failure —a—ah!"—Dick had been speaking very rapidly against time to get out what he had to say before he was interrupted—"you don't see it in that point of view."

"Do you mean to say, sir," said the old gentleman, "that you contemplate betraying a woman by a fictitious marriage, making her children illegitimate and herself a—I can't suppose that you have any real intention of that."

Dick, who had got up in his excitement, here sat

down suddenly as if his strength had failed him, with an exclamation of horror and alarm.

"You don't see that? Why, what else would it be? so long as there is a Mrs.—what do you call her?—living—living and undivorced, the union of that woman's husband with another woman could be nothing but a fictitious marriage. There is a still uglier word by which it could be called."

"You forget," said Dick, "that Mrs. Wyld—neither bears that name nor lays any claim to it. She put it aside long ago when she went upon her own course. It was nothing to her. She is not of the kind that try to keep up appearances or—anything of that sort. I'll do her that justice, she never meant to give the—the —unfortunate fellow any trouble. She didn't even want to stand in his way. She told him he should neither hear of her nor see her again. She is honest, though she is—— She has been to him as if she did not exist for years."

"Why does that matter," cried the old gentleman, "so long as she does exist? There are women who are mad and never can be otherwise—but that does not give their husbands a right to marry again. Divorce her, since you are sure you can do so, and be thankful you have that remedy. I suppose this woman is—not a lady."

"No." Dick spoke in a very low voice. He was quite cowed and subdued, looking at his old friend with furtive looks of trouble. Though he spoke carefully as if the case were not his own, yet he did not attempt to correct the elder man who at once assumed it to be so. He was so blanched and tremulous, nothing but the red of his lips showing out of his colourless

face, and all the lines drawn with inward suffering, that he too might have been an old man. He added in the same low tones: "A man who is divorced would be a sort of monster to them. They would never permit—she would never listen."

"You mean—the other? well, that is possible. There is a prejudice, and a just prejudice. So you think on the whole that to do a young lady—for I suppose the second is in your own class—a real, an unspeakable injury would be better than to shock her prejudices? If that is how you of the new generation confuse what's right and wrong——"

Dick made no reply. He was not capable of self-defence, or even of understanding the indignation he had called forth. He continued as if only half conscious. "It need never be known. There is not a creature who knows of it. She sent me her marriage lines. She has nothing to prove that there ever was anything—and she would not want to prove anything. She is as if she were dead."

"Come, sir," said the lawyer, "rouse yourself, Dick; she is not dead, and for every honourable man that must be enough. Don't bewilder yourself with sophistries. Why should you want to marry—again? You have had enough of it, I should think; or else divorce her, since you can. You may be able to do that secretly as well as the marriage. Why not?"

Dick said nothing, but shook his head. He was so completely cast down that he had not a word to say for himself. How he could have supposed that a dispassionate man could have taken his side and seen with his eyes in such a matter, it is hard to say. He had thought of it so much that all the lines had got

blurred to him, and right and wrong had come to seem relative terms. "What harm would it do?" he said to himself, scarcely aware he was speaking aloud. "No one would be wronged, and they would never know. How could they know? it would be impossible. Whereas, on the other side, there must be a great scandal and raking up of everything, and betrayal—to every one." He shuddered as he spoke.

"Whereas, on the other side," said the old lawyer, "there would be a betrayal—very much more serious. Suppose you were to die, and that then it were to be found out (in the long run everything is found out) that your wife was not your wife, and her children—— Come, Dick, you never can have contemplated a blackguard act like that to an unsuspecting girl!"

"Sir!" cried Dick, starting to his feet. But he could not maintain that resentful attitude. He sank down in the chair again, and said with a groan, "What am I to do?"

"There is only one thing for you to do: but it is very clear. Either explain the real circumstances to the young lady or her friends—or without any explanation give up seeing her. In any case it is evident that the connection must be cut at once. Of course if she knows the true state of the case, and that you are a married man, she will do that. And if you shrink from explanations, *you* must do it without an hour's delay."

Dick made no reply. He sat for a time with his head in his hands: and then rose up with a dazed look, as if he scarcely knew what he was about. "Good-bye," he said, "and thank you. I'll—tell Tom—what you said."

"Do," said the old lawyer, getting up. He took Dick's hand and wrung it in his own with a pressure that, though the thin old fingers had but little force, was painful in its energy. "You don't ask my silence, but I'll promise it you—except in one contingency," and here he wrung Dick's hand again." Should I hear of any marriage—after what you have said, I shall certainly think it my duty to interfere."

When Dick came out the day seemed to have grown dark to him; the sky was all covered with threads of black; he could scarcely see his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEVERTHELESS Dick went down to Highcombe on the following Saturday. There are two ways in which advice can work: one by convincing the man who receives it to abandon his own evil way, and adopt the good way set before him, which of course is the object of all good advice, although but rarely attained to; the other is to make him far more hotly and determinedly bent upon his own way, with a sort of personal opposition to the adviser, and angry sense that he has not properly understood the subject, or entered into those subtle reasons below the surface which make a certain course of action, not generally desirable, perhaps, the only one that can be appropriately adopted in this particular case. This was the effect produced upon Dick. He spent the intervening time in turning it over and over in his mind, as he had already done so often, until all the outlines were blurred. For a long time he had been able to put that early, fatal, mad marriage out of his mind altogether, finding himself actually able to forget it; so that if any one had suddenly accused him of being, as his old friend said, a married man, he would have, on the first shock, indignantly denied the imputation. It had lasted so short a time, it had ended in such miserable disaster! Scarcely a week had passed before he had discovered the horror and folly of what

he had done. He had not, like many men, laid the blame upon the unhappy creature who had led him into these toils. She was no unhappy creature, but one of those butterfly-women without any soul, to whom there are no distinctions of right and wrong. He discovered afterwards that if he had not himself been honourable, it was not she who would have insisted upon the bond of marriage, and whether she had ever intended to be bound by it he could not tell. Her easy, artless independence of all moral laws had been a revelation to the young man such as arrested his very life, and filled him with almost awe in the midst of his misery, disgust, and horror. Without any soul, or heart, or shame, or sense that better was required from her—this was what she was. All the evil elements of corrupt civilisation and savage freedom seemed to have got mixed in her blood: half of the worst of the old world, half of the rudest and wildest of the new. She had been a captivating wonder to the young Englishman, accustomed to all the domestic bonds and decorums, when he saw her first, a fresh wild-flower, as he thought, with the purity as well as the savagery of primitive nature. But afterwards it seemed an uncertain matter whether she had ever known what purity was, or whether those links which bound him to her had not bound other men even before his day. She had flung in his face those marriage lines which women of the lower classes generally hold in such reverence, and had laughed and assured him that they were so much waste paper, and that as she did not mean to be bound by them, neither need he; and then she had disappeared, and for years he had not known that she existed. The

awful discovery that she was in the neighbourhood of his friends, and that he himself might by chance meet her any moment on the common road, had turned him to stone. Lizzie Hampson had been her maid during the brief period in which she was his wife, and had loved and clung to her, the subject of a fascination not uncommon between women, after every other trace of that episode in her life had passed away. Dick Cavendish had not for years thought of that miserable episode in his until he had by chance recognised Lizzie at Underwood. He had even lent himself with no serious purpose, yet with a light heart, to that scheme of his family and friends about the nice girl who was to convert him into a steady member of society. No doubt the moment it had become serious he must have felt himself brought face to face with the burdens and hindrances of his previous career, even had he not seen Lizzie Hampson. This reminder of what had been, however, came at the exact crisis when Chatty Warrender had (as his errant imagination always pictured her) pushed open lightly the door of his heart and walked in with the bowl of roses in her hands: and hence all the tumults and storms which had suddenly seized again upon a life almost forgetful of any cause for these tempests. He knew what he ought to have done then. He ought to have flown from Chatty and every other "nice girl," as indeed he had done at once, to do him justice. But who could have foreseen that meeting in London, who provided against the necessity of "paying a little attention" to the mother and sister of his friend? And now here was this invitation, which meant—what did it mean?

It meant at least that Mrs. Warrender did not object to the continuance of that intercourse, that perhaps Chatty herself—perhaps Chatty—— His pulses had been beating hotly enough before: but when this thought came, the mingling of a delicious sort of intoxicating pleasure with the misery was more than he could bear. When he got home to his rooms he opened the despatch box which had accompanied him through all his wanderings, and which, he suddenly recollected, should "anything happen to him," held all the indications of a secret in his life without any explanation of it, and went over its contents. He was interrupted in the midst of this by a chance and inopportune visitor, no less than a younger brother, who pulled the papers about, and cried, "Hallo, what's this?" with the unjustifiable freedom of a near relation, bringing Dick's heart into his mouth, and furnishing him with a dreadful example of what might be, were a touch of more authority laid upon those scattered *débris* of his life. A young brother could be sent away, or otherwise disposed of, but there might come those who could not be sent away. When he was alone again, he found the few papers connected with his secret amid many others of no consequence, and it gave Dick a curious thrill, half of amusement, to think of the spring of astonished interest with which some problematical person who might examine these papers after his death would come upon this little trace of something so different from the tame relics of every day. There was the letter which she had left behind her setting him free, as the lawless creature intended; there was the marriage certificate and some little jumble of mementos which somehow, without any

will of his, had got associated with the more important papers. Dick looked over the bundle as if through the eyes of that man who would go through them after his death, finding out this appalling mystery. The man would be delighted, though it might not be a pleasant discovery—it might (Dick went on imagining to himself) throw a horrible doubt, as old What's-his-name said, upon the standing of his widow, upon the rights of his child—but the man who found it would be delighted. It would come so unexpectedly amid all these uninteresting letters and records of expenditure. It would brighten them up with the zest of a story, of a discovery; it would add an interest to all the lawyer's investigations into his estate. All the men about would meet and shake their heads over it, putting two and two together, making out what it meant. Probably they would advertise cautiously (which was what Dick himself, as a budding lawyer, would recommend in the circumstances) for *her*, poor creature, sure to be dead and buried long before that. They would consult together whether it was necessary to inform poor Mrs. Cavendish until they had something more definite to say. Dick, looking down the vale of years, saw, or thought he saw, with a curious quiver of his heart between pleasure and pity, Chatty in a widow's cap, shedding tears at the sound of his name, absolutely obtuse and incapable of understanding how any dishonour could have come to her by him. They would think her stupid, Dick believed, with a tear stealing to the corner of his eye. Yes, she would be blank with a holy stupidity, God bless her, idiotic, if you like, my fine gentleman, in that—not capable of understanding dishonour. It was with a sort of grim

pleasure that he got up after this and lighted a candle, which shone strangely yellow and smoky in the clear September sunshine. "I'll balk them," he said to himself, with fierce satisfaction, as if those respectable imaginary executors of his had been ill-natured gossips bent on exposing him. And he burnt the papers one by one at his candle, watching the last fibre of each fade away in redness and then in blackness, disappearing into nothing.

And then he packed his portmanteau and went down to Highcombe. There are some people who will think this inconceivable, but then these good persons perhaps have never had a strong overpowering inclination to fight against, never been pressed and even menaced by an urgent adviser, never recognised that necessity of doing one thing which seems to throw the troubled mind into the arms of the other. And then below all these contentions Dick had a stubborn, strong determination to conduct this matter his own way. He had decided in his mind that it was the best way. If there had been any latent doubt on the subject before he consulted his old friend, that had been dissipated by the interview and by all the old gentleman's cogent reasoning on the other side. Dick felt that he had taken the bit in his teeth and would be guided by no man. It *was* the best way, there was no risk in it, no wrong in it—certainly no wrong. He had not dealt even harshly with that wretched creature. He knew that he had been kind, that he had tried every way to reclaim her, and she had freed him from every law, human or divine. He could get a divorce anywhere, that he knew; and after all a divorce was but the legal affirmation of that severance which

had been made by nature, ay, and by God. Even the pure law of Christianity permitted it for that one cause. Therefore there was no wrong. And to spare publicity was merciful, merciful to her as well as to himself.

Thus he reasoned, growing more certain on each repetition, and packed his portmanteau. But yet he did not take Mrs. Warrender's invitation in all its fulness. There was a little salve for any possible prick of conscience in this. Instead of from Monday to Saturday, as she said, he kept to the original proposal and went from Saturday to Monday. There was something in that; it was a self-denial, a self-restraint—he felt that it was something to the other side of the account.

The Eustace Thynnes were still at Highcombe when he arrived, and Mrs. Warrender had a little foretaste of the gratification which she proposed to herself in announcing to Minnie at some future period the name of her brother-in-law, in perceiving how deeply Minnie was impressed by the visitor, and the evident but very delicately indicated devotion with which he regarded Chatty, a thing which took the young married lady altogether by surprise and gave her much thought. As for Chatty herself, it was with the sensation of one reluctantly awaked out of a dream, that she suffered herself once more to glide into the brighter life which seemed to come and go with Cavendish, an attendant atmosphere. The dream, indeed, had not been happy, but there had been a dim and not unsweet tranquillity in it—a calm which was congenial to Chatty's nature. Besides that she was still young enough to feel a luxury in that soft languor

of disappointment and failure against which she had never rebelled, which she had accepted as her lot. Was it possible that it was not to be her lot after all? Was there something before her brighter, more beautiful, after all? not an agitated happiness, more excitement than bliss, like that of Theo, not the sort of copartnery of superior natures laying down the law to all surroundings, like Minnie and her Eustace: but something much more lovely, the true ideal, that which poetry was full of—was it possible that to herself, Chatty, the simplest and youngest (she was older than Theo it was true, but that did not seem to count somehow now that Theo was a man and married), this beautiful lot was to come? She was very shy to accept the thought, holding back with a gentle modesty, trying not to see how Dick's thoughts and looks turned to her—an attitude that was perfect in its conformity with her nature and looks, and filled Dick with tender admiration mingled with a little alarm, such as he had not heretofore felt, but which touched Minnie with astonishment and indignation. "She can't be going to refuse Mr. Cavendish," she said afterwards to the partner of all her thoughts. "It would be very surprising," said Eustace. "Oh, it must not be allowed for a moment," Minnie cried.

On the first evening, which was Saturday, Lady Markland and Theo came to dinner: she very sweet, and friendly and gracious to every one, he full of cloudy bliss, with all his nerves on the surface, ready to be wounded by any chance touch. The differing characteristics of the family thus assembled together might have given an observer much amusement, so full was each of his and her special little circle of

wishes and interests: but time does not permit us to linger upon that little society. Lady Markland attached herself most to the mother, with a curious fellow-feeling which touched yet alarmed Mrs. Warrender. "I am more on your level than on theirs," she whispered. "My dear, that is nonsense, Minnie is as old as you are," Mrs. Warrender said. But then Minnie had never been anything but a young lady until she married Eustace, and Lady Markland—ah, nothing could alter the fact that Lady Markland had already lived a life with which Theo had nothing to do. In the midst of this family party Chatty and her affairs were a little thrown into the background. She fulfilled all the modest little offices of the young lady of the house, made the tea and served it sweetly, brought her mother's work and footstool, did everything that was wanted. Dick could not talk to her much, indeed talking was not Chatty's strong point: but he followed her about with his eyes, and took the advantage of all her simple ministrations, in which she shone much more than in talk.

But the Sunday morning was the best. The Rev. Eustace took the duty by special request of the vicar in the chief church of Highcombe, and Dick went with the mother and daughter to a humble little old church standing a little out of the town, with its little inclosure round it full of those rural graves where one cannot help thinking the inmates must sleep sounder than anywhere else. Here, as it was very near, they were in the habit of attending, and Chatty, though she was not a great musician, played the organ, as so many young ladies in country places do. When the little green curtain that veiled the organ loft was drawn

aside for a moment Dick had a glimpse of her, looking out her music before she began, with a chubby-faced boy who was to "blow" for her at her hand: and this foolish lover thought of Luca della Robbia's friezes, and the white vision of Florentine singers and players on the lute. The puffy-cheeked boy was just like one of those sturdy Tuscan urchins, but the maiden was of finer ware, like a madonna. So Dick thought: although Chatty had never called forth such fine imaginations before. They all walked home together very peacefully in a tender quiet, which lasted until the Eustace Thynnes came back with their remarks upon everybody. And in the afternoon Dick told Mrs. Warrender that he must go over and see Wilberforce at Underwood. There were various things he had to talk to Wilberforce about, and he would be back to dinner, which was late on Sunday to leave time for the evening church-going. Chatty had her Sunday-school, so it was as well for him to go. He set out walking, having first engaged the people at the Plough Inn to send a dog-cart to bring him back. It was a very quiet unexciting road, rather dusty, with here and there a break through the fields. His mind was full of a hundred things to think of; his business was not with Wilberforce, but with Lizzie Hampson, whom he must see, and ask—what was he to ask? He could scarcely make out to himself. But she was the sole custodian of this secret, and he must know how she could be silenced, or if it would be necessary to silence her, to keep her from interfering. The walk, though it was six long miles, was not long enough for him to decide what he should say. He went round the longest way, passing the Elms in order to see if the house was still

empty, with a chill terror in his heart of seeing some trace of those inhabitants whose presence had been an insult to him. But all was shut up, cold and silent; he knew that they were gone, and yet it was a relief to him when he saw with his eyes that this was so. Then he paused and looked down the little path opening by a rustic gate into the wood, which led to the Warren. It was a footpath free to the villagers, and he saw one or two people at long intervals passing along, for the road led by the farther side of the pond and was a favourite Sunday walk. Dick thought he would like to see what changes Warrender had made and also the spot where he had seen Chatty if not for the first time, yet the first time with the vision which identified her among all women. He went along, lingering to note the trees that had been cut down and the improvements made, and his mind had so completely abandoned its former course of thought for another, that when Lizzie Hampson came out of the little wood, and met him, he started as if he had not known she was here. There was nobody else in sight, and he had time enough as she approached him to recover the former thread of his musings. She did not recognise him until they were close to each other: then she showed the same reluctance to speak to him which she had done before, and after a hasty glance round as if looking for a way of escape, cast down her eyes and head evidently with the intention of hurrying past as if she had not seen him. He saw through the momentary conflict of thought, and kept his eyes upon her. "I am glad that I have met you," he said; "I wanted to see you," standing in front of her so that she could not escape.

"But I don't want to see you, sir," Lizzie said, respectfully enough.

"That may be: but still—I have some questions to ask you. Will you come with me towards the house? We shall be less interrupted there."

"If I must, I'd rather hear you here, sir," said Lizzie. "I won't have the folks say that I talk with a gentleman in out-of-the-way places. It's better on the common road."

"As you please," said Dick. "You know what the subject is. I want to know——"

"What, sir? You said as I was to let you know when trouble came. Now no trouble's come, and there's no need, nor ever will be. She would never take help from you."

"Why? She has done me harm enough," he said.

"She never says anything different. She will never take help from you. She will never hear of you, nor you of her. Never, never. Consider her as if she were dead, sir—that's all her desire."

"I might have done that before I saw you. But now——"

"You don't mean," said Lizzie, with a sudden eager gleam of curiosity, "that you—that after all that's come and gone——?" The look that passed over his face, a flush of indignation, a slight shudder of disgust, gave her the answer to her unspoken question. She drew herself together again, quickly, suddenly catching her breath. "I can't think," she said, "what questions there can be."

"There is this," he said: "I had almost forgotten her existence—till I saw you: but now that is not possible. Look here, I may have to try and get a

divorce—you know what that means—out there, not here: and she must have warning. Will you let her know?"

The girl started a little, the word frightened her. "Oh, sir," she cried, "you wouldn't punish her, you wouldn't put her in prison or that? Oh, don't, sir. She would die—and you know she's not fit to die."

"You mistake," said Dick; "there is no question of punishment, only to be free of each other—as if indeed, as you say, she were dead to me."

"And so she is," cried Lizzie earnestly. "She never will have her name named to you, that's what she says, never if she should be ever so—— She's given you your freedom as she's taken hers, and never, never shall you hear word of her more: that is what she says."

"Yet she is in England, for all she says."

"Did she ever pass you her word not to come to England? But I don't say as she's in England now. Oh, it was an ill wind, sir," cried Lizzie with vehemence, "that brought you here!"

"It may be so," Dick said, with a gravity that went beyond any conscious intention of regret he had. "There is but one thing now, and that is that I must be free. Let her know that I must take proceedings for divorce. I have no way of reaching her but through you."

"Sir, there is somebody coming," said Lizzie; "pass on as if you had been asking me the way. I'll let her know. I'll never open my lips to you more nor to any one, about her, but I'll do what you say. That's the way to the house," she added, turning, pointing out the path that led away from the side of the pond towards the Warren. He followed the indication with-

out another word, and in a minute stood in the peaceful shadow of the deserted house. It came upon him chill, but wholesome, life reviving after the agitation of that brief encounter. Divorce—it was a bad word to breathe in such an honest place—a bad blasphemous word, worse than an oath. He had not meant to say it, nor thought of it before this meeting: but now he seemed to be pledged to this step involuntarily, unwillingly; was it by some good angel, something that was working in Chatty's interests and for her sweet sake?

CHAPTER XV.

DICK went back to town on the Monday, having taken no decisive step, nor said any decisive words. All that he had done was to make it apparent that the matter was not to end there, as had seemed likely when they parted in London. Chatty now saw that it was not to be so. The thing was not to drop into the mere blank of unfulfilledness, but was to be brought to her decision, to yea or nay. This conviction, and the company of Dick in a relation which could not but be new, since it was no longer accidental, but of the utmost gravity in her life, gave a new turn altogether to her existence. The change in her was too subtle for the general eye. Even Minnie, sharp as she was, could make nothing more of it than that Chatty was "more alive looking," a conclusion which, like most things nowadays, she declared to come from Eustace. Mrs. Warrender entered with more sympathy into her daughter's life, veiled not so much by intention as by instinctive modesty and reserve from her as from all others: but even she did not know what was in Chatty's mind, the slow rising of an intense light which illuminated her as the sun lights up a fertile plain,—the low land drinking in every ray, unconscious of shadow,—making few dramatic effects, but receiving the radiance at every point. Chatty herself felt like that low-lying land.

The new life suffused her altogether, drawing forth few reflections, but flooding the surface of her being, and warming her nature through and through. It was to be hers, then,—not as Minnie, not as Theo had it, —but like Shakespeare, like poetry, like that which maidens dream.

Dick went back to town. When he had gone to his old friend for advice his mind had revolted against that advice and determined upon his own way; but the short interview with Lizzie Hampson had changed everything. He had not meant to speak to her on the subject; and what did it matter though he had spoken to her for a twelvemonth? She could not have understood him or his desire. She thought he meant to punish the poor, lost creature, perhaps to put her in prison. The word divorce had terrified her. And yet he now felt as if he had committed himself to that procedure, and it must be carried out. Yet a strange reluctance to take the first steps retarded him. Even to an unknown advocate in the far West a man is reluctant to allow that his name has been dishonoured. The publicity of an investigation before a tribunal, even when three or four thousand miles away, is horrible to think of,—although less horrible than had the wrong and misery taken place nearer home. But after six years, and over a great ocean and the greater part of a continent, how futile it seemed to stir up all those long-settled sediments again! He wrote and rewrote a letter to a lawyer whose name he remembered, to whom he had done one or two slight services, in the distant State which was the scene of his brief and miserable story. But he had not yet satisfied himself with this letter when

there occurred an interruption which put everything of the kind out of his thoughts.

This was the receipt of a communication in black borders so portentous that Dick, always alive to the comic side of everything, was moved for the moment to a profane laugh. "No mourning could ever be so deep as this looks," he said to himself, and opened the gloomy missive with little thought. It could, he believed, only convey to him information of the death of some one whom he knew little, and for whom he cared less. But the first glance effectually changed his aspect. His face grew colourless, the paper fell out of his hands. "Good God!" he said. It was no profane exclamation. What was this? a direct interposition of heaven in his behalf, a miracle such as is supposed never to happen nowadays? The first effect was to take breath and strength from him. He sat with his under jaw fallen, his face livid as if with dismay. His heart seemed to stand still; awe, as if an execution had been performed before his eyes, came over him. He felt as if he had a hand in it, as if some action of his had brought doom upon the sufferer. A cold perspiration came out on his forehead. Had he wished her death in the midst of her sins, poor miserable woman? Had he set the powers of fate to work against her, he, arrogant in his virtue and the happiness that lay within his reach? Compunction was the first thought. It seemed to him that he had done it. Had he a right to do it, to cut off her time of repentance, to push her beyond the range of hope?

After this, however, he picked up the letter again with trembling hands, and read it. It was from a man

who described himself as the head of a circus company in Liverpool, with whom Emma Altamont had been performing. She had died in consequence of a fall two days before. "She directed me with her last breath to write to you, to say that you would know her under another name, which she was not going to soil by naming it even on her deathbed, but that you would know. She died very penitent, and leaving her love to all friends. She was very well liked in the company, though she joined it not so very long ago. A few things that she left behind she requested you to have the choice of, if you cared for any keepsake to remember her by, and sent you her forgiveness freely, as she hoped to be forgiven by you. The funeral is to be on Sunday, at two o'clock; and I think she would have taken it kind as a mark of respect if she had thought you would come. I leave that to your own sense of what is best."

This was the letter which fell like a bomb into Dick's life. It was long before he could command himself enough to understand anything but the first startling fact. She was dead. In his heart, by his thoughts, had he killed her? was it his fault? He did not go beyond this horrible idea for some long minutes. Then there suddenly seized upon him a flood of gladness, a sensation of guilty joy. God had stepped in to set the matter straight. The miracle which we all hope for, which never seems impossible in our own case, had been wrought. All lesser ways of making wrong right were unnecessary now. All was over, the pain of retrospection, the painful expedients of law, the danger of publicity, all over. The choice of her poor little leavings for a token to re-

member her by! Dick shuddered at the thought. To remember her by! when to forget her was all that he wished.

It was long before he could do anything save think, in confused whirls of recollection, and painful flashes of memory, seeing before his hot eyes a hundred phantasmal scenes. But at last he roused himself to a consideration of what he ought to do. Prudence seemed to suggest an immediate journey to Liverpool, to satisfy himself personally that all was effectually winded up and concluded in this miserable account; but a dread, a repugnance, which he could not overcome, held him back. He could not take part by act or word in anything that concerned her again; not even, poor creature, in her funeral; not from any enmity or hatred to her, poor unfortunate one, but because of the horror, the instinctive shrinking, which he could not overcome. Dick determined, however, to send the man who had charge of his chambers, a man half servant, half clerk, in whom he could fully trust. It was Friday when he received the letter. He sent him down next day to Liverpool with instructions to represent him at the funeral, to offer money if necessary to defray its expenses, to let no "respect" be spared. She would have liked "respect" in this way. It would have given her pleasure to think that she was to have a fine funeral. Dick gave his man the fullest instructions. "She was connected with—friends of mine," Dick said, "who would wish everything to be respectably done, though they cannot themselves take any part." "I understand, sir," said the man, who put the most natural interpretation upon the strange commission, and did not believe in any

fiction about Dick's "friends." Dick called him back when he had reached the door. "You can see the things of which this person writes, and choose some small thing without value, the smaller the better, to send as he proposes to—the people she belongs to." This seemed the last precaution of prudence to make assurance sure.

After this, three days of tumultuous silence till the messenger came back. He came bringing a description of the funeral, a photograph of "the poor young lady," and a little ring—a ring which Dick himself had given her, so long, so long ago. The sight of these relics had an effect upon him impossible to describe. He had to keep his countenance somehow till the man had been dismissed. The photograph was taken in fancy dress, in one of the circus costumes, and was full of all manner of dreadful accessories; the stage smile, the made-up beauty, the tortured hair; but there was no difficulty in recognising it. A trembling like palsy seized upon him as he gazed at it: then he lit his taper once more, and with a prayer upon his quivering lips burnt it. The ring he twisted up in paper, and carried out with him in his hand till he reached the muddy, dark-flowing river, where he dropped it in. Thus all relics and vestiges of her, poor creature, God forgive her! were vanished and put out of sight for evermore.

Next day Dick Cavendish, a new man, went once more to Highcombe. He was not quite the light-hearted fellow he had been. There was a little emotion about him, a liquid look in the eyes, a faint quiver about the mouth, which Chatty, when she lifted her soft eyes with a little start of surprise and consciousness to

greet him, perceived at once and set down to their true cause. Ah yes, it was their true cause. Here he was, come to offer himself with a past full of the recollections we know, with a life which had been all but ruined in times gone by, to the whitest soul he had ever met with, a woman who was innocence and purity personified; who would perhaps, if she knew, shrink from him, refuse the hand which she would think a soiled one. Dick had all this in his mind, and it showed in his countenance, which was full of feeling, but feeling of which Chatty understood nothing. He found her alone by the merest chance. Everything seemed to work for him in this season of fortune. No inquisitive sister, no intrusive brother-in-law, not even the mother with her inquiring eyes was here to interrupt. The jar with the big campanulas stood in the corner; the mignonettes breathed softly an atmosphere of fragrance; her muslin work was in Chatty's hand.

Well, he had not a great deal to say. It had all been said by his eyes in the first moment, so that the formal words were but a repetition. The muslin work dropped after a few seconds, and Chatty's hands were transferred to his to be caressed and kissed and whispered over. He had loved her ever since that day when she had lightly pushed open the door of the faded drawing-room at the Warren and walked in with her bowl of roses. "That was the door of my heart," Dick said. "You had come in before I knew. I can smell the roses still, and I shall ask Theo for that bowl for a wedding present. And you, my Chatty and, you?"

Mrs. Warrender had her little triumph that afternoon. She said, with the most delicate politeness: "I

hope, Minnie, that Eustace after all will be able to tolerate his new brother-in-law." Minnie gave her mother a look of such astonishment as proved that the fine edge of the sarcasm was lost.

"To tolerate—a Cavendish! I can't think what you mean, mamma! Eustace is not an ignorant goose, though you seem to think so; nor am I."

"I am glad your Honours are pleased," said the ironical mother, with a laugh. Minnie stared and repeated the speech to Eustace, who was not very clear either about its meaning. But "Depend upon it, dear, your mother meant to be nasty," he said, which was quite true.

After this, all was commotion in the house. Dick, though he had been an uncertain lover, was very urgent now. He made a brief explanation to Mrs. Warrender that his proposal had not been made at the time they parted in London, "only because of an entanglement of early youth," which made her look grave. "I do not inquire what you mean," she said, "but I hope at least that it is entirely concluded." "Entirely," he replied with fervour; "nor am I to blame as you think, nor has it had any existence for six years. I was young then." "Very young, poor boy!" she said with her old indulgent smile. He made the same brief explanation to Chatty, but Chatty had no understanding whatever of what the words meant and took no notice. If she thought of it at all she thought it was something about money, to her a matter of the most complete indifference. And so everything became bustle and commotion, and the preparations for the wedding were put in hand at once. The atmosphere was full of congratulations, of

blushes and wreathed smiles. "Marriage is certainly contagious; when it once begins in a family, one never knows where it will stop," the neighbours said: and some thought Mrs. Warrender much to be felicitated on getting all her young people settled; and some, much to be condoled with on losing her last girl just as she had settled down. But these last were in the minority, for to get rid of your daughters is a well understood advantage, which commends itself to the meanest capacity.

It was arranged for the convenience of everybody that the wedding was to take place in London. Dick's relations were legion, and to stow them away in the Dower house at Highcombe, or even to find room to give them a sandwich and a glass of wine, let alone a breakfast, after the ceremony, was impossible. Dick himself was particularly urgent about this particular, he could not have told why, whether from a foreboding of disturbance or some other incomprehensible reason. But as for disturbance, there was no possibility of that. Every evil thing that could have interfered had been exorcised and lost its power. There was nothing in his way; nothing to alarm or trouble, but only general approval and the satisfaction of everybody concerned.

CHAPTER XVI.

LIZZIE HAMPSON heard, like everybody in the village, of what was about to happen. Miss Chatty was going to be married. At first all that was known was that the bridegroom was a gentleman from London, which in those days was a description imposing to rustics. He was a gentleman who had once been visiting at the Rectory, who had been seen in the rector's pew at church, and walking about the village, and on the road to the Warren. Many of the village gossips remembered, or thought they remembered, to have seen him, and they said to each other, with a natural enjoyment of a love story which never fails in women, that no doubt that was when "it was all made up." It gave many of them a great deal of pleasure to think that before Miss Minnie had ever seen "that parson," her more popular sister had also had a lover, though he hadn't spoken till after, being mayhap a shy gentleman, as is seen often and often. He was a fair-haired gentleman and very pleasant spoken. What his name was nobody cared so much; the villagers found it more easy to recollect him by the colour of his hair than by his name. It was some time before Lizzie identified the gentleman whom Miss Chatty was about to marry. She had a small part of the trousseau to prepare, one or two morning dresses to make, a commission which made her proud and happy, and gave her honour in

the sight of her friends and detractors, a thing dear to all. And then at the very last Lizzie discovered who the bridegroom was. The discovery affected her very greatly. It was the occasion of innumerable self-arguments, carried on in the absolute seclusion of a mind occupied by matters, its acquaintance with which is unknown. Old Mrs. Bagley talked about the marriage to every one who came into the shop. It was, she said, almost as if it was a child of her own.

Thus Lizzie heard—all that there was to hear: and her mind grew more perplexed as time went on. She had the strange ignorances and the still more strange beliefs common to her kind. She put her faith in those popular glosses of the law, at which the better instructed laugh, but which are to the poor and unlearned like the canons of faith. It was the very eve of the wedding before her growing anxiety forced her to action. When Mr. Wilberforce was told that a young woman wanted to see him, he was arranging with his wife the train by which they were to go up to town to the wedding, not without comments on the oddness of the proceeding, which Mrs. Wilberforce thought was but another of the many signs of the times—which severed all bonds, and made a nasty big hotel better than your own house. The rector was in the habit of taking his wife's comments very calmly, for he himself was not so much alarmed about our national progress to destruction as she was. But yet he had his own opinion on the subject, and thought it was undignified on the part of Mrs. Warrender not to have her daughter married at home. He was only to be the second in importance in point of view of the ceremony itself, having no more to do than to assist a

bishop who was of the Cavendish clan: whereas he felt himself quite man enough to have married Chatty out of hand without any assistance at all. However, to assist a bishop in the capacity of the parish clergyman of the bride was a position not without dignity, and he felt that he had, on the whole, little to complain of. He went into his study to speak to the young woman when that little consultation was over. Lizzie was seated, as they always were, upon the edge of one of the chairs. He was surprised to see her, though he could scarcely have said why.

"Oh, Lizzie! I am sorry to have kept you waiting: but I had something to do for Mrs. Wilberforce," the rector said.

"It doesn't matter, sir. I came to ask your advice, if I may make so bold."

"Certainly, certainly, Lizzie—anything that I can do."

"It isn't for me, sir, it's for a friend," she said, with the same device which Dick had employed, but in her case with more appropriateness. "I want to ask you, sir, about marriages. Oh, it's very serious, sir, there's nothing to smile about."

"I will not smile then, Lizzie. I shall be as serious as you please."

"It's just this, sir. When a man has been married and has had his wife run away from him and hasn't seen her nor heard of her for years—for six or seven years—he's free to marry again?"

"Do you think so? I should not like to affirm so much as that."

"But what I want you to tell me," said Lizzie, running on very quickly and taking no notice of his

interruption, "is whether, if it could be proved that he *had* heard of her though he hadn't seen her, if that would make any difference?"

"I have no doubt it would make all the difference in the world. Even your first statement is doubtful, I fear. I don't think seven years is a sacred period that would justify a second marriage."

"I didn't say seven, sir, for certain. Six or seven."

"That is of little importance. The presumption is, that if he has heard nothing of her for a long period she must be dead; but of course, if he has heard of her existence——"

"But dead to him, oh, dead to him!" cried Lizzie, "leading a dreadful life, not a woman he could ever touch, or so much as look at again."

"I am afraid," said the rector, shaking his head, "though it is a very hard case for him, that there is nothing to be done. He should try and get a divorce —but that is a serious business. I don't know what else there is in his power."

"Would he be punished for it, sir?"

"It is not so much the punishment to him. In a hard case like this, the circumstances would be very much taken into consideration. Very likely it would be only a nominal punishment. The fatal consequences are not to the man, but to the woman—— I mean the second wife."

"But she knows nothing about it, sir. Why should she be punished? It's no doing of hers. She don't know."

"Then, my good girl, you should warn her. Though she knows nothing about it, and is quite innocent, it is upon her chiefly that the consequences will fall. She

will not be his wife at all; her children, if she has any, will be illegitimate. She will have no claim upon him, if he should happen to be a bad fellow. In short, if she was married, even as Miss Warrender is going to be to-morrow, by a bishop, Lizzie, it would be simply no marriage at all."

Lizzie uttered a wild exclamation, clasping her hands—and said, "Oh, sir, is there anything that a woman that wishes her well could do?"

"There is only one thing you can do: to warn her before it is too late. Tell her she must break it off if it were at the last moment—if it were at the very altar. She must not be allowed to sacrifice herself in ignorance. I'll see her myself, if that will do any good."

"She's going to be married to-morrow," cried Lizzie breathlessly. "Oh, sir, don't deceive me! there's not a creature that knows about it, not one—and she the least of all. Oh, Mr. Wilberforce, how could any judge or jury, or any one, have the heart to punish *her*?"

"Neither judge nor jury, my poor girl: but the law which says a man must not marry another woman while his first wife is living. There are many even who will not allow of a divorce in any circumstances; but I am not so sure of that. Tell me who this poor girl is, and I will do my best to warn her while there is time."

Lizzie rose up and sat down again, in nervous excitement. She made a ball of her handkerchief and pressed it alternately to each of her wet eyes. "Oh, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do!" she cried.

"If there is anything that can be done to-night," he said,—"Quick, Lizzie, there is no time to lose, for

I must leave early to-morrow for Miss Warrender's marriage."

"And there's not another train leaves to-night," cried Lizzie; then she made an effort to compose herself, and a curtsy, rising from her seat. "I must do it myself, sir, thank you all the same," she said, and went away tottering and unsteady in her great trouble: yet only half believing him after all. For how, oh how, ye heavens, could the law punish one that meant no harm and knew no evil? a question which minds more enlightened than that of Lizzie have often asked in vain.

CHAPTER XVII.

LIZZIE had a tiresome argument with her grandmother that night, who could not understand why she should be so bent on going into Highcombe by the first train. To see Miss Chatty married, that was reasonable enough; but Miss Chatty would not be married till eleven at the earliest, perhaps later. Mrs. Bagley knew that gentlefolks ran it almost too late, as late as was possible, which was the fashion, or else because they didn't like to get up so early as poor folks,—and why should Lizzie start by the seven o'clock train? But Lizzie was determined and got her way, declaring that she would stay up all night and do her work before she started sooner than not go. It would not have mattered much had she done so, for there was no sleep for Lizzie that night. She had not any certainty of being right to support her in what she was going to do. She thought of disturbing all the wedding preparations, stopping the bride with her veil on and the orange blossoms in her hair, and all the guests assembled—for what? because of—one who made no claim, who would never make any claim, who had not been heard of for more than six years. That was the flaw which disturbed Lizzie. It was not quite out seven years. Had that mystic period been accomplished she felt that she could have left Chatty to the protection of God. But at the out-

side it was only six and a half, and he *had* heard of her through Lizzie herself—though she inwardly resolved that no inducement on earth would make her appear before judge and jury to tell that. No! she would rather fly than tell it. And then her mind came back to the picture of the bride in her glistening white silk or satin, with the veil over her head, and the orange blossoms—to stop all that, to turn away the carriages from the door, and set herself up as knowing better than a gentleman like Mr. Cavendish, and perhaps making a fool of herself, and not being believed or listened to after all!

These thoughts tormented Lizzie all through the night: she got up very early, while it was still dark, and lighted the fire, and put everything straight for her grandmother, and made herself a cup of tea, which she needed much to settle her agitated nerves. Old Mrs. Bagley got up, too, disturbed by the sound of some one stirring, not without grumbling at being awoke so early. Lizzie came and kissed her before she went away. "Oh, Granny, say God bless you!" she cried; "for I'm all shaking and trembling, and I don't know what may come to me to-day." "Lord bless the child!" said Mrs. Bagley, "what's a-coming to her? A body would think as it's you as is going to be married to-day; but God bless you's easy said, and meant from the 'art, and never comes amiss; and God bless Miss Chatty too, the dear, and give her a happy weddin' and a happy life." Lizzie felt that she could not say Amen. It seemed to choke her, when she tried to utter that word, for it was little happiness poor Miss Chatty would have, if she did what she was going to do. She hurried to the station, which was a

long walk in the fresh morning, feeling the air chill and sharp. It was a long way to the station, and then the railway made a round, so that an active person would have found it almost as quick to walk straight to Highcombe, and it was between eight and nine when Lizzie at last found herself before the door of Mrs. Warrender's house. She thought it looked wonderfully quiet for the morning of a wedding, the shutters still closed over the drawing-room windows. But it would be vain to attempt to describe her dismay when she heard the explanation of this tranquillity. Not here, but in London! Didn't she know? the housemaid said, who was a girl from Underwood. She thought everybody had known. And Lizzie had the sickening consciousness that had she inquired a little more closely she might have discovered for herself, and saved herself this trouble. She was taken in by the sympathising housemaid to have a second cup of tea at least, if not breakfast, and to hear all about the preparations and the dresses, which Betsey, though sadly disappointed to miss the glories of the wedding, had yet seen, and could describe. And there was not a train to London till nearly ten. She asked herself in her dismay whether it was worth going then, whether perhaps it were not Providence that had stopped her; but then, with a returning obstinacy of purpose, determined that she would not be beaten, that whatever hindered she would not be kept back.

She got to London just at the hour when the wedding party were to leave for church, and found them gone when she arrived at the house. Lizzie's habits did not consist with taking cabs. She had toiled along from the station, hot and weary, on foot. "If

you want to catch them up you had better take an 'ansom," said one of the white-neckclothed men who were busy preparing the wedding breakfast. Lizzie scarcely knew what a hansom was; but she submitted to be put into one, and to get with much difficulty a shilling out of her purse to pay it. The sudden whirl, the jar and noise, the difficult getting out and in, the struggle to pursue that shilling into a corner of her purse among the pennies and sixpences, aided in confusing her brain utterly. She rushed up the steps of the church, which were crowded with idlers, not knowing what she did. The organ was pealing through the place, making a little storm of sound under the gallery, as she rushed in desperate, meeting the fine procession, the bride in all that glory which Lizzie had dreamt of, which she had been so reluctant to spoil; her white dress rustling over the red cloth that had been laid down in the aisle, her white veil flowing over her modest countenance, her arm in that of her bridegroom; all whiteness, peace, and sweet emotion, joy touched with trembling and a thousand soft regrets. Chatty came along slowly, her soft eyes cast down, her soul floating in that ecstasy which is full of awe and solemn thoughts. Dick's eyes were upon her, and the eyes of all, but hers saw nothing save the wonderful event that had come to pass, the boundary between the old and the new upon which she stood. And Lizzie had forgotten everything that could be called reason or coherence in her thought, she forgot her doubts, her scruples, her sense of the misery she might make, her uncertainty as to whether it might be needful at all. At this moment of bewildering excitement she had but one idea. She fell down upon

her knees before them in the aisle, and caught at Chatty's white dress and the folds of her floating veil. "Oh, Miss Chatty, stop, stop, leave go of his arm: for he is married already, and his wife is living." She lifted her eyes, and there appeared round her a floating sea of horror-stricken faces, faces that she knew in the foreground, and floating farther off, as if in the air, in the distance, one she knew still better. Lizzie gave a shriek which rang through the church. "His wife is living, and she is HERE."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE wedding morning had been confusing and full of many occupations, as wedding mornings always are. Chatty, left in the quiet of her room, had received innumerable little visits: from her mother, who came and came again, with a cheerful front, but her heart very low, merely to look at her, to give her a kiss in passing, to make sure that she was still there: and from Minnie, very busy, wanting to have a finger in everything, to alter her dress at the last moment, and the way in which her veil was put on. "For it is quite different from mine," Minnie cried, "and it stands to reason that there cannot be *two* ways of putting on a veil." Then there would come a young sister of Dick's, very shy, very anxious to make friends, admiring Chatty and her orange blossoms, with that sense of probable future occurrences in her own life of the same description which makes sympathy so warm. Then Mrs. Wilberforce, who though disapproving much of the wedding in London, was yet mollified by her husband's share in it, and association with the bishop; and Lady Markland, who gave the bride a kiss of tender sympathy and said nothing to her, which Chatty felt to be the kindest of all. Minnie, on the other hand, had a great inclination from the depths of her own experience to give her sister advice. "You must remember, Chatty, that

a man is not just like one of us. When you are travelling you must be sure to recollect that—they can't do with a bun or a cup of coffee or that sort of thing, they must always have something substantial to eat. You see they take so much more out of themselves than we do. And they like you to be ready to the minute, though you have often got to wait for them—and——"

"But, dear Minnie, men are not all alike," said Mrs. Wilberforce, "no more than women are. Don't you think you had better leave her to find out for herself? She will learn soon enough," she added with a sigh, softly shaking her head, as though the experience could not but be melancholy when it came; "men, like everything else, are changing every day. The chivalry one used to meet with is quite gone—but what can you expect in these times?"

"I don't like this puffing at all," said Minnie; "if I were you, I would have it taken off. Oh, I am not at all of your opinion about the times. We are Liberal on both sides. The Thynnes have always gone in for progress and advancement; and when you think how much everything has improved——"

"If you call it improvement!" said Mrs. Wilberforce with something like a groan; but whether this was in reference to things in general, or to the removal of the tulle puffing over which Minnie was holding her hand, it would be difficult to say.

And thus the morning went by. Chatty took it all very sweetly, responding with smiles to every one, feeling the hours pass like a dream until it was time to go into the dream chariot, and be carried away to the fulfilment of the dream. In the large, dull, London

drawing-room below, meanwhile, guests were assembling, guests in rustling garments of many-coloured silk, with bonnets which were enough to drive any ordinary mortal out of her senses, a little tulle tossed up with flowers or feathers into the most perfect little crown for a fair head, a little velvet with nodding plumes that made the wearer at once into a duchess. The duchess herself was present, but she was dowdy, as duchesses have a right to be. And then the arrivals, the carriages that came gleaming up, the horses that pranced and curved their beautiful necks, as highbred as the ladies! Geoff, who had come with his mother, posted himself at one of the windows inside the filmy white curtains to watch the people coming. He suddenly called out "mother" when it was almost time to start, and the brougham was already waiting at the door for the bridegroom. Lady Markland was standing close by the window talking to Dick, who, as bridegrooms often are, was agitated and required support and encouragement. "What is it, Geoff?" she asked in the midst of what she was saying, without turning from her companion.

"Oh, look here. I say, there is the lady that was at the big house at Underwood, the lady that picked me up the day I ran away—the one that was at the Elms. Look, mamma. Ah, you're just too late," cried Geoff, "you are always too late. She's gone now."

It was Dick and not Lady Markland who came forward to the window. "The lady who was at the Elms?" he said, and Geoff, looking up, saw a face that was like ashes looking not at him, but out of the window, with wide staring eyes.

"Look there—just going away—in a big veil—don't

you see her? but I saw her face quite plain—the same lady that took me up beside her on the big tall phaeton. I did not like her much," the boy added in an undertone.

"I think"—in a still lower voice, almost a whisper —"you are mistaken, Geoff; that lady is dead."

"I saw her all the same," said the boy.

And here some of the jocular persons who make weddings more dreadful than they need to be came forward and touched Dick on the arm. "Come along, old fellow," he said; "no sulking, it's too late to draw back. The bridegroom's carriage stops the way."

There are resolute people in the world, who can look as they please, who can receive a mortal blow, and smile all the time, or worse, look gravely self-possessed, as if nothing had ever happened to them, or could happen to the end of time. Dick Cavendish was not of this heroic kind, but yet he managed to make himself look as a bridegroom ought, as he went through the little crowd and made his way downstairs. He said to himself it was not possible; had not her death been certified beyond doubt, had not Saunders attended the funeral and brought that photograph and the poor little ring? Was the certainty of all these facts to be shaken by the random recollection of a foolish child; or a chance resemblance which that child might imagine in a passer-by? He said to himself that there could be no greater folly than to pay any attention to such a piece of absurdity. But as he went out, and all the way along as he drove, hearing without paying any attention to the occasional remarks of his best man, who was with him, his eyes were searching among the wayfarers, the little crowd round the door,

the other little crowd round the church. Just as he stepped inside the portico, turning round for a last look, he saw something approaching in a hansom—something rather than some one, a gray veil covering an unseen face. Was it some woman peacefully going about her own business, or was it——? He went in, feeling the faces in the church turn round to look at him, wondering if his face was like the face of a man who was going to marry Chatty, or of one who was standing by the side of a grave? When he got up to the altar and took his place to wait for his bride there was a moment of silence, during which no intrusive fool could talk to him. And in the quiet he stood and closed his eyes and felt himself—oh, not here at the altar, waiting for Chatty in her orange flowers, but by the side of the dark pit into which the coffin was descending, straining his eyes to see through the lid if indeed the other was there. But then again, with an effort, he shook his miserable nightmare off. It was not possible he could be deceived. What motive could any one have to deceive him? Saunders had seen her buried, and had brought the potograph and that ring. The ring was conclusive; unless a horrible trick had been played upon him there was no room for doubt, and to whose interest could it be to play him a trick of this dreadful kind?

And then came the little rustle and thrill of the arriving train. And something white came up, a succession of whitenesses streaming one after the other, with no sound but the delicate rustle, that soft touch upon the air that might almost have been wings. They stood together, both but half conscious of what was going on round them: Chatty, sweetly wrapped in a

maze of soft-coming fancies of wonder and pleasure and awe and regret; while he, touched to the heart by her presence, yet only half conscious of it, went through the whole in a kind of trance, mingling the words spoken with interlinings of unspeakable dumb reasonings, self-assurances, self-exhortations. Nobody knew anything about all this. The ceremony went on, just as such ceremonies go on every day in the year. The priest said the words and paused while they were repeated; by one voice firmly and strongly, by the other low and unassured, yet clear. And then there was the flutter of tension relieved, the gathering round of the little crowd, the little procession to the vestry, where everything was signed, the kissings and good wishes. Dick had no mother, but his elder sister was there, who kissed him in her place, and his younger sister, who was a bridesmaid, and hung about Chatty with all a girl's enthusiasm. What could be more simple, more natural and true? There was no shadow there of any dread, but everything happy, honest, pure. He recovered his soul a little in the midst of that group; though when Geoff with his little sharp face, in which there always seemed more knowledge than belonged to his age, caught his eye, a slight shiver ran over him. He felt as if Geoff knew all about it; and might, for anything he could tell, have some horrible secret to bring forth.

And then they set out again, the husband with his wife on his arm, to go away. The touch of Chatty's hand on his arm seemed to restore his confidence. She was his, in spite of all that Fate could do—in spite of everything, he thought. They walked together, he feeling more and more the pride and triumph of

the moment, she moving softly, still in her dream, yet beginning too to feel the reality, past the altar where they had knelt a little while before, going down the aisle, facing the spectators who still lingered well pleased to see the bride. And then in a moment the blow fell. Some one seemed to rise up before them, out of the ground, out of the vacancy, forming before his horror-stricken eyes. And then there rose that cry which everybody could hear — which paralysed the bridal procession and brought the clergyman startled out of the vestry, and thrilled the careless lookers-on. "He has a wife living. She is living, and she is here!" Had he heard these words before in a dream? Had he known all along that he would hear them, ringing in his ears on his wedding day? "His wife is living—and she is here!"

"What is it? what is it?" cried the wedding guests, crowding upon each other, those who were nearest at least, while those at the end of the procession paused with the smile on their lips to stare and wonder at the sudden disturbance. Chatty was the most self-possessed of all. She said softly: "Lizzie, Lizzie! Something has happened to her," and put out her disengaged hand in its white glove to raise her from her knees.

"Miss Chatty, it's you that something has happened to—Oh stop, oh stop! there she is! Don't—don't let Miss Chatty go away with him, don't let her go away with him!" Lizzie cried.

"The woman is mad!" said some one behind. And so it might have been thought; when suddenly those immediately following who had closed up behind Chatty heard the bridegroom's voice, extremely agitated,

yet with a nervous firmness, say audibly: "It is not true. Lizzie, the woman you speak of is dead. I know for certain that she is dead."

"Look there!" the intruder cried.

And he turned round in the sight of them all, the bride half turning too with the voluntary impulse, and saw behind the sea of anxious wondering faces another, which seemed to float in a mist of horror, from under the half-lifted cloud of a gray veil. He saw this face; and the rest of the wedding guests saw his, blanched with dread and misery, and knew every one that the marriage was stopped, and Chatty no wife, and he a dishonoured man.

Her eyes had followed his, she had not looked at him, but still held his arm, giving him a support he was incapable of giving her. The face in the background was not unknown to Chatty. She remembered it well, and with what a compunction of pity she had looked at it when she met that poor creature on the road at home, and wanted in her heart to take the lost one to her mother. She did not understand at all what was going on about her, nor what Mrs. Warrender meant, who came closely up behind, and took hold of her arm, detaching her from Dick. "Chatty, let us get home, my darling. Come, come with me. Theo will take us home," the mother said.

Then Chatty, turning round wondering, saw her bridegroom's face. She looking at him earnestly for the moment, holding his arm tighter, and then said with a strange, troubled, yet clear voice: Dick—what does it mean? Dick!"

"Come home, come home, my dearest," cried Mrs. Warrender, trying to separate them.

"Come back to the vestry, Cavendish," cried Theo with threatening tones; and then arose a loud murmur of other suggestions, a tumult most unusual, horrifying, yet exciting to the spectators who closed around. The clergyman came out still in his surplice, hurrying towards the spot. "Whatever the interruption is," he said, "don't stay there, for Heaven's sake. Come back if you will, or go home, but don't let us have a disturbance in the church."

"Chatty, go with my mother. For God's sake, Frances, get them all away."

"I will not leave Dick," said Chatty in her soft voice, "until I know what it is." She who was so yielding and so simple, she turned round with her own impulse the unhappy young man whose arm she held, and who seemed for the moment incapable of any action of his own, and led him back towards the place from which they had come. The horror had not penetrated sufficiently into Chatty's mind to do more than pale a little the soft colour in her face. She had grown very serious, looking straight before her, taking no notice of anything. They all followed like so many sheep in her train, the ladies crowding together, Dick's sister at his other hand, Mrs. Warrender close behind, Lizzie carried along with them, now crying bitterly and wringing her hands, utterly cowed by finding herself in the midst of this perfumed and rustling crowd, amid which her flushed and tear-stained face and humble dress showed to such strange disadvantage. Unnoticed by the rest, Geoff, who had wriggled out of the mass, pursued down the farther aisle a hurrying flying figure and stopped her, holding her fast.

In the vestry Chatty began to fail a little. She

relinquished Dick's arm, and stood trembling, supporting herself by the table. "I want him," she said, faltering a little, "mamma, to tell me—what it means. There is something—to find out. Dick," with a tremulous smile, "you have concealed something. It is not that I don't trust you,—but tell me"—Then, still smiling, she murmured, "Lizzie—and that—that poor—girl."

Dick had collected himself. "My darling," he said, "I have done wrong. I have concealed what you ought to have known. Warrender, stop before you speak. I married when I was a boy. I declare upon my soul that I had every assurance the woman was dead. My clerk saw her buried, he brought me the certificate, and her portrait, and her ring. I had no reason, no reason at all, to doubt. I have no reason now," he said, with a sudden recovery of courage, "except what this girl says,—who has no way of knowing, while my information is sure. It is sure—quite sure. Chatty! can you think I would have brought you here to—to—— The woman is dead."

"Mr. Cavendish!" cried Lizzie loudly. "You saw her—as well as I."

He looked at her for a moment, his face grew once more gray as ashes, he trembled where he stood. "It must have been—an illusion," he said.

Here Warrender caught Lizzie somewhat roughly by the arm. "If this woman is here, find her," he cried peremptorily, pushing her to the door before him. The church was still full of excited spectators whom the vergers were endeavouring to get rid of. In the aisle stood Geoff with some one veiled and muffled to the eyes. The boy was standing in front of her,

like a little dog who has been set to watch. She could not move a step without a movement on his part. He gave to Warrender a sort of invitation with a nod of his little head. "I've got her here," he said; then whispering, "It is the lady—the lady that ran you over, that picked me up,—the lady at the Elms."

"At the Elms!" There rushed over Theo's mind a recollection of Dick's visit to the village, of his hurried departure, of agitation unnoticed at the time. "I must ask you to step into the vestry," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Warrender, I know you, though you don't know me; don't ask me to do that. What, among all those nicely dressed people, and me so!—oh no, please do not ask me, please don't ask me! What good could I do? It seems to me I've done harm, but I meant none. I thought I'd just come and have a peep after hearing so much about you all, and knowing him so long."

"Will you tell me who you are, and what is your connection with Cavendish? Come, and let us know before his face."

"Oh, my connection with—Dear, dear! is it necessary to go into that—a thing of an age ago? Oh, Lord, Lizzie, let me alone, will you! it's all your doing. Why couldn't you let things alone?"

"Whatever you have to say, it had better be said before us all," said Warrender sternly, for various members of the bridal party had straggled out, and were listening from the vestry door. He took her by the arm and led her into the room. "What is your relation to that man?" he said, keeping his hand upon her arm.

The wedding guests made a circle round, the clergy-

man in his white surplice among the ladies' gay dresses, the white figure of Chatty leaning with her hand on the table, her mother's anxious face close behind her. Poor Dick in his spruce wedding clothes, with his ghostly face, stood drawing back a little, staring with eyes that seemed to sink deeper in their sockets as he gazed. He had never looked upon that face since he parted with her in utter disgust and misery six years before. She came in, almost forced into the inclosure of all those fine people gazing at her, with all her meretricious graces, not an imposing sinner, a creature ready to cry and falter, yet trying to set up against the stare of the ladies the piteous impudence of her kind.

"What are you to that man?" Theo asked.

"Oh,—what should I be to him? a gentleman doesn't ask such questions. I—I—have been the same to him as I've been—you know well enough," she added, with a horrible little laugh that echoed all about, and made a stir among the people round.

"Are you his wife?"

She shuddered, and began to cry. "I—I'm nobody's wife. I've been—a number of things. I like my freedom—I——" She stopped hysterical, overcome by the extraordinary circumstances, and the audience which listened and looked at her with hungry ears and eyes.

Dick put out his arms as if to wave the crowd away. What were all these spectators doing here, looking on at his agony? He spoke in a hoarse and husky voice. "Why did you deceive me? why did you pretend you were dead, and lead me to this?"

"Because I've nothing to do with you, and I don't

want nothing to do with you," she cried; "because I've been dead to you these long years; because I'm not a bad, cruel woman. I wanted to leave you free. He's free for me," she said, turning to Warrender. "It's not I that wants to bind him. If I made believe it was me that died, where was the wrong? I wanted to set him free. That's not deceiving him, it was for his good, that he might feel he was free."

"Answer, woman. Are you his wife?"

"What right have you to call me a woman? His wife? How can you tell whether I wasn't married before ever I set eyes upon him?" she cried, with a hysterical laugh. "They don't think so much of that where I came from. There! I hope you've had enough of me now. Lizzie, you fool, you spoil-sport, you hateful creature, give me hold of your arm, and let's go away. We've done you harm, Mr. Cavendish, instead of doing you good, but that is no fault of mine."

There was a pause as she went out of the vestry, holding Lizzie's arm, whose sobs were audible all the way down the aisle. It did not last long, but it was as the silence of death. Then Dick spoke.

"You see how it is. I married her when I was a boy. She deserted me in a very short time, and I have never seen her from that day to this, nearly seven years ago. Six weeks since I received information that she was dead. She tells you it was a trick, a device,--but I—had every reason to believe it. God knows I wanted to believe it! but I thought I spared no pains. Then I went to Chatty, whom I had long loved." Here he paused to regain his voice, which had become almost inaudible. "I thought all was right. Don't you believe me?" he cried hoarsely,

holding out his hands in appeal. At first his little sister was the only one who responded. She threw herself weeping upon one of his outstretched arms and clasped it. Chatty had been put into a chair, where she sat now very pale, under the white mist of the veil, beginning to realise what it was that had happened. When she heard the anguish in Dick's voice, she suddenly rose to her feet, taking them all by surprise. Instinctively the party had separated into two factions, his side and her side. The group about Chatty started when she moved, and Theo seized hold almost roughly of her elbow. But Chatty did not seem sensible of this clutch. She went forward to the bridegroom so disastrously taken from her, and took his other hand in hers. "I believe you—with all my heart," Chatty said. "I blame you for nothing, oh, for nothing. I am sorry—for us both."

"Take her away, mother. The carriage has come round to the vestry door. Chatty! This is no longer any place for you."

Chatty looked round upon her faction, who were encircling her with dark or miserable looks. "We are very unfortunate," she said, "but we have done nothing that is wrong."

"Chatty, O Chatty, my darling, come away. You cannot stay any longer here."

"What, without a word to Dick, mother! Speak to him. He is the most to be pitied. We never thought we should have to say good-bye again." Here she paused and the tears came. She repeated in a voice that went to the hearts of all the staring, excited spectators, "I am sorry—for us both."

"God bless you, Chatty! God bless you, my own

love! And must we part so?" cried poor Dick, falling down upon his knees, and sobbing over the hands which held his. He was altogether broken down. He knew there was nothing to be said to him, or for him. He was without help or hope. For a moment even Warrender, who was the most severe, could say nothing in sight of this lamentable scene,—the bride and her bridegroom, who had been pronounced man and wife half-an-hour before, and now were parting,—perhaps for ever,—two people between whom there was now no bond, whose duty would be to keep apart. Chatty stooped over him, whom she must see no more, her white veil fell over him covering them both, she laid her pale cheek against his. "It is not our fault. We are very unfortunate. We must have patience," she said.

He kept on kneeling there, following her with his eyes, while her brother and her mother led her away, then with a groan covered his face with his hands. Was this the end?

CHAPTER XIX.

After this extraordinary and terrible event there were a great many conferences and explanations, which did little good as may be understood. Dick's life—the part of it which had passed during his absence, the wanderyear which had brought such painful consequences—was laid entirely open, both to his own family and all the Warrenders. There was nothing in it to be ashamed of—still he had wanted to keep that episode to himself, and the consequence, of course, was that every detail became known. He had thrown himself into the wild, disorderly population on the edge of civilisation: people who lived out of reach of law, and so long as they were not liable to the tribunal of Judge Lynch, did no harm in the eyes of the community. There he had fallen in love, being clean and of pure mind, and disposed to think everybody like himself, and married in haste—a girl whom his tiresome proprieties had wearied at once, and who did not in the most rudimentary way comprehend what to him was the foundation of life. He shuddered, but could give no coherent account of that time. She left him, inclosing him her "marriage lines" and a paper declaring him to be free. And from that time until she had been brought face to face with him in the vestry he had never seen her again. His old father, whom Dick had been anxious to spare from any an-

noyance, and who was too old to be present at the wedding, had to be called forth from his retirement to hear the whole story; his eldest brother, who was abroad, hurried home, to know what was meant by the paragraphs in the papers, and what it was all about. No particular of bitterness was spared to the unfortunate young man; the particulars of his conduct were discussed at every dinner-party. Had there been collusion? had he known all the time that the woman was not dead? Society did not quite understand the want of accordance with conventional rules that had been shown by everybody concerned. The wicked wife ought to have planned this villainous trick as a way of vengeance against him: whereas it was evident that she had meant only kindness, abandoned creature as she was. And the poor bride, the unfortunate Miss Warrender, should with all her family have sworn everlasting feud with him, whereas it was known that Chatty took his part, and would say nothing but that they were very unfortunate both. Women should not act like this, they should fly at each other's throats, they should tear each other to pieces.

But if Chatty (backed up by her mother, it was said) showed undue indulgence, this was not the case with her brother and sister. Theo's keen temper had taken up and resented the whole matter almost with violence. He had not only treated Cavendish, and the Cavendishes generally, who were more important than the individual Dick, with harsh contumely and enmity, refusing to hear any excuse, and taking the occurrence as an insult to himself: but he had quarrelled with his mother, who was disposed to forgive, and with still more vehemence with Chatty, who made no pretence

of any wrath, but believed Dick's story fully, and would not hear anything against him. Chatty had a soft obstinacy about her which nobody had known till now. She had not broken down, nor hidden herself from her family, nor taken any shame to herself. She had even received him, against the advice of everybody, in a long interview, hearing everything over again, and fully, from his own lips, and had kissed him (it was whispered) at parting, while her mother and his sister looking on could do nothing but cry. There began after a while to be many people who sympathised with these two unhappy lovers—who were not so unhappy either, because they understood and had faith in each other. But Theo made an open quarrel with his mother and sister after this meeting. He was furious against both of them, and even against his wife when it became known that she had gone to see and sympathise with them. Warrender declared that he would consider any man his enemy who spoke to him of Cavendish. He was furious with everything and everybody concerned. He said that he had been covered with shame, though how no one could tell. Lady Markland, who also was on the side of Dick, was helpless to restrain her young husband. She too, poor lady, began to feel that her lot was not one of unmixed good, nor her bed of roses. Though the force of events had carried Theo over all the first drawbacks to their marriage, he had never recovered the bitterness and exasperation which these had given. He had not forgiven her, though he adored her, for being still Lady Markland, and though he lived at Markland with her, yet it was under a perpetual protest, to which in moments of excitement he sometimes gave

utterance, but which even in silence she was always conscious of. His smouldering discontent burst forth on the occasion given him by this *mariage manqué*. The rage that filled him was not called forth by Dick Cavendish alone. It was the outflow of all the discontents and annoyances of his life.

And Minnie's outraged virtue was almost more rampant still. That Eustace should have any connection with a scandal which had even got into the newspapers, that a girl who was his sister-in-law should have got herself talked about, was to Minnie a wrong which blazed up to heaven. "For myself, I should not have minded," she said, "at least, however much I minded I should have said as little as possible; but when I think that Eustace has been made a gazing-stock to all the world through me—oh, you may think it extravagant, but I don't. Of course, he has been made a gazing-stock. 'Brother-in-law to *that* Miss Warrender, you know'—that is how people talk, as if it could possibly be his fault. I am sure he bears it like an angel. All he has ever said, even to me, is, 'Minnie, I wish we had looked into things a little more beforehand,' and what could I say? I could only say you were all so headstrong, you would have your own way."

"Next time he says so, you will perhaps refer him to me, Minnie. I think I shall be able to answer Mr. Thynne."

"Oh," cried Minnie, "by making a quarrel! I know your way of answering, mamma. I tell Eustace if I had been at home it never, never could have happened. I never cared about that man from the first. There was always something in the look of his eyes: I told Eustace before anything happened—something about

the corner of his eyes. I did not like it when I heard you had seen so much of him in town. And Eustace said then, 'I hope your mother has made all the necessary inquiries.' I did not like to say: 'Oh, mamma never makes any inquiries!' but I am sure I might have said so. And this is what it has come to! Chatty's ruin,—yes, it is Chatty's ruin, whatever you may say. Who will ever look at her,—a girl who has been married and yet isn't married? She will never find any one. She will just have to live with you, like two old cats in a little country town, as Eustace says."

"If Mr. Thynne calls your mother an old cat, you should have better taste than to repeat it," said Mrs. Warrender; "I hope he is not so vulgar, Minnie, nor you so heartless."

"Vulgar! Eustace! The Thynnes are just the best bred people in the world. I don't know what you mean. A couple of old ladies living in a little place, and gossiping about everything,—everybody has the same opinion. And this is just what it comes to, when no attention is paid. And they say you have actually let him come here, let Chatty meet him, to take away every scrap of respect that people might have had. He never heard of such a mistake, Eustace says, it shows such a want of knowledge of the world."

"This is going too far, Minnie; understand, once for all, that what Eustace Thynne says is not of the least importance to me, and that I think his comments most inappropriate. Poor Dick is going off to California to-morrow. He is going to get his divorce."

Minnie gave a scream which made the thinly built London house ring, and clasped her hands. "A DIVORCE!" she cried; "it only wanted this. Eustace said that was

what it would come to. And you would let your daughter marry a man who has been divorced!"

Minnie spoke in such a tone of injured majesty that Mrs. Warrender was almost cowed, for it cannot be denied that this speech struck an echo in her own heart. The word was a word of shame. She did not know how to answer; that her Chatty, her child who had come so much more close to her of late, should be placed in any position which was not of good report, that the shadow of any stain should be upon her simple head, was grievous beyond all description to her mother. And she was far from being an emancipated woman. She had all the prejudices, all the diffidences of her age and position. Her own heart cried out against this expedient with a horror which she had done her best to overcome. For the first time she faltered and hesitated as she replied—

"There can be no hard-and-fast rule; our Lord did not do it, and how can we? It is odious to me as much as to any one. But what would you have him do? He cannot take that wretched creature, that poor unhappy girl."

"You mean that shameless, horrible thing, that abandoned——"

"There must be some good in her," said Mrs. Warrender, with a shudder. "She had tried to do what she could to set him free. It was not her fault if it proved more than useless. I can't prolong this discussion, Minnie. Eustace and you can please yourselves by making out your fellow-creatures to be as bad as possible. To me it is almost more terrible to see the good in them that might, if things had gone

differently—— But that is enough. I am going to take Chatty away."

"Away! where are you going to take her? For goodness' sake don't: they will think you are going after him—they will say——"

"I am glad you have the grace to stop. I am going to take her abroad. If she can be amused a little and delivered from herself—— At all events," said Mrs. Warrender, "we shall be free from the stare of the world, which we never did anything to attract."

"Going away?" Minnie repeated. "Oh, I think, and I am sure Eustace would say, that you ought not to go away. You should live it down. Of course people will blame *you*, they must, I did myself: but after all that is far better than to be at a place abroad where everybody would say, Oh, do you know who that is? that is Mrs. Warrender, whose eldest daughter married one of the Thynnes, whose youngest was the heroine of *that* story, you know about the marriage. Oh, mamma, that is exactly what Eustace said he was afraid you would do. For goodness' sake don't! stay at home and live it down. We shall all stand by you," said Minnie. "I am sure Frances will do her very best, and though Eustace is a clergyman and ought always to show an example, yet in the case of such near relations—we——"

Mrs. Warrender only turned her back upon these generous promises, walking away without any answer or remark. She was too angry to say anything: and to think that there was a germ of reality in it all, a need of some one to stand by them, a possibility that Chatty might be a subject for evil tongues, made Chatty's mother half beside herself. It seemed more

than she could bear. But Chatty took it all very quietly. She was absorbed in the story, more entertaining than any romance, which was her own story. No thought of what divorce was, or of anything connected with it, disturbed her mind. What Dick had to do seemed to her natural: perhaps anything he had done in the present extraordinary crisis would have seemed to her natural. He was going to put things right. She did not think much for the moment what the means of doing so were, nor what in the meantime her own position was. She had no desire to make any mystery of it, to conceal herself, or what had happened. There was no shame in it so far as Chatty knew. There was a dreadful, miserable mistake. She was "very sorry for us both," but for herself less than for Dick, who had suffered, she said to herself, far more than she, for though he had done no wrong, he had to bear all the penalties of having done wrong, whereas in her own case there was no question of blame. Chatty was so much absorbed in Dick that she did not seem to have time to realise her own position. She did not think of herself as the chief sufferer. She fell back into the calm of the ordinary life without a murmur, saying little about it. With her own hands she packed up all the new dresses, the wealth of the pretty trousseau. She was a little pale, and yet she smiled. "I wonder if I shall ever have any need for these," she said, smoothing down the silken folds of the dresses with a tender touch.

"I hope so, my dear, when poor Dick comes back."

Then Chatty's smile gave way to a sigh. "They say human life is so uncertain, mamma, but I never

realised it till now. You cannot tell what a day may bring forth. But it very, very seldom happens, surely, that there are such changes as this. I never heard of one before."

"No, my darling, it is very rare: but oh, what a blessing, Chatty, that it was found out at once, before you had gone away!"

"Yes, I suppose it was a blessing; perhaps it would have been wrong, but I should never have left him, mamma, had we gone away."

"Oh, do not let us think of that; you were mercifully saved, Chatty."

"On my wedding day! I never heard that such a thing ever happened to a girl before. The real blessing is that Dick had done nothing wrong. That comforts me most of all."

"I don't know, Chatty. He ought perhaps to have taken better care: at all events he ought to have let people know that he was a—that he was not an unmarried man."

Chatty trembled a little at these words. She did not like him to be blamed, but so far as this was concerned she could not deny that he was in the wrong. It was the foundation of all. Had it been known that he was or had been married, she would not have given him her love. But at this Chatty flushed deep, and felt that it was a cruel suggestion. To find that she was not married was an endless pain to her, which still she could scarcely understand. But not to have loved him! Poor Dick! To have done him that wrong over and above all the rest, he who had been so much wronged and injured! No, no, neither for him nor for herself could it be anything but profane to wish that.

Not to have loved him! Chatty's life seemed all to sink into gray at the thought.

"At all events," she said, returning to those easier outsides of things in which the greatest events have a humble covering, and looking again at her pretty gowns, "they can wait, poor things, to see what will happen. If it should so be, as that it never comes right——"

"Oh, Chatty, my poor dear."

"Life seems so uncertain," said Chatty, in her new-born wisdom. "It is so impossible to tell what may happen, or what a day may bring forth. I think I never can be very sure of anything now. And if it never should come right, they shall just stay in the boxes, mother. I could not have the heart to wear them." She put her hand over them caressingly, and patted and pressed them down into the corners. "It seems a little sad to see them there, doesn't it, mamma, and I in my old gray frock?" The tears were in her eyes, but she looked up at Mrs. Warrender with a little soft laugh at herself, and at the little tragedy, or at least the suspended drama, laid up with something that was half pathetic, half ludicrous, in the wedding clothes.

Chatty suffered herself to be taken abroad without any very strong opinion of her own. She would have been content to adopt Minnie's way, to go back to Highcombe and "live it down," though indeed she was unconscious of scandal, or of the necessity of living down anything. There were some aspects of the case in which she would have preferred that,—to live on quietly day by day, looking for news of him, expecting what was to come. But there was much to be

said on the other hand for her mother's plan, and Chatty now, as at all times, was glad to do what pleased her mother. They went off accordingly when the early November gales were blowing, not on any very original plan, to places where a great many people go, to the Riviera, where the roses were still blowing with a sort of soft patience which was like Chatty. And thus strangely out of nature, without any habitual cold, or frost, or rain, or anything like what they were used to, that winter which had begun with such very different intentions glided quietly away. Of course they met people now and then who knew their story, but there were also many who did not know: ladies from the country, such as abound on the Riviera, who fortunately did not think a knowledge of London gossip essential to salvation, and who thought Miss Warrender must be delicate, her colour changed so from white to red. But as it is a sort of duty to be delicate on the Riviera and robust persons are looked down upon, they did very well, and the days, so monotonous, so bright, with so little in them, glided harmlessly away. Dick wrote not very often, but yet now and then, which was a thing Minnie had protested against, but then, mamma, Mrs. Eustace Thynne said, *had* always "her own ways of thinking," and if she permitted it, what could any one say?

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. WARRENDER and her daughter came home in the early summer, having lingered longer than they intended in the South. They had lingered for one

thing, because a long and strange interruption had occurred in the letters from America. Dick had made them aware of his arrival there, and of the beginning of his necessary business, into the details of which naturally he did not enter. He had told them of his long journey, which was not then so rapid as now, but meant long travelling in primitive ways by waggons and on horseback, and also that he had found greater delays and more trouble than he expected. In the spring he was still lingering, investigating matters which he did not explain, but which he said might very likely facilitate what he had to do and make the conclusion more fortunate than he had anticipated. And then there came a pause. They waited, expecting the usual communication, but it did not come; they waited longer, thinking it might have been delayed by accident, and finally returned home with hearts heavier than those with which they went away. Theo came to meet them at the station, when they arrived in London. He was there with his wife in the beginning of the season. Mrs. Warrender's anxious looks, withdrawn for the moment from Chatty, fell with little more satisfaction upon her son. He was pale and thin, with that fretted look as of constant irritation which is almost more painful to look at than the indications of sorrow. He put aside with a little impatience her inquiries about himself. "I am well enough,—what should be the matter with me? I never was an invalid that I know of."

"You are not looking well, Theo. You are very thin. London does not agree with you, I fear, and the late nights."

"I am a delicate plant to be incapable of late nights," he said, with a harsh laugh.

"And how is Frances? I hope she does not do too much: and——"

"Come, mother, spare me the catalogue. Lady Markland is quite well, and my Lord Markland, for I suppose it was he who was meant by your 'and'——"

"Geoff, poor little fellow! he is at school, I suppose."

"Not a bit of it," said Warrender, with an ugly smile. "He is delicate, you know. He has had measles or something, and has come home to his mother to be nursed. There's a little too much of Geoff, mother; let us be free of him here, at least. You are going to your old rooms?"

"Yes. I thought it might be a little painful: but Chatty made no objection. She said indeed she would like it."

"Is she dwelling on that matter still?"

"Still, Theo! I don't suppose she will ever cease to dwell on it till it comes all right."

"Which is very unlikely, mother. I don't give my opinion on the subject of divorce. It's an ugly thing, however you take it; but a man who goes to seek a divorce avowedly, with the intention of marrying again—— That is generally the motive, I believe, at the bottom, but few are so bold as to put it frankly on evidence."

"Theo! you forget Dick's position, which is so very peculiar. Could any one blame him? What could he do otherwise? I hope I am not lax—and I hate the very name of divorce as much as any one can: but what could he do?"

"He could put up with it, I suppose, as other men have had to do—and be thankful it is no worse."

"You are hard, Theo. I am sure it is not Frances that has taught you to be so hard. Do you think that Chatty's life destroyed, as well as his own, is so little? and no laws human or divine could bind him to—I don't think I am lax," Mrs. Warrender cried, with the poignant consciousness of a woman who has always known herself to be even superstitiously bound to every cause of modesty, and who finds herself suddenly assailed as a champion of the immoral. Her middle-aged countenance flushed with annoyance and shame.

"No, I don't suppose you are lax," said Theo: but the lines in his careworn forehead did not melt, and Chatty, who had been directing the maid about the luggage, now came forward and stopped the conversation. Warrender put his mother and sister into a cab, and promised to "come round" and see them in the evening. After he had shut the door, he came back and asked suddenly: "By the way, I suppose you have the last news of Cavendish. How is he?"

"We have no news. Why do you ask? is he ill?"

"Oh, you don't know then?" said Warrender. "I was wondering. He is down with fever, but getting better, I believe, getting better," he added hurriedly, as Chatty uttered a tremulous cry. "They wrote to his people. We were wondering whether you might not have heard."

"And no one thought it worth while to let us know!"

"Lady Horton thought if you did not know it was better to say nothing: and that if you did it was unnecessary—besides, they are like me, they think it is

monstrous that a man should go off with an avowed intention—they think in any case it is better to drop it altogether."

"Theo," said Chatty, in her soft voice, "can we hear exactly how he is?"

"He is better, he is going on well, he will get all right. But if you should see Lady Horton——"

Lady Horton was Dick's elder and married sister, she who had stood by him on the day that was to have been his wedding-day.

"I think we had better drive on now," Chatty said. And when Theo's somewhat astonished face had disappeared from the window, and they were rattling along over the stones, she suddenly said, "Do you think it should have been—dropped altogether? Why should it be dropped altogether? I seem to be a little bewildered—I don't—understand. Oh, mamma, I had a presentiment that he was ill—ill and alone, and so far away."

"He is getting better, dear; he would think it best not to write to make us anxious; probably he has been waiting on day by day. I will go to Lady Horton to-morrow."

"And Lady Horton thinks it should be dropped altogether," said Chatty, in a musing reflective tone. "She thinks it is monstrous—what is monstrous? I don't—seem to understand."

"Let us not think of it till we get home, till we have a little calm and—time."

"As if one could stop thinking till there is time!" said Chatty, with a faint smile. "But I feel that this is a new light. I must think. What must be dropped? Am not I married to him, mother?"

"Oh, my darling, if it had not been for that woman——"

"But that woman—my thoughts are all very confused. I don't understand it: perhaps he is not married to me—but I have always considered that I—— The first thing, however, is his health, mother. We must see at once about that."

"Yes, dear; but there is nothing alarming in it, from what Theo says."

The rest of the drive was in silence. They rattled along the London streets in all the brightness of the May evening, meeting people in carriages going out to dinner, and the steady stream of passengers on foot, coming from the parks, coming from the hundred amusements of the new season. Chatty saw them all without seeing them; her mind was taken up by a new strain of thought. She had taken it for granted that all was natural, that Dick was doing the thing it was right to do: and now she suddenly found herself in an atmosphere of uncertainty to which she was unaccustomed, and in which, for the moment, all her faculties seemed paralysed. Was it monstrous? Ought it to have been dropped? She was so much bewildered that she could not tell what to say.

Theo and his wife both "came round" in the evening; she with a fragile look as of impaired health, and an air of watching anxiety which it was painful to see. She seemed to have one eye upon Theo always, whatever she was doing, to see that he was pleased, or at least not displeased. It had been her idea to go to Lady Horton's on the way and bring the last news of Dick. Much better, going on quite well, will soon be allowed to communicate with his friends was

the bulletin which Lady Markland took Chatty aside to give.

"He has not been able to write himself all the time. The people who have taken care of him—rough people, but very kind, from all that can be presumed —found his father's address, and sent him word. Otherwise for six or seven weeks there has been nothing from himself."

This gave Chatty a little consolation. "Theo says —it is all wrong, that it ought to be dropped," she said.

"Theo has become severe in his judgments, Chatty."

"Has he? he was always a little severe. He got angry"—Chatty did not observe the look of recognition in Lady Markland's face, as of a fact *connu.* She went on slowly: "I wish that you would give me your opinion. I thought for a long time I was the first person to be thought of, and that Dick must do everything that could be done to set us right. But now it seems that is not the right view. Mamma hesitates,—she will not speak. Oh, will you tell me what you think——!"

"About," said Lady Markland, faltering, "the divorce?"

"I don't seem to know what it means; that poor creature—do people think she is—anything to him?"

"She is his wife, my dear."

"His—wife! But then I—am married to him."

"Dear Chatty, not except in form, a form which her appearance broke at once."

Chatty began to tremble, as if with cold. "I shall

always feel that I am married to him. He may not be bound, but I am bound—till death do ye part."

"My dear, all that was made as if it never had been said by the appearance of the—wife."

Chatty shivered again, though the evening was warm. "That cannot be," she cried. "He may not be bound, but I am bound. I promised. It is an oath before God."

"Oh, Chatty, it was all, all made an end of when that woman appeared. You are not bound, you are free; and I hope, dear, when a little time has passed——"

Chatty put up her hand with a cry. "Don't!" she said. "And do you mean that he is bound to her?—oh, I am sorry for her, I am sorry for her,—to one who has forsaken him and gone so far, so very far astray, to one who has done things that cannot be borne, and not to me—by the same words, the same words—which have no meaning to her, for she has left him, she has never held by him, never; and not to me, who said them with all my heart, and meant them with all my heart, and am bound by them for ever and ever?" She paused a little, and the flush of vehemence on her cheek and of light in her eye calmed down. "It is not just," she said.

"Dear Chatty, it is very hard, harder than can be said."

"It is not just," said Chatty once more, her soft face falling into lines in which Lady Markland saw a reflection of those which made Theo's countenance so severe.

"So far as that goes, the law will release him. It would do so even here. I do not think there is any

doubt of that,—though Theo says,—but I feel sure there is not any doubt."

"And though the law does release him," said Chatty, "and he comes back, you will all say to me it must be dropped, that it is not right, that he is divorced, that I must not marry him, though I have married him. I know now what will happen. There will be Minnie and Theo,—and even mamma will hesitate, and her voice will tremble. And I don't know if I will have strength to hold out," she cried, with a sudden burst of tears. "I have never struggled or fought for myself. Perhaps I may be a coward. I may not have the strength. If they are all against me, and no one to stand by me, perhaps I may be unjust too, and sacrifice him—and myself."

This burst of almost inaudible passion from a creature so tranquil and passive took Lady Markland altogether by surprise. Chatty, so soft, so simple, so yielding, driven by cruel fate into a position so terrible, feeling everything at stake, not only her happiness but the life already spoiled and wasted of the man she loved, feeling too that on herself would depend the decision of all that was to follow, and yet seized by a prophetical terror, a fear which was tragic, lest her own habit of submission should still overwhelm all the personal impulse, and sweep away her very life. The girl's face, moved out of all its gentle softness into the gravity almost stern which this consciousness brought, was a strange sight.

"I do not count for much," said Lady Markland. "I cannot expect you to think much of me, if your own sister, and your brother, and even your mother, as you fear, are against you: but I will not be against

you, Chatty. So far as I can I will stand by you, if that will do you any good."

"Oh yes, it will do me good," cried Chatty, clasping her hands; "it does me good already to talk to you. You know I am not clever, I don't go deep down into things," she added after a moment. "Minnie always said I was on the surface: but I never thought until to-day, I never thought—I have just been going on, supposing it was all right, that Dick could set it all right. And now it has burst upon me. Perhaps after all mamma will be on my side, and perhaps you will make Theo——" here she paused instinctively, and looked at her sister-in-law, feeling in the haste and rush of her own awakened spirit a sudden insight of which she had not been capable before.

Lady Markland shook her head. She was a little sad, a little overcast, not so assured in her gentle dignity, slightly nervous and restless, which was unlike her. "You must not calculate on that," she said. "Theo—has his own way of looking at things. It is right he should. We would not wish him to be influenced by—by any one."

"But you are not—any one."

"No, indeed. I am no one, in that point of view. I am his wife, and ought to take my views from him, not he his from me; and besides," she said, with a little laugh, "I am, after all, not like an old acqu—not like one he has known all his life, but comparatively new, and a stranger to his ways of thinking—to any of his ways of thinking—and only learning how he will look at this and that; you don't realise how that operates even when people are married. Theo has very distinct views—which is what he ought

to have. The pity is that—I have lived so much alone—I have too. It is a great deal better to be blank," she said, laughing again. Her laugh was slightly nervous too, and it seemed to be intended for Theo, whose conversation with his mother had now paused, and who was occasionally glancing, not without suspicion, at his wife and sister in the corner. Did she laugh to make him think that there was nothing serious in their talk? She called to him to join them, making room upon the sofa. "Chatty is tired," she said, "and out of spirits. I want to try and amuse her a little, Theo, before Mrs. Warrender takes her away."

"Amusement is the last thing we were thinking of," he said, coming forward with a sort of surly opposition, as if it came natural to him to go against what she said. "My opinion is that she should go down to the country at once, and not show at all in town this season. I don't think it would be pleasant for any of us. There has been talk enough."

"There has been no talk that Chatty need care for," said Lady Markland quietly; "don't think so, pray don't think so. Who would say anything of her? People are bad enough in London, but not so bad as that."

"Nevertheless, mother," said Theo, "I think you and I understand each other. Chatty and you have been enjoying yourselves abroad. You never cared for town. It would be much better in every sense that you should go home quietly now."

"We intended nothing else," said Mrs. Warrender, with a slight irritation, "though I confess I see no reason. But we need not discuss that over again. In the end of the week——"

"But this is only Monday. You cannot have anything to keep you here for days. I think you should go to-morrow. A day's rest is surely enough."

"We have some people to see, Theo."

"If I were you I would see nobody. You will be sure to meet with something unpleasant. Take Chatty home, that is far the best thing you can do. Frances would say the same if she had not that unfortunate desire to please everybody, to say what is agreeable, which makes women so untrustworthy. But my advice is, take Chatty home. In the circumstances it is the only thing to do."

Chatty rose from where she had been seated by Lady Markland's side. "Am I to be hidden away?" she said, her pale face flushing nervously. "Have I done anything wrong?"

"How silly to ask such questions. You know well enough what I mean. You have been talked about. My mother has more experience; she can tell you. A girl who has been talked about is always at a disadvantage. She had much better keep quite quiet until the story has all died away."

"Mother," cried Chatty, holding out her hands, "take me away then to-night, this moment, from this horrible place, where the people have so little heart and so little sense."

CHAPTER XXI.

"WHAT was Chatty saying to you? I rely upon your good sense, Frances, not to encourage her in this sentimental folly."

"Is it sentimental folly? I think it is very true feeling, Theo."

"Perhaps these are interchangeable terms," he said, with the angry smile she knew so well; "but without discussing that matter I am determined that this business shall go no farther. A sister of mine waiting for a married man till he shall be divorced! the very thought makes my blood boil."

"Surely that is an unnecessarily strong statement. The circumstances must be taken into consideration."

"I will take no circumstances into consideration. It is a thing which must not be. The Cavendishes see it in precisely the same light, and my mother,—even my mother begins to hear reason."

Lady Markland made no reply. They were walking home, as their house was close at hand, a house taken for the season, in which there was not the room and space of the country, nor its active interests, and which she, having come there with much hope in the change, would already have been glad to exchange for Markland, or the Warren, or almost any other place in the world. He walked more quickly than suited her and she required all her breath to keep up with him; besides that she was silenced by what he said to her, and did not know how to reply.

"You say nothing," he continued after a moment, "from which I conclude that you are antagonistic and mean to throw your influence the other way."

"Not antagonistic: but I cannot help feeling very much for Chatty, whose heart is so much in it, more perhaps than you think."

"Chatty's heart doesn't trouble me much," he said carelessly. "Chatty will always obey whatever impulse

is nearest and most continuous, if she is not backed up on the other side."

"I don't believe you realise the strength of her feelings, Theo. That is what she is afraid of, not to be strong enough to hold out."

"Oh! So you have been over that ground with her already!"

"She spoke to me. She was glad of the opportunity to relieve her mind."

"And you promised to stand by her?" he said.

Lady Markland had been a woman full of dignity and composure. She was so still to all outward appearance, and the darkness concealed the flush that rose to her face; but it could not conceal the slight tremor with which she replied after a pause: "I promised not to be against her at least."

A flood of angry words rose to Theo's lips, the blood mounted to his head. He had taken the bias so fatal between married people of supposing when his wife disagreed with him that she did it on purpose, not because she herself thought so, but because it was opposition. Perhaps this was because of that inherent contempt for women which is a settled principle in the minds of so many men, perhaps because he had been used to a narrow mind and opinions cut and dry in the case of his sister, perhaps even because of his hot adoration and faith in Lady Markland as perfect. To continue perfect in his eyes, after their marriage, she would have needed to agree always with him, to think his thoughts. He exacted this accord with all the susceptibility of a fastidious nature, which would be content with no forced agreement, and divined in a moment when an effort was required

to conform her opinions to his. He would not tolerate such an effort. He would have had her agree with him by instinct, by nature, not even by desire to please him, much less by policy. He could not endure to think of either of these means of procuring what he wanted. What he wanted was the perfect agreement of a nature which arrived at the same conclusions as his by the same means, which responded before he spoke, which was always ready to anticipate, to give him the exquisite satisfaction of feeling he was right by a perpetual seconding of all his decisions and anticipation of his thoughts. Had he married a young creature like Chatty, ready to take the impress of his more active mind, he might have found other drawbacks in her to irritate his *amour-propre*, and probably would have despised her judgment in consequence of her perpetual agreement with him. But the fact was that he was jealous of his wife, not in the ordinary vulgar way, for which there was no possibility, but for every year of additional age, and every experience, and all the life she had led apart from him. He could not endure to think that she had formed the most of her ideas before she knew him: the thought of her past was horrible to him. A suspicion that she was thinking of that, that her mind was going back to something which he did not know, awoke a sort of madness in his brain. All this she knew by painful intuition now, as at first by discoveries which startled her very soul, and seemed to disturb the pillars of the world. She was aware of the forced control he kept over himself, not to burst forth upon her, and she would have fled morally, and brought herself round to his ideas and sworn eternal

faith to him, if it would have done any good. But she knew very well that his uneasy nature would not be satisfied with that.

"I might have divined," he said, after a long pause, during which they went quickly along, he increasing his pace unawares, she losing her breath in keeping up with him, "that you would see this matter differently. But I must ask, at least, that you won't circumvent us, and neutralise all our plans. The only thing for Chatty to do is to drop it altogether, to receive no more letters, to cut the whole concern. It is a disreputable business altogether. It is better she should never marry at all than marry in that way."

"I feel sure, Theo, that except in this way she will never marry at all—if you think that matters."

"If I think that matters! It is not very flattering to me that you should think it doesn't matter," he said.

And then they reached their house, and he followed her into the drawing-room, where one dim lamp was burning, and the room had a deserted look. Perhaps that last speech had been a little unkind. Compunction visited him not unfrequently. He seated himself at the little table on which the lamp was standing, as she took off her hat and recovered her breath. "Since we are at home, and alone for once in a way," he said, more graciously, "which happens seldom enough, I'll read to you for an hour, if you like, Frances; that is, if you have no letters to write."

There was a little irony in the last words, for Lady Markland had, if the truth must be told, a foible that way, and liked, as so many women do, the idea of having a large correspondence, and took pleasure in

keeping it up. She answered eagerly that she had no letters to write (though not without a glance at her table where one lay unfinished) and would like his reading above everything: which was so far true that it was a sign of peace, and an occupation which he enjoyed. She got her work while he got the book, not without a horrible sense that Geoff, always wakeful, would have heard her come in, and would call for her, nor without a longing desire to go to him, if only for a moment, which was what she had intended to do. Perhaps it was to prevent this that Theo had been so ready with his offer, and so sensitive was he to every impression that the poor lady felt a thrill of terror lest her half-formed intention, or Geoff's waking, might thrill through the atmosphere to her husband's mind, and make him fling down the book with impatience. She got her work with a nervous haste, which it seemed he must divine, and seated herself opposite to him. "Now, I am ready," she said.

Poor Lady Markland! He had not read a page—a page to wich she gave the most painful attention, trying not to think that the door might open any moment, and the nurse appear begging her to speak a word to Lord Markland—when a faint cry reached her ears. It was faint and far away, but she knew what it was. It was the cry of "Mamma," from Geoff's bed, only given forth, she knew, after much tossing and turning, and which a year ago she would have heard from any corner of the house and flown to answer. She started when she heard it, but she had been so much on the alert, and prepared for some interruption of the kind, that she hoped Theo did not see the little instinctive movement. "Mamma!" She

sat with a nervous thrill upon her, taking no notice, trying to listen, seeing in the dark the little sleepless boy tossing upon his uneasy pillow, and calling in vain for his mother, but resisting all the impulses both of heart and habit. If only Theo might not hear! After a while, however, Theo's ear caught the sound. "What's that?" he said sharply, stopping and looking at her across the table. Alas! the repressed agitation in her smile told its own story to Theo. He knew that she pretended to listen, that she knew very well what it was. "*That*," she said, faltering. "What? Oh! it sounds like Geoff calling—some one."

"He is calling *you;* and you are dying to be with him, to rush upstairs and coax and kiss him to sleep. You are ruining the boy."

"No, Theo. It is probably nurse he is calling. He sleeps so badly," she said, with a broken voice, for the appeals to mamma came quicker, and she felt as if the child was dragging at her very heart-strings.

"He would have slept better, had he been paid less attention to; but don't let me keep you from your boy," he said, throwing down the book on the table. She made an attempt at an appeal.

"Theo! please don't go away. I will run for a moment, and see what is the matter."

"You can do what you please about that: but you are ruining the boy," said Warrender. And then he began to hum a tune, which showed that he had reached a white heat of exasperation, and left the room. She sat motionless till she heard the street door closed loudly. Her heart seemed to stand still: yet was there, was it possible, a certain relief in the

sound? She stole upstairs noiselessly and into Geoff's room and threw herself down by the bedside. "Oh, Geoff, what is the matter?" she asked: though her heart had dragged her so, there was in her tone a tender exasperation too.

"I can't sleep," the boy said, clinging to her, with his arms round her neck.

"But you must try to sleep—for my sake. Don't toss about, but lie quite still, that is far the best way."

"I did," said Geoff, "and said all the poetry I knew, and did the multiplication table twice. I wanted you. I kept quiet as long as I could—but I wanted you so."

"But you must not want me. You are too big to want your mother."

"I shall never be too big, I want you always," said Geoff, murmuring in the dark, with his little arms clinging close round her neck.

"Oh, Geoff, my dearest boy! but for my sake you must content yourself—for my sake."

"Was he angry?" the child asked, and in the cover of the darkness he clenched his little hands and contracted his brows; all of which she guessed, though she saw not.

"That is not a question to ask," she said. "You must never speak to me so; and remember, Geoff,—they say I am spoiling you—I will never come when you call me after to-night."

But Lady Markland's heart was very heavy as she went downstairs. She had put her child away from her; and she sat alone in the large still drawing-room all the evening, hearing the carriages come and go outside, and hansoms dashing up which she hoped

might be coming to her own door. But Theo did not come back. This was one of many evenings which she spent alone, in disgrace, not knowing how to get her pardon, feeling guilty, yet having done nothing. Her second venture had not brought her very much additional happiness so far.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Two little girls. He came over to tell us yesterday. Poor Theo! He is pleased, of course, but I think half ashamed too. It seems a little ridiculous to have twins, and the first."

"I can't think how you can say it is ridiculous. It is very interesting. But nowadays people seem to be ashamed of having children at all. It used to be thought the strength of a country, and doing your duty to the state. But people have different notions now."

"Well," said the rector, "I should have thought Theo would be pleased; for he likes to be original in everything, and two little girls are as unlike as possible to one little boy."

Mrs. Warrender's eyes shot forth a gleam, half of humorous acquiescence, half of irritation, that Mr. Wilberforce should have divined her son's state of mind. She had come to the Warren with Chatty for a few weeks, for what they called "change," though the change of a six miles' journey was not much. The Warren bore a very different aspect now from that which it had borne in former days. It was light and cheerful; some new rooms had been built, which broke the commonplace outlines of the respectable

house. It was newly furnished with furniture as unlike as possible to the mahogany catafalques. Only the hall, which had been old-fashioned and harmonious, in which Chatty was attending to the flowers, was the same; and so far as that went, it might have been the very same day on which Dick Cavendish had paid his first visit, when Chatty with her bowl of roses had walked in, as he said, into his heart. There were still roses of the second bloom, with the heat of July in their fervent heart, and she stood at the table arranging them, changed, indeed, but not so changed as to affect the indifferent spectator, to whom she still seemed a part of the background, a figure passive though sweet, with no immediate vocation in life. Old Joseph, too, was in the depths of the hall, just visible, doing something,—something that was not of the least urgency or importance, but which kept him about and hearing all that passed. He and his old wife were in charge of the Warren, in the present changed days, and though they both half resented the fact that the young master had abandoned his own house, they were yet more than half pleased to have this tranquillity and ease at the end of their long service. To do them justice, they had been glad to receive their old mistress and her daughter, welcoming them as visitors with a sense of hospitality, and declaring that they did not mind the trouble, notwithstanding that Joseph's health was bad, and late dinners had always been an affliction to his wife.

"I hope," Mrs. Warrender said, "that the two little girls will soon make their own welcome, as babies have a way of doing—and make everybody certain that they are much sweeter than any one little boy."

This was how Theo's mother took the sting out of the rector's speech, which was not intended to have any sting, and was only a stray gleam of insight out of a confused realisation of the state of affairs; but it was so true that it was difficult to believe it was that, and no more. The Wilberforces had come to inquire, not only for Lady Markland and her babies, but into many other things, could they have found the opportunity. But Chatty's presence stopped even Mrs. Wilberforce's mouth. And when they went in to inspect all the improvements and the new decorations and furniture, Chatty came after them, and followed everywhere, which seemed very strange to the rector's wife. Did she mean to prevent them from talking? Was that her purpose? She took little part in the conversation. She was more silent than she had ever been, though she had never been given to much talk; and yet she came with them wherever they went, putting an effectual stop to the questions that quivered on the very edge of Mrs. Wilberforce's lips. Nor had the rector the sense, which he might so easily have had, to engage her in talk, to occupy her attention, and leave his wife free to speak. Anybody but a man would have had the sense to have done so, but a man is an unteachable creature, and never will divine the things that are required of him which cannot be told him in plain words. Accordingly, the whole party strolled from one room to another, commenting upon the new arrangements without a possibility of any enlightenment as to the real state of affairs. Mrs. Wilberforce was very indignant with her husband as they left,—an indignation that seemed very uncalled for to this injured man.

"What you could have done? Why, you could have talked to Chatty. You could have interested her on some subject or another, about where they were abroad, or about the parish, or—— Dear me, there are always plenty of subjects. When you knew how anxious I was to find out all about it! Dick Cavendish is a great deal more a friend of yours than he was of theirs until this unfortunate business came about, and it seems very strange that we should know nothing. Why, I don't know even what to call her,—whether she is still Miss Warrender, or what she is."

"You would not call her Miss Warrender in any case," said the rector, with a little self-assertion. "And you know that is nonsense, for the moment the other wife was proved to be living, poor Chatty's marriage was as if it had not been."

"Well, that is what I cannot understand, Herbert: to be married just like anybody else, and the ring put on, and everything (by the way, I did notice that she does not wear her ring), and that it is as if it had not been. Bigamy one can understand: but how it should mean nothing! And do you mean to say she could marry somebody else, the same as if it had never happened?"

"To-morrow if she likes,—and I wish she would, poor Chatty! It would be the best way of cutting the knot."

"Then I can tell you one thing that all your superior information would never teach you," cried Mrs. Wilberforce,—"*that she never will!* You may take my word for it, Chatty has far too much principle. What! be married to one man in church, and then go and be married to another! Never, Herbert! Oh, you may

tell me the ceremony is nothing, and that they must have nothing to say to each other, and all that: it may be quite true, but that Chatty will ever marry any one else is not true. She will never do it. For anything I can tell, or you can tell, she may never see Dick Cavendish again. But she will never marry any one else. It is very hard to be sure of anything nowadays, when all the landmarks are being changed, and the country going headlong to—— But if I know anything, I hope I know Chatty Warrender, and *that*, you may be sure, she will never do."

This flood of eloquence silenced the rector, and indeed he had no objection to make: for he was aware of all those sacred prejudices that live in the hearts of ladies in the country, and he thought it very likely that Chatty would feel herself bound for ever by what was no bond at all.

In the meantime there had been only one letter from Dick, a short and hasty one, telling that he was better, explaining that he had not been able to let them know of his illness, and announcing that he was off again as soon as he should be able to move upon his search. Chatty and her mother wondered over this, without communicating its contents to any one. His search!—what did his search mean? There was no search wanted for those proceedings which he had declared were so easy and so certain at that far end of the world. Evidently they had not been so easy, and the words that he used were very strange to the ladies. He had no doubt, he said, of his success. Doubt! he had spoken of it before he went away as a thing which only required asking for, to have; and the idea that there was no doubt at once gave em-

bodiment and force to the doubt which had never existed. Mrs. Warrender joined the forces of the opposing party from the moment she had read this letter. After a day or two of great depression and seriousness, she had taken Chatty into her arms and advised her to give up the lover, the husband, who was no husband, and perhaps an unfaithful lover. "I said nothing at first," Mrs. Warrender had said with tears. "I stood by him when there was so much against him. I believed every word he said, notwithstanding everything. But now, my darling,—oh, Chatty, now! He was to be gone for three months at the outside, and now it is eight: and he was quite sure of being able to do his business at once. But now he says he has no doubt, and that he is off on his search. His search for what? Oh, my dearest, I am most reluctant to say it, but I fear Theo is right. To think of a man trying, and perhaps trying in vain, to get a divorce in order to marry *you!* Chatty, it is a thing that cannot be; it is impossible, it is disreputable. A divorced man is bad enough,—you know how Minnie spoke even of that,—but a man who is trying for a divorce with the object—— Chatty, my darling, it is a thing which cannot be."

Chatty was not a girl of many words, nor did she commit herself to argument: she would enter into no controversy with her mother. She said only that she was married to Dick. Perhaps he was not married to her: that might be: and she might never see him again: but she was bound for ever. And in the meantime, until they knew all the circumstances, how could they discuss the matter? When Dick returned and gave them the necessary information, then it would be

time enough. In the meantime she had nothing to say. And nothing more could be got from her. Minnie came and quoted Eustace: but Chatty only walked out of the room, leaving her sister in possession of the field, but without any of the satisfaction of a victory. And Theo came, but he contented himself with talking to his mother. Something of natural diffidence or feeling prevented him from assailing Chatty in the stronghold of that modest determination which they all called obstinacy.

Theo came and made his mother miserable, almost commanding her to use her authority, declaring that it would be her fault if this farce went on,—this disreputable farce he called it; while poor Mrs. Warrender, now as much opposed to it as he, had to bear the brunt of his objurgations until she was driven to make a stand upon the very arguments which she most disapproved. In the midst of all this Chatty stood firm. If she wept, it was in the solitude of her own chamber, from which even her mother was shut out; if she ever wavered or broke down, it was in secret. Externally, to the view of the world, she was perfectly calm and cheerful, fulfilling all her little duties with the composure of one who has never known what tragedy means. A hundred eager eyes had been upon her, but no one had been able to tell how Chatty "bore it." She said nothing to anybody. It was thought that she held her head a little higher than usual and was less disposed for society: but then she had never loved society. She arranged her flowers, she took her walks, she carried beef-tea and port wine to the sick people. She even sat down daily at the usual hour and took out her muslin work, a height of tranquillity to which

it was indeed difficult to reach. But what woman could do, Chatty would do, and she had accomplished even that. There are many in the world who must act and cannot sit still, but there are also some who, recognising action to be impossible, can wait with the whole passive force of their being, until that passiveness becomes almost sublime. Chatty was of this kind. Presumably she did not torment herself hour by hour and day by day, as her mother did, by continual re-arguments of the whole question, but if she did, she kept the process altogether to herself.

There had been one interview, indeed, which had tried her very much, and that had taken place a day or two after her arrival at the Warren, when she had met Lizzie Hampson on the road. Lizzie had shrunk from the young lady in whose life she had interfered with such extraordinary effect, but Chatty had insisted on speaking to her, and had called her almost imperiously. "Why do you run away? Do you think I am angry with you?" she said.

"Oh, Miss Chatty!" The girl had no breath or courage to say more.

"You did right, I believe," Chatty said. "It would have been better if you had come and told me quietly at home, before—anything had happened. But I do not blame you. I think you did right."

"I never knew till the last minute that it would hurt you so!" Lizzie cried. "I knew it might be bad for the gentleman, and that he could be tried and put in prison; but she would never, never have done that. She wanted him to be free. It was only when I knew, Miss Chatty, what it would do to you—and then it

was too late. I went to Highcombe, but you had gone from there; and then when I got to London——"

A flush came over Chatty's face, as all the extraordinary scene came back to her. "It seems strange that it should be you who were mixed up with all," she said. "Things happen very strangely, I think, in life; one can never tell— If you have no objection, I should like you to tell me something of—. I saw her—do you remember? here, on this very road: and you told me—ah! that to put such people in penitentiaries would not do; that they wanted to enjoy themselves. Do you remember? It seemed very strange to me then. And to think that——" This moved Chatty more than all the rest had done. Her soft face grew crimson, her eyes filled with tears.

"To think that she—oh, Miss Chatty, I feel as if I ought to go down on my knees and ask you to forgive me for ever having anything to do with her."

"That was no fault of yours, I think," said Chatty very softly. "It can have been nobody's fault. It is just because—it has happened so: that makes it harder and harder: none of us meant any harm—except perhaps——"

"Miss Chatty, she didn't mean any harm to you. She meant no harm to any one. She was never brought up to care for what was good. She was brought up just to please her fancy. Oh, the like of you can't understand, if you were to be told ever so: nor should I if I hadn't seen it. They make a sort of principle of that, just to please their fancy. We're taught here that to please ourselves is mostly wrong: but not there. It's their religion in a kind of a way, out in these wild places, just to do whatever they like; and then when

you come to grief, if you are plucky and take it cheerful—— The very words sound dreadful, here where everything is so different," Lizzie said, with a shudder, looking round her, as if there might be ears in the trees.

Chatty did not ask any further questions. She walked along very gravely, with her head bent. "It makes one's heart ache," she said. There was an ease in speaking to this girl who had played so strange a part in her life, who knew her trouble as no one else did. "It makes one's heart ache," she repeated. She was not thinking of herself. "And where is she now? Do you hear of her? Do you know what has become of her?"

"Only one thing can become of her," said Lizzie. "She'll fall lower and lower. Oh, you don't think a poor creature can fall any lower, I know," for Chatty had looked at her with wonder, shaking her head; "but lower and lower in her dreadful way. One day there," said Lizzie philosophically, but sadly, pointing to the high wall of the Elms, "with her fine dresses and her horses and carriages: and the next in dirt and misery. And then she'll die perhaps in the hospital. Oh, she'll not be long in anybody's way. They die soon, and then they are done with, and everybody is glad of it—" the girl cried, with a burst of sudden tears.

Chatty stopped suddenly upon the road. They were opposite to the gate from which so often the woman they were discussing had driven forth in her short-lived finery; a stillness as of death had fallen on the uninhabited house, and all was tranquil on the country road, stretching on one side across the tranquil

fields, on the other towards the clustering houses of the village and the low spire which pointed to heaven. "Lizzie," she said, "if it is never put right—and perhaps it will never be put right, for who can tell?—if you will come with me who know so much about it, we will go and be missionaries to these poor girls. I will tell them my story, and how I am married but have no husband, and how three lives are all ruined, —all ruined for ever. And we will tell them that love is not like that; that it is faithful and true: and that women should never be like that—that women should be—oh, I do not believe it, I do not believe it! Of her own free will no woman could ever be like that!" Chatty cried, like Desdemona, suddenly clenching her soft hands in a passion of indignation and pity. "We will go and tell them, Lizzie!"

"Oh, Miss Chatty! They know it all, every word," Lizzie cried.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Two little girls are as unlike as anything can be to one little boy. This gave Warrender a sort of angry satisfaction in the ridiculous incident which had happened in his life. For it is a ridiculous incident. When a man is hardened to it, when he has had several children and is habituated to the paternal honours, it may be amusing and interesting and all the rest. But scarcely a year after his marriage, when he was not quite four-and-twenty, to be the father of twins! He felt sometimes as if it was the result of a conspiracy to make him ridiculous. The neighbouring

potentates, when he met them, laughed as they congratulated him. "If you are going to continue like this, you will be a patriarch before you know where you are," one of them said. It was a joke to the entire country round about. Twins! He felt scarcely any of the stirrings of tenderness in his heart which are supposed to move a young father, when he looked at the two little yawning, gaping morsels of humanity. If there had been but one, perhaps!—but two! He was the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood, he felt. The sight of his wife, pale and smiling, touched his heart indeed. But even this sight was not without its pangs. For alas! she knew all about this position which was so novel to him. She understood the babies and their wants, as it was natural a mother who was already experienced in motherhood should. And finally she was so far carried away by the privileges and the expansion of the moment as to ask him —him! the last authority to be consulted on such a subject—whether Geoff was delighted to hear of his little sisters. Geoff's little sisters! The thought of that boy having anything to do with them, any relationship to claim with *his* children clouded Warrender's face. He turned it away, and Lady Markland, in the sweet enthusiasm of the moment, fortunately did not perceive that change. She thought in her tender folly that this would make everything right; that Geoff, as the brother of his little girls, would be something nearer to Theo, claiming a more favourable consideration. She preserved his hope for some time, notwithstanding a great many signs to the contrary. Even Theo's dark face, when he found Geoff one day in his mother's room, looking with great interest at

the children, did not alarm the mother, who was determined not the part with her illusion. "Do you think it right to have a boy of Geoff's age here in your room?" he said. "Oh, Theo, my own boy!—what harm can it do?" she had said, so foolishly, forgetting that Geoff's crime in the eyes of his young stepfather was exactly this, that he was her own boy.

Thus the circumstance which every one concerned hoped was to make the most favourable change in the position did only intensify its difficulties. Geoff naturally was more thrown into the society of his stepfather during his mother's seclusion, and Geoff was very full of the new event and new relationships, and was no wiser than his mother so far as this was concerned. When they lunched together the boy was so far forgetful of former experiences as to ply Theo with questions, as he had not done since the days when the young man was his tutor, and everything was on so different a footing. Geoff's excitement made him forget all the prudence he had acquired. His "I say, Warrender," over and over repeated drove Theo to heights of exasperation indescribable. Everything about Geoff was offensive to his stepfather: his ugly little face, the nervous grimaces which he still made, the familiarity of his address, but above all the questions which it was impossible to silence. Lady Markland averted them more or less when she was present, and Geoff had learnt prudence to some extent, but in his excitement he remembered these precautions no more.

"I say, Warrender! shall you take mamma away? Nurse says she must go for a change. I think Markland is always the nicest place going, don't you?"

"No, I prefer the Warren, as you know."

"Oh!" Geoff could scarcely keep out of his voice the wondering contempt with which he received this suggestion: but here his natural insight prevailed, and a sort of sympathetic genius which the little fellow possessed. "To be sure, I like the Warren very much indeed," he said. "I suppose what makes me like Markland best is being born here."

"And I was born there," Theo said.

"Yes, I know. I wonder which the babies will like best. They are born here, like me; I hope they will like Markland. It will be fun seeing them run about, both the same size, and so like. They say twins are always so like. Shall we have to tie a red ribbon round one and a blue ribbon round the other, as people do?"

To this question the father of the babies vouchsafed no reply.

"Nurse says they are not a bit like me," Geoff continued, in a tone of regret.

"Like you! Why should they be like you?" said Warrender, with a flush of indignation.

"But why not, Warrender? Brothers and sisters are alike often. You and Chatty are a little alike. When I am at Oxford, if they come to see me, I shall like fellows to say, 'Oh, I saw your sisters, Markland.'"

"Your sisters!" Theo could scarcely contain his disgust, all the more that he saw the old butler keeping an eye upon him with a sort of severity. The servants in the house, Theo thought, all took part with Geoff, and looked to him as their future master. He continued hastily: "I can only hope they will

prefer the Warren, as I do, for that will be their home."

"Oh!" cried Geoff again, opening round eyes. "But if it isn't our home, how can it be theirs? They don't want a home all to themselves."

"I think they do," said Theo shortly.

The boy gave him a furtive glance, and thought it wise to change the subject. "Mrs. Warrender is there now. Oh, I say! she will be granny to the babies. I should like to call her granny too. Will she let me, do you think, Warrender? She is always so kind to me."

"I should advise you not to try."

"Why, Warrender? Would she be angry? She is always very kind. I went to see her once, as soon as she came home, and she was awfully kind, and understood what I wanted." Geoff paused here, suddenly catching himself up, and remembering with a forlorn sense that he had gone a long way beyond that in his little life, the experiences, which were sufficiently painful, of that day.

"It requires a very wise person to do that," said Warrender, with an angry smile.

"Yes, to understand you quite right even when you don't say anything. I say, Warrender, if mamma has to go away for a change, when shall we go?"

"We!" said Warrender significantly. "Are you also in want of a change?"

The boy looked up at him suddenly, with a hasty flush. The tears came to his brave little eyes. He was overpowered by the sudden suggestion, and could not find a word to say.

"Markland is the best change for you, after Eton,"

said Theo. "You don't want to travel with a nursery, I suppose."

Geoff felt something rise in his throat. Why, it was his own nursery, he wanted to say. It was his own family. Where should he go but where they went? But the words were stopped on his lips, and his magnanimous little heart swelled high. Oh, if he could but fly to his mother!—but to her he had learnt never now to fly.

"Wherever we may go," said Warrender coldly, "I think you had much better spend your holidays here;" and he got up from the table, leaving Geoff in a tumult of feelings which words can scarcely describe. He had suffered a great deal during the past year, and had said little. A sort of preternatural consciousness that he must keep his own secret, that he must betray nothing to his mother, had come upon him. He sat now silent, his little face twitching and working, a sudden new, unlooked-for horror stealing over him, that he was to be separated from his mother; that he was to be left behind while they went away. It did not seem possible, and yet, with all the rapidity of a child's imagination, Geoff's mind flashed over what might happen,—he to be left alone here, while *they* went away. He saw his mother go smiling into the carriage, thinking of the babies, in their little white hoods, little dolls—oh no, dear little helpless creatures, to whom the boy's heart went out; his little babies as well as his mother's. But of course she would think of them. She must think of them. And Geoff would be left behind, with no one, nobody to speak to, the great rooms all empty, only the servants about. He remembered what it had been when his

mother was married; but then he had the hope that she would come back to him, that all would be well: and now he knew that never, never, as of old, could he have her back. Geoff did not budge from the table for some time after, but sat with his elbows on it and his head in his hands, in the attitude which he had so often been scolded for, with nobody to scold him or take any notice. He thought to himself that he might put his elbows on the table as much as he liked, and nobody would care. But this thought only made the position more terrible. It was only the return of the servants to clear the table, and the old butler's question, "What's the matter, Master Geoff?" that roused him. The butler's tone was far too sympathetic. He was an old servant, and the only one in the house who did not call poor little Geoff My lord. But the boy was not going to accept sympathy. He sprang up from the table with a "Nothing's the matter. I'm going out for a ride," and hurried towards the stables, which were now his resource more and more.

This knowledge rankled in Geoff's heart through all the time of his mother's convalescence. He was very brave, very magnanimous, without knowing that he was either. That he would not vex his mother was the determination of his soul. She was very sweet, sweeter than ever, but pale, and her hands so thin that you could see the light through them. Though he anticipated with a dull anguish the time when she should go away, when Warrender would take her away, leaving him behind, Geoff resolved that he would say nothing about it, that he would not make her unhappy. He would bear it; one could bear anything when one tried, even spending the holidays by one's

self. But his heart sank at the thought. Supposing she were to stay a month away,—that was four weeks; it was thirty days,—and he alone, all alone in Markland. And when she came back it would be time for him to go to school. Sometimes he felt as if he must cry out when he thought of this; but he would not say a word, he would not complain; he would bear it rather than vex mamma. When she came downstairs she was so pale. She began to walk about a little, but only with Warrender's arm. She drove out, but the babies had to be with her in the carriage; there was no room for Geoff. He twisted his poor little face out of shape altogether in the effort to get rid of the scalding tears, but he would not betray the state of his mind; nothing, he vowed to himself, should make him worry mamma.

One day he rode over to the Warren, pondering upon what Theo had said, that the Warren must be liked best by the babies, because it was their home. Would it ever really be their home? Would Warrender be so hard as that, to take away mamma and the babies for good, and leave a fellow all alone in Markland, because it was Geoff's and not his own? Geoff's little gray face was as serious as that of a man of eighty, and almost as full of wrinkles. He thought and thought what he could do to please Warrender. Though his heart rose against this interloper, this destroyer of his home, Geoff was wise, and knew that to keep his mother he must please her husband. What could he do? Not like him,—that was impossible. Riding along, now slowly, now quickly, rather at the pony's will than at his own, Geoff, with loose reins in his hands and a slouch in his shoulders which

was the despair of Black, pondered the subject till his little mind was all in confusion. What could he do to please Warrender? He would be good to the babies, by nature, and because he liked the two funny little things, but that would not please Warrender. He would do almost anything Warrender chose to tell him, but that wouldn't please him. What was there, then, that would? He did not know what he could do. He rode very carelessly, almost as much at the mercy of the pony as on the occasion when Theo picked him from under the wheels of the high phaeton; but either the pony was more wise, or Geoff stronger, for there was no question now of being thrown. When he came in sight of the little gate of the Warren, he saw some one standing there, at sight of whom he quickened his pace. He knew the general aspect of the man's figure though he could not see his face, and this welcome new excitement made the heart jump up again in Geoff's breast. He hurried along in a sudden cloud of dust, and threw himself off the pony like a little acrobat. "Mr. Cavendish!" cried Geoff, "have you come back?" with a glow of pleasure which drove all his troubles away.

It was Dick, very brown, very thin, a little wild in his aspect and dress. "Hallo, Geoff!" he replied. "Yes, I have come back. Didn't they expect me to come back?"

"Oh, I don't know. I think they wondered."

"That's how it is in this world," said the other; "nobody trusts you: as soon as you are out of sight—oh, I don't say you're out of mind—but nobody trusts you. They think that perhaps, after all, you were a villain all the time."

To this, naturally, Geoff had no reply to make, but he said, "Are you going in that way, Mr. Cavendish?" Upon which Dick burst into a loud laugh, which Geoff knew meant anything but laughing.

"What do you think, Geoff?" he said. "My wife's inside, and they've locked me out here. That's a joke, isn't it?"

"I don't think it's any joke. And Chatty wants you so. Come round to the other door."

"Are you sure of that?" said Dick. "Here's that fellow been here,—that Thynne fellow,—and tells me——" Then he paused and looked at the boy, with another laugh. "You're a queer confidant for a poor vagabond, little Geoff."

"Is it because I'm little?" cried Geoff. "But though I am little there are heaps of things I know. I know they are all against you except Chatty. Come along and see Chatty. I want to go to her this moment and tell her——"

"I thought," said Cavendish, "I'd wait for her here. I don't want to make a mummy of that fellow, my brother-in-law, don't you know, the first moment. Tell Chatty—tell my wife, Geoff—that I am waiting for her here."

Geoff did not wait for another word, but clambered on to his pony again and was off like the wind, round by the village to the other gate. Meantime Dick stood and leaned upon the wooden paling. His face was sharp and thin with illness, with eagerness and suspense, his complexion browned and paled out of its healthful English tints. But this was not because he was weak any longer, or in diminished health. He was worn by incessant travelling, by anxiety and the

fluctuation of hope and fear; but the great tension had strung his nerves and strengthened his vitality, though it had worn off every superfluous particle of flesh. A keen anxiety mingled with indignation was in his eyes as he looked across the gate which the clergyman had fastened against him,—indignation, yet also a smile. From the moment when Geoff's little voice had broken upon his angry reverie, Dick had begun to recover himself. "Chatty wants you so." It was only a child that spoke. But a child does not flatter or deceive, and this was true. What Eustace Thynne thought, what anybody thought, was of little consequence. Chatty! The simple name brought a softening glow to Dick's eye. Would she come and open to him? Would she reverse the judgment of the family by her own act, or would it be he who must emancipate Chatty? He waited with something of his old gaiety rising in his mind. The position was ludicrous. They had shut him out, but it could not be for long.

Geoff galloped his pony to the gate, and up the little avenue, which was still very shady and green, though so much of the wood had been cut. He threw himself off and flung the reins to the gardener's boy, who stood gazing open-mouthed at the little lord's headlong race. The doors were not open, as usual, but Geoff knew that the drawing-room windows were seldom fastened in the summer weather. He darted along round the corner of the house, and fell against one of the windows, pushing it open. In the drawing-room there seemed a number of people assembled, whom he saw vaguely without paying any attention. Mr. and Mrs. Thynne, Warrender, in a group, talking with their heads together, Mrs. Warrender standing

between them and the tranquil figure of Chatty, who sat at work at the other end of the room, taking no part in the consultation of the others, paying no heed to them. Chatty showed an almost ostentation of disregard, of separation from the others, in her isolated place and the work with which she was busy. She looked up when Geoff came stumbling through the window, with a little alarm, but she did not look as if she expected any one, as if she had heard who was so near at hand. The boy was covered with dust and hot with haste, his forehead bathed in perspiration. He called out to her almost before he was in the room: "Chatty! Mr. Cavendish is outside at the gate. They will not let him come in. He sent me to tell you."

Chatty rose to her feet, and the group in the end of the room scattered and crowded to the window. Theo seized his stepson by the collar, half choking the boy. "You confounded imp!" he cried, "what business is that of yours?"

"Geoff, where, where?" Chatty rushed to the child and caught his hand. He struggled in Theo's grasp, in a desperate, nervous anguish, fearing he could not tell what,—that he would be strangled, that Chatty would be put in some sort of prison. The strangling was in progress now; he called out in haste, that he might get it out before his breath was gone—

"Oh, run, Chatty! The little gate in the road—the wooden gate." She seemed to flash past his eyes, —his eyes which were turning in his head, with the pressure and the shaking of Warrender's arm. Then the child felt himself suddenly pitched forward and fell, stunned for the moment, and thinking, before con-

sciousness failed him, that all was over, and that he was killed indeed—yet scarcely sorry, for Chatty had his message and he had fulfilled his commission before he died.

Chatty flew along the shady paths, a line of whiteness fluttering through sunshine and shadow. She called out her lover's name as she approached the gate. She had neither fear nor doubt in her mind. She did not know what news he was going to bring her, what conclusion was to be put to the story. She called to him as soon as he was within hearing, asking no questions, taking no precautions. "Dick, Dick!" Behind her, but at some distance, Minnie too fluttered along, inspired by virtuous indignation, which is only less swift than love and happiness. The gentlemen remained behind, even Eustace perceiving that the matter had now passed beyond their hands. This is one of the points in which men have the advantage over women. They have a practical sense of the point at which opposition becomes impossible. And Warrender had the additional knowledge that he had done that in his fury which at his leisure it would be difficult to account for. Mrs. Warrender, who had not been informed of the crisis, nor known upon what matter her children were consulting, was too much horrified by what had happened to Geoff to think even of Chatty. She raised the boy up and put him on a sofa, and bathed his forehead, her own heart aching and bleeding, while Warrender stood dumbly by, looking at his handiwork, his passion still hot in him, and a half frenzy of dislike and repugnance in his mind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Dick!" Curiously enough Dick had not thought till then that even a high gate may be vaulted by a man whose heart has leaped it before him, and who is in perfect training, and knows no fear. He had been more discouraged by Eustace Thynne than any authority on the part of that poor creature at all warranted, and his heart had failed him still more when he thought that perhaps Chatty might have been talked over, and might stand by him no longer. She was his wife, but what if her heart had given him up! But when a man hears the voice he loves best in the world calling him, everything takes a different aspect. "Dick!" Her voice came first faint, so that he scarcely believed it; then nearer and nearer, giving life to the silent world. The thin brown face of the vagabond, as he had called himself, grew crimson with a flush of happiness and new life. He could not wait until she came; his soul flew to meet her in a great revulsion of confidence and joy. The gate was high, but he was eager and she was coming. He put his sinewy, thin hands upon it, and was over in a moment. And there she came, flying, fluttering, her light dress making a line of whiteness under the trees. She did not stop to ask a question, but ran straight to him, into his arms. "Dick, Dick!" and "Chatty, my darling, at last!"—that was all they said.

Minnie did not run so fast. She had not the same inducement; for opposition, though very nearly as swift, has not quite the same impetus as love. She only came up to them when these first greetings were over,

and when, to the consciousness of both, life had taken up its threads again exactly where they had broken off. Chatty did not ask any questions,—his presence was answer enough to all questions; but indeed she did not think of any. Everything else went out of her mind except that he was there.

"Mr. Cavendish!" Minnie came up breathless, putting her hand to her side. "Oh, Chatty, you are shameless! Do you know what you are doing? It was his duty—to satisfy us first. Mr. Cavendish, if she is lost to—all sense of shame——"

Panting, she had got up to them, and was pulling Chatty away from him by her arm.

"There is no shame in the matter," he said. "But, Chatty, your sister is right, and I must explain everything to your relatives at once. There is no time to lose, for the train leaves at six, and I want to take you away with me. If you can be ready."

"Yes, Dick, I can be ready. I am ready, whenever you please."

He pressed her arm, which she had placed within his, with a look that said everything there was to say. But Minnie replied with a scream. "Take her away! What right have you to take her away? Eustace will never consent, and my mother—oh, even my mother will not hear of that. If you were a hundred times divorced,—which it is a shame to think of,—you can't take her away like that; you will have to be married again."

"I am sorry to push past you, Mrs. Thynne. It is your husband's fault, who stopped my entrance in the natural way. But we have no time to lose." He looked back, waving his hand to Minnie, whose wrath took

away the little breath she had left. "I am not a divorced man," he said. Mrs. Eustace looked after them with feelings indescribable. They went hurrying along, the two figures melting into one, swift, straight, carried as by a wind of triumph. What did he mean? It was horrible to Minnie that she could not go so fast, that she had to wait and take breath. With a pang of angry disappointment she felt at once that they were on the winning side, and that they must inevitably reach the Warren before she could, and that thus she would not hear what Dick had to say. It may here be added that Minnie had, like Chatty, the most perfect confidence that all was right. She no more believed that Dick would have been there had the end of his mission been unsatisfactory than she believed that night was day. She would not have owned this for the world, and she was vexed and mortified by the conviction, but yet at the bottom of her heart, being not at all so bad as she wished to believe she was, felt a sense of consolation and relief, which made it at once easier and more tantalising to have to wait.

Foolish Chatty held Dick's arm fast, and kept up a murmur of happiness. "Oh, Dick, are you sure it is you? Have you come at last? Are you well now? And I that could not go to you, that did not know, that had no one to ask! Oh, Dick, didn't you want me when you were ill? Oh, Dick! oh, Dick!" After all, his mere name was the most satisfactory thing to say. And as he hurried her along, almost flying over the woodland path, Chatty too was soon out of breath, and ended in a blissful incapacity to say or do anything except to be carried along with him in his eager progress towards the tribunal which he had to face.

Eustace Thynne opposed his entrance, but quite ineffectually, at the drawing-room door. Dick with his left hand was more than a match for the Reverend Eustace. Warrender stood in the middle of the room, with his head towards the sofa, over which his mother was bending, though his eyes turned to the new-comers as they entered. He made a step towards them as if to stop them, but a movement on the sofa drew him back again as by some fascination. It was Geoff, who struggled up with a little pale gray face and a cut on his forehead, like a little ghost. His sharp voice piped forth all at once in the silence: "I told her, Mr. Cavendish. I gave her your message. Oh, I'm all right, I'm all right. But I told Chatty. I—I did what you said."

"Mr. Cavendish!" cried Mrs. Warrender, turning from the child. She was trembling with the excitement of these hurrying events, though the sick terror she had been seized with in respect to Geoff was passing away. "Mr. Cavendish, my son is right in this,—that before you saw Chatty we should have had an account of you, he and I."

"I should have said so too, in other circumstances," said Dick holding Chatty's arm closely within his own. "If my presence or my touch could harm her, even with the most formal fool,"—he flashed a look at Eustace, angrily, which glowed over the pale parson like a passing lamp, but left him quite unconscious. "As it is, you have a right to the fullest explanation, but not to keep my wife from me for a moment."

"She is not your wife," cried Warrender. "Leave him, Chatty. Even in the best of circumstances she cannot be your wife."

"Chatty, do not move. I have as full a right to hold her here as you have, or any married man. Mrs. Warrender, I don't want to get angry. I will tell you my story at once. On our wedding-day, when that terrible interruption occurred, the poor creature whom I then thought, whom I then believed, to have been——"

"You mean Mrs. Cavendish, your lawful wife."

"Poor girl, do not call her by that name; she never bore it. She did not mean to do any harm. There was no sanctity to her in that or any other tie."

Chatty pressed his arm more closely in sympathy. "Oh, Dick, I know, I know."

"She meant no harm, from her point of view. She scarcely meant to deceive me. Mrs. Warrender, it was a fiction all through. There has been no need of any divorce. She was already married when—she made believe to marry me. The delusion was mine alone. I hunted the man over half the continent. I did not dare to tell you what I was doing, lest it should prove to be a false hope. But at last I found him, and I have all the evidence. I have never had any wife but Chatty. She forgives me what was done in folly so long ago, before I ever saw her. There was no marriage. What was done was a mere idle form, in deference to my prejudices," he said, with a short laugh of excitement. "I was a fool, it appears, all through; but it was not as a wise man that Chatty married me," he said, turning to her. "Our marriage is as true as ever marriage was. I have no wife but Chatty. Mrs. Warrender, I have all the evidence. Don't you believe me? Surely you must believe me!" Dick cried.

His voice was interrupted by a shrill little outburst

from the sofa behind. "Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried little Geoff before Dick had ended. "Chatty, it was me that brought the first news! Chatty, are you happy now?"

Mrs. Warrender, in the act of going forward to the pair who stood before her awaiting her judgment, turned with a thrill of anxious terror. "Oh, hush, hush!" she cried, putting herself before the boy.

Theo, too, had turned round with a suppressed but passionate exclamation, clenching his hands. "Mother, I can think of nothing till that imp is out of the way."

"He shall go, Theo. Speak to them, speak to them!" cried the mother anxiously, bending over the sofa, with an indescribable tumult in her heart. She had to leave her own child's fate at its crisis to look after and protect the child who was none of hers, who was the stumbling-block in her son's way. And yet her heart condemned her son, and took part with the little intruder. Thus Chatty for the moment was left to stand alone before her husband's judge, but was not aware of it, thought nothing of it, in her confidence and joy. Warrender stood looking darkly after them till his mother had taken his stepson out of the room. The pause, perhaps, was useful in calming the excitement of all. When the door closed Theo turned round, mastering himself with an effort. Geoff had diverted the rush of hasty temper which was natural to him. He looked upon the new-comer less severely.

"We can have no interest," he said, "but that your story should be true. But it cannot rest on your word, Cavendish. You have been deceived once; you may be deceived again. My mother is no judge of points

of law, and she is favourable, too favourable, to you. You had better come with us into another room, and let us see what proofs you have of what you say."

"That is quite just," said Dick. "I'd like you to kiss that little beggar for me, Chatty; he knows what it is to stand by a man in trouble. It is all right, Warrender. Of course it is the interest of all of us that there should be no mistake. Send for Wilberforce, who will be impartial; and if you could have Longstaffe too——"

Minnie came in, out of breath, at this stage of the affairs. "What does he say, Eustace,—oh, what does he say? Are you sure it is true? What has he got to say? And what does he mean about Mr. Longstaffe and Mr. Wilberforce? Aren't you good enough for him? Can't you judge without Wilberforce? Wilberforce," she cried, with professional contempt for another clergyman, "is nothing so very wonderful; and he is *his* friend and will be sure to be on his side. Why can't Eustace do?"

Mrs. Warrender, with her anxious face, had now come back again alone. She went up to Dick, holding out both her hands. "God bless you!" she said, "I believe you, dear Dick, every word you say. But everything must be made as clear as daylight both for her sake and your own."

"I know it, dear mother," he replied. "I am quite ready. I should be the first to ask for a full examination. Take care of my Chatty while I show my papers. I want to take my wife away with me. I cannot be parted from her again."

"Oh, Dick! oh, Dick!" The mother, like the daughter, could find no other words to say.

Little Geoff found himself alone in Mrs. Warrender's room. She had taken him there with much kindness and many tender words, and made a little nest for him upon the sofa. "Lie down and try to go to sleep," she said, stooping to kiss him, a caress which half pleased, half irritated, Geoff. But he obeyed, for his head was still aching and dazed with the suddenness and strangeness of all that had passed. To lie down and try to sleep was not so hard for him as for most children of his age, and for the first moment no movement of revolt was in him. He lay down in the silence, not unwilling to rest his head on a soft pillow. But the fire of excitement was in Geoff's veins, and a restlessness of energy and activity which after a minute or two forebade all possibility of rest. Something had happened to him which had never happened before. He had not been quite clear what it was at first; whether it was the wonder of Dick's return or of his own part in it,—the fact that he had been the messenger and had discharged his trust. But presently it all came to him, as he lay quietly with his aching head pressed against the cool pillow. Geoff had encountered many new experiences in the last two years of his life, but he had not known at any time what personal violence was. Everybody round him had made much of him; his delicate health had always been in the thoughts of those who were about him, and perhaps the rank to which he was so indifferent, of which he was scarcely conscious. Till Theo had appeared upon the scene, Geoff had been the central figure in his own little world. Since that time, the boy had suffered with a magnanimity which few men could have equalled a gradual deposition from most

of the things he prized most. He was no longer first; he had partially lost the mother who for so long had been his companion and playfellow as well as the chief object in his existence. Many humiliations had come to the keen feelings and sensitive heart of the little dethroned boy. Many a complaint and reproach had been on his lips, though none had got utterance. But now a deeper indignity still had befallen him. As Geoff lay in the room to which he had been banished to be out of Warrender's sight, all this swept across his little soul like a tempest. He remembered the suffocating sensation in his throat, the red mist in his eyes, the feeling that he had but a moment left in which to deliver his message; and then the giddy whirl of movement as he was flung away like a rag or a stone, the crash in his ears, the sharp blow which brought back his scattered faculties for a moment, only to banish them again in the momentary unconsciousness which brought all the tingling and thrilling into his ears of which he had not yet got free. How had all this come about? It was Warrender who had seized him, who had flung him upon the floor, who had—had he? tried to kill him? had he tried to kill him? Was that what Warrender meant? A wild flood of feeling, resentment, terror, desire for revenge, swept through Geoff's mind. Warrender, to whom already he owed so much; Warrender, who had taken his mother from him, and his home, and everything he cared for in the world,—Warrender now wanted to kill him! If mamma knew! Mamma had not ceased to care for her boy. Even now that the babies had come she still loved Geoff,—and if she knew! The boy jumped up from his couch. He was pale and

trembling, and the cut on his forehead showed doubly from the total absence of colour in his little gray face; but he got himself a great draught of water, and, restored by that and by the rush of rage that swelled all his veins, he flew downstairs, past Joseph in the hall, who gave an outcry of astonishment, to where the gardener's boy was still holding his pony outside. Geoff, scarcely able to stand, what with the shock and what with the emotion, clambered up upon the pony, and turned its head homewards. The pony was well pleased to find himself in that way, and obeyed with enthusiasm his little master's impulse. The small steed and rider flew along the road to Markland. Geoff had no cap; he was dusty, as if he had been for days on the road; and as he flew by, the cottagers came out to the doors to look, and said to each other that the little lord must be mad, that he would have an accident like his father. He went on thus, with scarcely a pause, till he reached the gates of Markland, wrath and pain carrying him on at a swifter rate even than the pony, eager for sympathy and for revenge.

Something stayed this headlong race all at once. It was when he came within sight of the avenue, which was so bare, which had no trees except at distant intervals. There he saw a speck upon the way, a slowly moving figure which he recognised at once. It was his mother, coming down, as was her wont, to meet—whom? Her husband. Geoff's hot heart, all blazing with childish rage, sank into a shivering calm at the sight of her. In a moment he turned from heat to cold, from headlong passion to the chill of thought and self-sacrifice. Mamma! She it was now who was "delicate," as he had been all his life. It might make

her ill; it would make her miserable. What! she who had been everything to him,—was he now going to seize upon her as Theo had seized him, and shake her and hurt her, he, her own boy? The child drew up his unwilling pony with a sudden force which almost carried him over its head. No, he could not do that. He would not. He would rather be shaken, strangled, thrown down, anything in the world, rather than hurt mamma. His little heart swelled with a new spring of impassioned emotion. He would bear it for her sake; he would bear anything, he did not mind what, rather. He would never, he cried to himself, with a rush of scalding tears to his eyes, hurt *her*. He turned the pony's head round with a force of passion which that astonished animal could not resist, to give himself, after the wild rush of his flight homeward, a little time to think. And he thought, knitting his little brows, twitching his little face, his heart aching, his little body, even, all strained with the effort. No! whatever he did, whatever he had to bear, he would not hurt mamma.

CHAPTER XXV.

WARRENDER had a long conference with Dick Cavendish in the old library at the Warren. Mr. Wilberforce, who had been sent for, came at once, full of curiosity and excitement; and though Mr. Longstaffe could not be had, the experience of the two clergymen, who knew all about marriage registers and the proofs that were necessary, was of use in this curious family crisis. It was all very important both to Chatty

and to the family in general, and Theo did his utmost to keep his attention to it, but his thoughts were elsewhere. He was glad to be released, when all was done that could be done by the little family commission. The result was a kind of compromise. No one had any moral doubt that Dick was right, but some higher sanction seemed to be necessary before he could be allowed to take Chatty away. The ladies had to be called in to soothe and subdue his impetuosity, to get him to delay. Warrender scarcely waited to see how it was settled. The impatience within him was not to be controlled. His heart was at Markland, hot with anger and anxiety, while he was forced to remain here and talk of other things. Yes, to be sure, Chatty's good name, her happiness, —if she considered that her happiness lay in that,— were important. It was important for Cavendish too, if any one cared what was important for Cavendish: but good heavens! not so important,—could any one suppose so for a moment?—as what had happened, what might be happening, elsewhere. Old Joseph had stopped him as he went through the hall to tell him that the little lord had run off and got on his pony, and had gone home. He had gone home. It was a relief for one thing, for Theo had felt that it would be impossible for him to carry that little demon back with him in the dog-cart, as it would have been his duty to do. But in another—how could he tell what might be happening while he was kept there, amid maddening delays and hesitations, looking over Dick Cavendish's papers? What could Dick Cavendish's papers matter? A few days sooner or later, what could it matter to Dick Cavendish? Whereas to him-

self—That boy might be lying senseless on the road, for anything he knew; or, what was worse, he might have got home and told his story. And the sting was that he had a story to tell.

Warrender knew that he had done what he ought not to have done. He had treated the child with a violence which he knew to be unmanly. He had thrown him down, and stunned, and might have killed him. He did not deny to himself what he had done. He would not deny it to her,—and he fully expected that she would meet him with upbraidings, with anger. With anger! when it was he who was the injured person,—he, her husband, whose privacy was constantly disturbed and all his rights invaded by her son. He turned this over and over in his mind, adding to the accumulation of his wrongs, till they mounted to a height which was beyond bearing. The fire blazed higher and higher as he kept on throwing in fuel to the flames. It must come to some decision, he said to himself. It was contrary not only to his happiness, but to his dignity, his just position, to let it go on, to be tormented perpetually by this little Mordecai at the gate, this child who was made of more importance than he was, who had to be thought of, and have his wishes consulted, and the supposed necessities of his delicate health made so much of. Geoff's generosities, the constant sacrifices of which he was conscious, were all lost upon his stepfather. He knew nothing of the restraint the child put on himself, or of the wistful pain with which Lady Markland looked on, divining more than she knew. All that was a sealed book to Theo. From his side of the question Geoff was an offence on every point.

Why should he be called upon to endure that interloper always in sight,—never to feel master in his own house? To be sure, Markland was not his house, but Geoff's; but that was only a grievance the more, for he had not wished to live in Markland, while his own house stood ready for his own family, with plenty of room for his wife and children. There grew upon Warrender's mind a great resolution, or, rather, there started up in his thoughts, like the prophet's gourd, a determination, that this unendurable condition of affairs should exist no longer. Why should he be bound to Geoff, in whose presence he felt he was not capable of doing himself justice, who turned him the wrong way invariably, and made him look like a hot-tempered fool, which he was not? No, he would not endure it longer. Frances must be brought to see that for the sake of her son her husband was not always to be sacrificed. It should not continue. The little girls must not grow up to see their father put in the second place, to think him an irritable tyrant. No, it must not continue, not for a day.

And there occurred to Theo, when he approached the gate of Markland, something like the same experience which had befallen Geoff. He saw going slowly along the bare avenue two figures, clinging closely together,—as he had seen them a hundred times, though never without jealousy, when he had no right to interfere. For a long time these walks had been intermitted, and he had almost forgotten the irritation of the past in this respect. But now it all surged back with an exasperation entirely out of proportion to the offence. For the offence was no more than this: that Lady Markland was walking slowly

along, with Geoff clinging with both hands to her arm, clasping it, with his head almost on her shoulder, with a sort of proprietorship which made the spectator frantic. He stopped the dog-cart and sprang down, flinging the reins to the groom outside of the gate. The sight brought his resolution, his rage, the fierce passion within him, to a climax. Yes, he had been anticipated; that was clear. The story of all that had passed had been poured into his wife's ear. She would meet him with reproaches, perhaps with tears, pointing to the cut on her son's forehead. There came into Theo's mind a maddening recollection that he himself had been cut on the forehead for Geoff; but no one, not *she* at least, would remember that now. She would meet him furious, like a tigress for her cub; or, worse, she would meet him magnanimous, forgiving him, telling him that she knew it must have been an accident—whereas it was no accident. He would make no pretence; he would allow that he had done it, he would allow that he had meant to do it; he would make no further pretences, and tolerate no pretences from this day.

In his anger he was as swift and light as a deer. Their backs were turned towards him, and they were too much absorbed in their talk to hear his approach. He was close to them, on Lady Markland's other side, before they heard anything. The mother and son looked up simultaneously, and started as if they were but one being. At the sight of him she gave a faint cry,—"Theo!"—and he unclasped her arm and slid from her in a moment: which, though it was what he wished, made the fire burn still higher in Warrender's heart.

"So," he said, with the harsh laugh of excited temper, "he has been telling you his story. I knew he would."

"He has been telling me no story, Theo," said Lady Markland. "Oh yes, he has been telling me that Mr. Cavendish——"

"Confound Mr. Cavendish! I am speaking of your boy, Lady Markland. He has been telling you about the cut on his forehead."

She looked from the man to the child, growing pale. "He fell," she said faltering. "But he says it does not hurt."

"The little liar!" cried Theo, in his excitement. "Why didn't you tell your mother the truth?"

"Warrender!" said little Geoff, in a tone which conveyed such a warning as Theo would not have taken from any man in the excited state of his mind. The child was red with sudden indignation, but still he held fast to his part.

"Geoff, run away home!" cried his mother, trembling. "Nurse will bathe it for you: and papa,"—she had ventured to call her young husband by this name since the birth of the babies,—"will give me his arm."

"I tell you he is a little liar," said Theo again. "He did not fall. I threw him down. He thrust himself into the midst of my family affairs, a meddling little fool, and I caught hold of him and threw him out of the way. It is best that you should know the truth."

Thy stood all three in the middle of the bare road, the afternoon sun throwing its level light into their eyes,—looking at each other, confronting each other, standing apart.

"Theo," said Lady Markland, "I am sure you did

not mean to hurt him. It was—an accident, after all. And Geoff, I am sure, never meant to interfere. But, indeed, you must not use such words of my boy."

"What words would you like me to use? He is the pest of my existence. I want you to understand this once for all. I cannot go on in this way, met at every turn by a rival, an antagonist. Yes, he is my rival in your heart, he is my opponent in everything. I cannot turn round at my own table, in my own house, without his little grinning face——" Here Theo stopped, with a still harsher laugh. The startled faces of the mother and son, the glance they gave at each other like a mutual consultation, the glow of indignation that overcame Lady Markland's paleness, were all apparent to him in a flash of meaning. "Oh, I know what you will say!" he cried. "It is not my house; it is Geoff's. A woman has no right to subject her husband to such a humiliation. Get your things together, Frances, and come with me to my own house. I am in a false position here. I will have it no longer. Let him have what is his right. I am resolved that he and I shall not sleep again under the same roof."

"Theo, you cannot mean what you say. You can't be so—— If Geoff has done anything wrong, he will beg your pardon. Oh, what is it, what is it?" She did not ask her son for his version of the story with her lips, but she did with her eyes, which exasperated Theo more and more.

"It does not matter what it is," he said. "It is not any temporary business, to be got over with an apology. It is just this, that you won't face what is inevitable. And it is inevitable. You must choose between him and me."

Geoff had been overwhelmed by this sudden storm. He was so young to play the hero's part. He was not above crying when such a tempest burst upon him, and had hard ado to keep back his tears. But when he met his mother's anguished imploring look, Geoff felt in his little forlorn heart a courage which was more than man. "Warrender," he said, biting his lips to keep them from quivering,—"Warrender, I say. As soon as the holidays are over, I—I'll go to school. I'll—be out of the way."

"Oh, Geoff!" Lady Markland said, with a heart-rending cry.

"It's—it's right enough, mamma; it's—quite right. I'm too old. I'm too—Warrender, I'll be going back to school in about six weeks." Alas, the holidays were just begun. "Won't that do?" said little Geoff, with horrible twitchings of his face, intended to keep back the tears.

His mother went up to him, and kissed him passionately, and put him away with her hand. "Go," she said. "Geoff, go, and wait for me in your room. We must talk—alone; we must talk alone. Go. Go."

Geoff would have given much to throw himself into her arms, to support and to be supported by her: but the child was moved beyond himself. He obeyed her without a word, turning his back upon the combat, though he would fain have stood by her in it. Warrender had taken no part in this; he had made no response to Geoff's appeal. He was walking up and down with all the signs of impatience, pale with passion and opposition. He paused, however, as the boy went away, a solitary forlorn little figure stealing along the avenue in silence, too dutiful even to look back. Lady

Markland stood, too, and looked after him, with a pang of compunction, of compassion, of heart-yearning, which it would be impossible to put into words. Her boy! who had been her chief, almost only companion for years; who was more dear—was he more dear?—than any one; who was her very own, all her own, with no feeling in his mind or experience in his little consciousness that was not all hers,—and this man bade her send him away, separate from her child; this—man. It is not safe for a union when one of the parties thinks of the other as that man. All at once a light had flashed up in Lady Markland's heart. She had been made very soft, very submissive, by her marriage. She had married a young man, younger than herself. She had seemed to herself ever since to be asking pardon of him and of the world for doing so. But now his violence had called her back to herself. She had not been too soft or submissive in the old days. She had been a woman with a marked character, not always yielding. The temporary seemed suddenly to disappear out of her life, and the original came back. She stood for a moment looking after her child, and then, being feeble of body, though waking up to such force of mind, she went to a bench which stood on the edge of the road, and sat down there. "If this is as you say, it is better that we should understand each other," she said.

Her tone had changed. From the anxiety to soften and smooth everything, the constant strain of deprecation and apology which had become habitual to her, she had suddenly emerged into a composure which was ominous, which was almost tragic. Even the act of sitting down, which was due to her weakness, made

her appear as if taking a high position, assuming an almost judicial place. She did not intend it so, but this was the effect it produced upon Warrender, stinging him more deeply still. He felt that he was judged, that his wife had thrown off the yoke which he had made so heavy, and that his chance of bringing her back to her subjection, and of forcing her into the new and sudden decision which he called for, was small. This conviction increased his fury, but it also made him restrain the outward signs of it. He went after her, and stood in front of the bench of which she had made a sort of judicial throne.

"You are right in that," he said. "Things have gone too far to return to their old level. I must have my house to myself, and for that reason it must be my own. I wish you to come with me to the Warren,—the children and you."

"Your mother and your sisters are there," she said, fixing upon him a steady look.

"What does that matter? There is room, I hope, at all times for the master of the house."

"You ask me," she said, "to turn all my life upside down, to change my habits and arrangements, at a moment's notice. But you have not told me why. Have you told me? You have said that my little boy of twelve has offended you, and that you knocked him down. Is that why I must change my house, and all my life?"

The slow steadiness of her tone made him frantic; that, more than the deliberate way in which she was putting him in the wrong.

"I have told you," he cried, "that I am in a false position altogether, and that I will not bear it any

longer! You ought to see that I am in a false position. As for your little boy—of twelve——"

"What of him?" she asked, growing very pale, and rising again from her seat.

"Only this one thing, Frances: that you can't serve God and mammon, you know; you can't keep both. You must choose between him and me."

"Choose!" She sat down again suddenly, as if her strength had failed her. "Choose! between Geoff, my little Geoff—my boy—my baby—Geoff——"

There was a kind of ridicule in her voice, a ridicule which was tragic, which was full of passion, which sounded like a scoff at something preposterous, as well as an indignant protest.

"Your scorn does not make it different. Yes, Geoff, who is all that: and me—between him and me."

For a moment they gazed at each other, having arrived at that decisive point, in a duel of the kind, when neither antagonist can find a word more to say. Lady Markland was very pale. She had been brought in a moment from her ease and quiet, when she expected no harm, to what might be the most momentous decision. She was still feeble, her nerves strained and weak from the long tension at which they had been held. She had clasped her hands together, and the fingers quivered. Her eyes seemed to grow larger and more luminous as she looked at him. "Theo," she said with a long breath. "Theo! do you know—what you are saying? Do you mean—all that—all that?"

He thought he was going to get an easy, an unlooked-for victory; he congratulated himself with a swift flash of premature triumph that he had pushed matters to a crisis, that he had been so firm. "Yes," he cried,

"I mean it all! We can't go on longer as we are. You must choose between him and me."

She kept looking at him, still without relaxing from that fixed gaze. "Do you know what you are asking?" she said again. "That I should give up my child,—my first-born child, my little delicate boy, who has never been parted from me. Was it ever heard of that a mother was asked to give up her child?"

"They have done it," he said,—"you must know that,—when a higher claim came in."

"Is there any higher claim? Every other is at our own choice, but this is nature. God made it. It cannot change. There may be other—other"—she faltered, her voice grew choked,—"but only one mother," she said.

"Other—other?" he cried. "What? To me there has been but one, as you know. I have put all my chances in one. God made it? Has not God made you and me one?—whom God has joined together—"

"Oh, Theo." She got up and came towards him, holding out her hands. "One, to bear each other's burdens, to help each other; not to go against nature, to abandon what is the first of duties. Theo! oh, help me; do not make it impossible, do not rend me in two! What can I say to you? Theo?" She tottered in her weakness; her limbs were not strong enough to support her. But Warrender made no forward step. He did not take the hands she held out to him. He had to be firm. It was now or never, he said to himself.

"If we are ever to live happily together the sacrifice must be made. I don't want to hurt you, Frances. If I seem harsh, it is for our good, the good of both of us. Make up your mind. Can any one doubt what

is your first duty? It is to me. It is I that must settle what our life is to be. It is you who must yield and obey. Are you not my wife? Spare yourself farther pain, and me," he went on, with all the absolute and cruel sincerity of youth. He made it up in his own mind that this was the right thing to do, and steeled himself to resist the appeal of her weakness, to see her flutter back to the hard bench, and drop down there, unsupported, unaided. It was for the best, it was for her good, to put things on a right footing at once and for always. After this, never a harsh word, never an opposition, more.

Her husband thus having her to himself, standing before her, magisterial, coldly setting down what her duty was, enforcing obedience,—he who little more than a year ago—— She wavered back to her bare seat alone, and sat there looking up at him till his peroration came to an end. In these few minutes many things flew through Lady Markland's thoughts, —unspeakable offence, revolt against the unlovely duty presented to her, a sudden fierce indignation against him who had thus thrust himself into her life and claimed to command it. At that moment, after all the agitation he had made her suffer, and before the sacrifice he thus demanded of her, she could scarcely believe that she too had loved him, that she had been happy in his love. It seemed to her that he had forced himself upon her, taken advantage of her loneliness, compelled her to put herself in his power. It had been all adoration, boundless devotion, help, and service. And now it was command. Oh, had he but said this before! Had he bidden her then choose between her child and him, before— And as she looked at him a wild ridicule

added itself to these other thoughts. To see him standing making his speech, thinking he could coerce like that a woman like herself, thinking in his youthfulness that he could sway any woman's heart like that, and cut off the ties that vexed him, and settle everything for the good of both! Heaven! to see him lifting up his authoritative head, making his decision, expecting her to obey! Spare yourself, and me! That she should refuse did not enter into his mind. She might struggle for a time, but to what use? Spare yourself, and me! She could not help a faint smile, painful enough, bitter enough, curving her lips.

"You speak at your ease," she cried, when his voice stopped. "It is easy to make up your mind for another. What if I should refuse—to obey, as you say? A wife's obedience, since you appeal to that, is not like a servant's obedience or a child's. It must be within reason and within nature. Suppose that I should refuse."

He had grown cool and calm in the force of his authority. The crimson flushed to his face and the fire to his eye at her words. "Refuse—and I have my alternative!" he cried. "I will never enter your house again nor interfere in your concerns more."

Again they contemplated each other in a deadly pause, like antagonists before they close for the last struggle. Then Lady Markland spoke.

"Theo, I have done all that a woman could do to please you, and satisfy you,—all, and more than all. I will not desert my little boy."

"You prefer Geoff to me?"

"There is no preferring; it is altogether different. I will not give up my child."

"Then you give up your husband?"

They looked at each other again,—she deadly pale, he crimson with passion, both quivering with the strain of this struggle; her eyes mutely refusing to yield, accepting the alternative, though she said no more. And not another word was said. He turned on his heel, and walked back down the avenue, with quick, swinging steps, without ever turning his head. She watched him till he was out of sight, till he was out of hearing, till the gate swung behind him, and he was gone. She did not know how she was to get back to the house, over that long stretch of road, without any one to help her, and thought with a sickening and failing of her heart of the long way. But in this great, sudden, unlooked-for revolution of her life she felt no weakness nor failing. The revulsion was all the greater after the long self-restraint. For the first time after so long an interval she was again herself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THAT night Lady Markland did not close her eyes. The strength of resistance, of indignation, of self-assertion, failed her, as was inevitable in the long and slow hours, during which she looked out, at first with a certainty, then with a hope, that Theo would come back. He must come back, she said to herself, even if all were over, which seemed impossible, impossible! —all in an hour or two, in one afternoon, when she thought no evil. Still the most prosaic of considerations, the least important, his clothes, if nothing more, must bring him back. She went on saying this to

herself, till from a half scorn which was in it at first it came to a kind of despair. He must come back, at all events, for his clothes! She could scarcely bear Geoff all the afternoon, though it was for him all this misery was. She never could, nor would, give up her child: but his society was intolerable to her for the moment; and she felt that if Theo came and found them together he might think—he would have a certain right to think. It was a relief to her when at last Geoff went to bed, silenced in all his questions, chilled, terrified, yet still heroically restraining himself, and making up his mind that he was to be sent away. After this she felt a kind of relief, a freedom in being left to herself, in wandering about the rooms and looking out in succession at every window that commanded the avenue. When the hour came to shut up the house she gave the butler an elaborate explanation; how Mr. Warrender had been obliged to return to the Warren about some business, how it was possible that he might not come back that night; in fact, she did not expect him that night, but still he might return. It was not necessary that any one should sit up,—oh no, not necessary at all. She would hear him if he came, or he could let himself in. "But I really do not expect him to-night. He has—business," she said, with a smile, which the butler thought not at all like my lady. She was not given to explanations in an ordinary way. She was very kind and considerate; but she was always a great lady, and not expansive to her servants. She smiled in a strange conciliatory way, as if begging him to believe her, and explained, to make it all right. The butler was not deceived. When was any butler ever deceived by such pretences? He knew better,—

he knew that something had happened. He told the company downstairs that he made no doubt there had been a row, and most likely about Master Geoff, and that they might make up their minds to see rare changes. They were all making their comments upon this in the servants' hall, while Lady Markland, standing at the window, looked out with a sort of desperation, shaping the figure of Theo a hundred times in the distance, scarcely able to restrain the impulse to go out and look for him; saying to herself, no longer scornfully, but with the profoundest tragic gravity, that he must come back, if only for his clothes! It was a dim summer night, the sky veiled with clouds, and after midnight fitfully lit by the gleam of a waning moon. She went from window to window noiselessly, thinking that now one, now another, had the most perfect command of the avenue; hearing a hundred sounds of footsteps, even of distant wheels and horses' hoofs, which seemed to beat upon the ground far off, and never came to anything; then when the dawn began to be blue in the sky, threw herself upon her bed and hid her face, knowing that all was over, and that he would come back no more.

Scarcely less was the consternation in the Warren when Theo, pale and silent, wrapped in silence as in a cloak, making no reply to the questions asked, ordering his old room to be made ready without any explanation, came back to the already excited house. Dick and Chatty and all their affairs were forgotten in the extraordinary new event. "Oh, Theo, what has happened," Mrs. Warrender cried, "what has happened? Are you not going home?"

"This is my home, I suppose," he said, "unless

you have any objections," which closed her mouth. She thought there must have been a quarrel, and that Lady Markland had resented Theo's treatment of Geoff, which his mother immediately began to justify to herself; saying that of course he did not mean to hurt the child, but that a person put in charge of the children of another, in any case, must have some power of correcting them when they wanted correction, and with great wonder and indignation at his wife had yet a wondering question in her mind—what would she herself have done if any one had corrected Theo so when he was a boy? She did all she could to urge him to return, sitting up till very late, keeping the groom awake for possible orders. "Frances will be very anxious," she said to her son. "She has no reason to be anxious; she knows where I am." "Oh, Theo, don't let it come to a quarrel," Mrs. Warrender urged imploringly, with tears in her eyes. Her attitude put him in mind of his wife's attitude as she stood holding out her hands, and was intolerable to him. "Good-night, mother. I am going to bed," he said. Mrs. Warrender was as restless as Lady Markland. She had come and listened to his breathing outside his door, and seen that his light was out, and that he had actually gone to bed, as he said, before she would allow herself to be convinced. It was a quarrel, then; and what was to come of it? Lady Markland was very yielding and gentle, but Theo! Theo was not yielding. Mrs. Warrender, too, lay down when it was nearly morning, as miserable as could be.

And yet none of them, not even the chief actors, who were both at the pitch of desperation, really be-

lieved that what this meant was a breach which should last for years. Even they would not have believed it had it been put to them. That it should not all come right was incredible. But as a matter of fact it did not come right. Lady Markland was not by nature the yielding and anxious woman whom for this year of troubled wedlock she had appeared; and everybody knew that Theo was neither persuadable nor reasonable, but had the hottest temper, the most rigid will, of his own, and that ingenuity in finding himself in the right which gives a fatal character to every quarrel. Lady Markland was willing to make any concession but the one which he required, the abandonment of Geoff. But he would make no concession; he stood upon his rights. With all the fervour and absolutism of inexperience he stood fast. No, nothing less than everything, nothing but entire submission, nothing but obedience. Alarmed and anxious friends gathered to the fray, as was inevitable, and everything was made worse. The result was that within a few weeks Theo Warrender had gone off with a burning sense of injury and wrong, to travel he did not much care where, to forget himself he did not much care how; and Lady Markland, feeling as if she had awakened suddenly from a strange dream, a dream full of fever and unrest, of fugitive happiness but lasting trouble, came to herself all alone with the two little babies, in a strange solitude which was no longer natural, and with Geoff. She had chosen, who could say wrongly?—and yet in a way which set wrong all the circumstances of her life.

This was how for the moment her second venture came to an end. Theo went forth upon the world for that Wanderyear in which so much of the superfluous

vigour of life is so often expended, which it would have been so well for everybody he had taken before; and stormed about the world for a time, no one knowing what volcanoes were exploding in his soul. How much he gathered of better wisdom it is not within the limits of this history to say.

The happy ones were Dick and Chatty, who began their life together as if there had been no cloud upon it. He had fully lived out his Wanderyear, and had paid dearly for the follies, which had been done with no evil meaning on his part, but in all honour and good intention, bitterly foolish though they were. And perhaps he never was very wise, nor rose above the possibility of being taken in, which is a peculiarity of many generous spirits. But why should we say they were the happy ones? The really happy ones were Minnie and her Eustace, who never felt themselves to be in the wrong, or were anything less than the regulators of everybody's life and manners wherever they went. It was Mrs. Eustace Thynne's conviction to the last that all the misfortunes which temporarily befell her sister were owing to the fact that she herself was not on the spot to regulate affairs; and that Theo, if he had taken her advice, would never have placed himself in the way of the trouble which had overwhelmed his life.

THE END.

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