IN SILK ATTIRE

Title: In Silk Attire
A Novel

Author: William Black

Release Date: June 30, 2012 [eBook #40111]

Language: English

Produced by Al Haines.

IN SILK ATTIRE.

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HETH," "THREE FEATHERS," ETC.

SEVENTH EDITION.

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.
1879.

"And ye shall walk in silk attire
And siller hae to spare,
Gin ye'll consent to be his bride,
Nor think o' Donald mair."

"O, wha wad buy a silken gown
Wi' a puir broken heart?
Or what's to me a siller crown
Gin frae my love I part?"

CONTENTS.

IN SILK ATTIRE.

CHAPTER I.

OVER, AND SAFE.

"I am gathering myself together for a great leap, Jack."

"Don't look so sad about it, then. Take it as you would one of your Berkshire fences, Harry, with a firm seat and a cool hand."

"If I only knew what was on the other side, Jack—that bothers me."

"By the way, did you hear of the dinner at old Thornhill's on Tuesday? I declare everybody was drunk but the dogs; and they were turned out at night to find their way home by themselves. The Squire got very, very bad—port and brandy alternately—tumbled twice off his horse before he got out of the gate; and then, half an hour after, when the rest of us rode home, we found him sitting in the middle of the road, in the dark, trying to ward off the dogs that had gathered round him and were for licking his face, while he hiccuped to them 'G—go away, my good people—g—go away—I've really nothing for you; 'pon my soul, I've forgot my p—purse.' But what's the matter, Harry? You haven't heard a word of my story; and you're looking as glum as a parson."

"Jack, I'm going to marry."

"Don't be a fool."

"I am, though. It's all over with me, Jack. I told you I was gathering myself together for a great leap."

"Who is it, Harry?"

"Annie Napier."

There was an interval of dead silence. Mr. John Palk was too prudent a man to hazard a hasty witticism, knowing as he did the somewhat fiery temperament of Harry Ormond, Marquis of Knottingley.

"Do you mean that, Harry?"

"I do."

"You're in luck, then, lad. But what a host of rivals you'll have blaspheming you! Why, all London is at Miss Napier's feet. Lord Sotheby and I went to see her last night—the people in the pit were half crazy about her. And when we went round to Millington House for some supper, Sotheby swore he'd give his soul to the devil for a hundred years to get an introduction to Annie—I beg your pardon, to Miss Napier."

"Fellows like Sotheby are rather free in offering their soul to the devil," said Lord Knottingley, with a sneer, "perhaps because it is the thing of least value they have about them; or because they know the devil will have it for nothing by-and-by."

"If you marry Miss Napier, Harry, you'll be killed in a month. I tell you, man, London won't stand it. Why, they say that the Duke of Nor——"

Knottingley started to his feet—his face scarlet, his eyes hot and angry.

"By God, I will drive a sword through the man who breathes that lie in my hearing!"

"Don't scowl at me, Harry. I don't believe it."

"Do I care a straw who believes it? But we needn't waste angry words, Jack. I have known Annie Napier for years; and our family has been rather celebrated

for its jealousy. If I, an Ormond, marry that girl, people may conclude that there will be no longer a market for their scandalous wares. And mind you, Jack—don't you talk of it to any living soul; for I haven't even asked her yet; but she, or nobody, will be my wife."

John Palk went home to order supper for a little party of card-players who were to meet at his house that night; and Harry Ormond had promised to call in during the evening—that is, the card-playing evening, which began when the men got home from the theatre.

Knottingley was himself at the theatre that evening. From his box he sent round the following note to the lady who, at that time, held London captive with the fascination of her genius and her personal loveliness:

"DEAREST ANNIE,—I shall await your coming home. I have something particular to say to my little sister. H."

He was alone in the box; and he sate there, alternately entranced by the sweet tones of the voice he loved, and enraged by the thought that all this houseful of people were sharing a satisfaction which by right belonged to him alone. When they applauded—as they did often and vehemently, for Miss Napier was the idol of the time—he scowled at them as though they were insulting the woman whom he hoped to make his wife. He resented their rude staring as an indignity visited upon himself; and when, at the end of the act, they turned and talked to each other about the great actress, his family passion drew dark meanings from their smiles and whispered conversations, and his heart burned within him. A night at the theatre was not a pleasure to Harry Ormond. He left so maddened by love and jealousy that he became a joke to his companions—behind his back, be it understood, for he had a quick temper and a sure eye with which the wits did not care to trifle. He was not a man to be provoked or thwarted lightly; and in this period of contrariety, disquietude, and gusty passion, which falls, in some measure or other, to the lot of most young men, a discreet avoidance of irritating topics was the course which wisdom dictated to Lord Knottingley's friends. Not that he was a sullen boor or bravo, eager to tread on any man's corns, and kill him for swearing. He was naturally light-hearted, fickle, generous; impulsive in every mood of affection or dislike; and at this time, when these uncomfortable love-measles were strong upon him, he as often quarrelled with himself as with his neighbours. He was sensitive and proud; he was naturally jealous; his sweetheart, worse luck, was an actress; and it was a time, as some of us can remember, when scandal was cultivated as an art. It is not to be wondered

at, therefore, that Harry Ormond suffered all the tortures, while enjoying few of the amenities of love.

That night he was sitting in Miss Napier's house, alone and moody. He had an uneasy feeling that the strength of his passion was forcing him to a step from which his calmer reason might otherwise have caused him to shrink. He had not sufficient self-criticism to know that his impulsiveness, under these circumstances, might hereafter beget all the mutual miseries of inconstancy; and yet there were vague forebodings in his mind. He crossed the room, which was very prettily furnished and brilliantly lit, and leaning his arms on the mantelpiece, proceeded to study a small and daintily-executed miniature which hung against the wall. Was he trying to trace in these calm and beautiful features his own destiny? or was he wondering how his passion might alter the future of her whom he loved so much? or was he bitterly thinking that this portrait, like the original, was but a thing at which all men might gaze as well as he?

At that moment the door was opened, and there entered the actress herself, flushed with the evening's triumph, and smiling a happy welcome to her friend. That first glimpse of her young and happy face settled the matter—there was no more doubt, no more regret, possible. And as it was not in the nature of the man to prepare his utterances, or use any discretion in choosing them, he at once went forward, took her hands in his, and looking into her face with a sad earnestness, uttered his complaint and prayer.

"Annie, I cannot bear your going upon the stage any longer. It is a monstrous thing—a degradation—I cannot bear it. Listen to me, Annie, for your own dear sake; and tell me you will never go back to the theatre any more. You are my little sister, are you not? and you will do what is best for yourself and me, my dearest? How can I bear to hear the women talk of you—how can I bear to see the men stare at you?—and such men and such women, Annie! You do not know what they say and think of actresses—but not of you, Annie! I did not mean that—and so I beseech you, darling, to do what I ask you; will you not?"

Her eyes fell.

"And what would you have me do *afterwards*?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Be my wife, Annie; there, I have told you! Look in my face, my dearest. You know I have loved you always; trust me now!"

"Trust you!" she said, looking up with sweet wet eyes; "you know I trust you, Harry. Whom should I trust but you?"

"And you say——"

"I say I will do anything for you, Harry, except that—anything except that," she said, with a white, downcast face and trembling lips. "You have been too good to me, Harry; you have given me too much of your love and your kindness, for me to let you do such a thing. It is for your sake only I refuse. You remember

when you said you would always be a brother to me; and I was thankful within my heart to hear you say that; and after having been my dear brother and my friend for all this time, do you think I would make such a poor return for all your love as to let you marry—an actress? I will leave the stage, if it will please you; I will lie down in my grave, if it will please you, and be happy enough if I knew you wished it. I will do anything for you, Harry; but not that—not that!"

Wherewith he caught her in his arms, and kissed her—passionately, despairingly.

"My angel, my dearest, are you mad, to talk in that way? Do you not see that the great favour would fall upon me only? Is there a woman in all England to be compared with you, my queen, my darling? What matters your being an actress to me? It is you, not the actress, whom I beg for a wife; and if you would see in what way I should ask you for so great a blessing—here at your feet I kneel, you an empress, and I your slave."

And so he knelt down before her, and took her hand and looked up into her eyes. That may have been the fashion in which lovers spoke in those days, or it may be that the strong passion of the young man thrilled him into using stage language. But there could be no doubt about the absolute sincerity of the words; and the girl, with a sort of sad, wistful pleasure in her face, heard his urgent prayer.

"See, Annie, am I low enough? For God's sake do not mock me by saying you cannot be my wife because you are an actress. You are to me the noblest and tenderest of women, and there is nothing I hope for but your love. What do you say, Annie? Will you not speak a word to me?"

She stooped down and gently kissed away the tears from his cheeks.

"I am ashamed of your goodness, dear," she said, in her low, intense voice, "and I wish you had not asked me. But oh! Harry, Harry, how can I hide that I love you with my whole heart!"

She placed her hand on his soft brown hair—that hand which half London would have died to have kissed—and looked for a moment into his love-stricken eyes. In that brief moment the compact was sealed between them, and they were thenceforth husband and wife. She uttered a few words—rather indistinctly, to be sure—of farewell; and then she lightly kissed his forehead and left the room.

He rose, bewildered, pale, and full of an indescribable happiness; and then he went downstairs, and out into the open air. There was a light in her bedroom as he turned and looked up; and he said:

"I leave my heart in her dear keeping, for good or ill."

Shortly afterwards he made his appearance in Mr. John Palk's rooms; and by that time there was nothing on his face but a happy, audacious trust in the future; an expression which immediately struck one of his friends who was seated

at one of the small tables.

"Knottingley, come here," said this gentleman. "I see you bring good luck in your face. Back me!"

"I will. A hundred guineas on Lord Wriothesly's next hand!"

"Done with you, Harry," said Mr. John Palk, to whom a hundred guineas was an acceptable sum, now that he had managed, by aid of ace, king, and queen (with occasional help from a racing favourite) to scatter one of the finest estates possessed by any private gentleman in England.

As it happened, too, Lord Wriothesly and his partner won; and Mr. Palk made a little grimace. At a sign from Ormond, he followed the young marquis into a corner, where their conversation could not be overheard.

"You'll have to take paper, Harry," said Palk.

"What do you mean?"

"The hundred guineas——"

"Confound your hundred guineas! Sit down, and listen to me. I am an expatriated man."

"How?" said Mr. Palk, quietly taking a chair.

"Miss Napier is going to be my wife; and I know she will never have the courage to confront my friends—rather, I should say, I shall never allow her to sue in any way for recognition from them. You see? Then I shouldn't like to have my wife brought face to face with people who have paid to see her; and so—and so, Jack, I am going to give up England."

"You are paying a long price for wedded happiness, Harry."

"There I differ with you, Jack. But never mind. I want you to help me in getting up a quiet little wedding down in Berks; for I know she will never consent to meeting my relatives and all the riff-raff of my acquaintances——"

"Thank you, Harry."

"And I am sure she will be glad to leave the stage at once, if that is possible."

"What a pace you have! You're at the end of everything when other people are thinking of the beginning. But, in good faith, Harry, you are to be congratulated; and you may rely on my services and secrecy to the last."

And to Harry Ormond, when he went outside that night, it seemed as if all the air around him were full of music.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOOK BACK.

How still the lake of Thun lay, under the fierce heat! The intense blue of it stretched out and over to the opposite shore, and there lost itself in the soft green reflection of the land; while the only interruption of the perfect surface was a great belt of ruffled light stirred by the wind underneath the promontory of Spiez. Then overhead the misty purple mass of the Niessen; and beyond that again the snowy peaks of the Schreckhorn, Mönch, and Jungfrau glimmering through the faint and luminous haze of the sunlight; and over these the serene blue of a Swiss sky. Down in front of the house the lake narrowed to the sharp point at which it breaks suddenly away into the rapid, surging green-white waters of the Aar; and at this moment, as seen from the open window, two men in a low flat boat were vainly endeavouring to make head against the powerful current.

At the window sate a little girl of about four years old, with large dark grey eyes, a bright, clear face, and magnificent jet-black curls; a doll-looking little thing, perhaps, but for the unusual depth and meaning of those soft, large eyes. All at once she put her elbows on a tiny card-table opposite her, clasped her hands, and said, with a piteous intonation:

"Nu, Nu; oh, I don't know what to do!"

Her father, who had been lying silent and listless on a couch in the shadow of the room, looked up and asked her what was the matter.

"My doll is lying out in the sun," she said, in accents of comic despair, "and the poor thing must be getting a headache, and I am not allowed, Nu says, to go out just now."

"What a little actress she is!" her father muttered, as he returned, with a slight laugh, to his day dreaming.

And she *was* an actress—every atom of her. She had not the least self-consciousness; the assuming of appropriate speech and gesture was to her more natural than the bashful sense of personality with which most children are burdened. A true actress will smile quite naturally into the Polyphemus eye of a camera; a false actress will be conscious of deceit even in dressing herself to have her portrait taken. This child of four had the self-abandonment of genius in her mimetic efforts. She coaxed her mother and wheedled her father with an artless art which was quite apparent; and her power of copying the tender phrases she heard used was only equalled by the dramatic manner in which she delivered them. The appeal to "Nu"—which was a contraction for "nurse"—was her invariable method of expressing intense despair. If her mamma reprimanded her; if she lost one of her toys; or if she merely felt out of sorts—it was all the same: down went the elbows and out came the pitiful exclamation, "Oh, Nu, Nu, I don't know what to do." This little girl was the daughter of the Marquis of Knottingley, who now lay upon the couch over there; and it is of her that the present history purposes to speak.

For Harry Ormond had been right in his surmise. The young actress begged him not to insist upon her meeting his friends and acquaintances; and he, to whom no sacrifice was then great enough to show his gratitude for her love, readily consented to go abroad after the quiet little ceremony which took place down in Berkshire. They went to Thun, and lived in this house which lay some short distance from the village, overlooking the beautiful lake; and here Lord Knottingley forgot his old world, as he was by it forgotten. His marriage was known only to a few, though it was suspected by many, and coupled with the unexpected withdrawal from the stage of Annie Napier. In the end, however, the matter dropped into oblivion, and Harry Ormond was no more thought of.

For several years they lived there a still and peaceful existence, varied only by an occasional excursion southward into Italy. The halo of his romantic passion still lingered around his young wife; and in the calm delight of her presence he forgot old associations, old friends, old habits.

"You cannot expatriate a married man," he used to say, "for he carries with him that which makes a home for him wherever he goes."

She, too, was very happy in those days. She could never be persuaded that her husband had not made a great sacrifice in coming abroad for her sake; and she strove to repay him with all the tenderness and gratitude and love of a noble nature. She simply worshipped this man; not even the great affection she bore her bright-eyed quaint little daughter interfered with the one supreme passion. To her he was a miracle of all honourable and lovable qualities; never had any man been so generous, heroic, self-denying.

And yet Harry Ormond was a weak man—weak by reason of that very impulsiveness which often drove him into pronounced and vigorous action. As he leant back on his couch, after hearing the pathetic complaint of his little daughter, there were some such thoughts as these vaguely flitting before him:

"She will be an actress, too; a real actress, not a made one, thank God. And if I take her back to England as my child, will not all the poor would-be actresses of my acquaintance assume a fine air of patronage towards her and her mother? But, after all, Annie was on the stage—I cannot deny it; and I cannot quarrel with anybody for reminding me of the fact. All the tipsy ruffians of the town have sate and stared at her—d——m them! And just as surely is it impossible that I can remain here all my life. Annie is very well, and very affectionate; but I did not bargain for a life-long banishment. And one might as well be dead as live always out of London."

This was the first seed sown; and it grew rapidly and throve in such a mind as his. He became peevish at times; would occasionally grumble over the accidents of his present life, and then took to grumbling at that itself; sometimes held long conversations with the small Annie about England, and strove to impress

her with the knowledge that everything fine and pleasant abode there; finally—and this process had been the work of only a week or two—he announced his intention of going to London on business.

His wife looked up from her work, with dismay on her face; he had never proposed such a thing before.

"Why cannot Mr. Chetwynd do that business for you also, Harry?" she asked.

"Because it is too important," he said, a little impatiently. "You need not fear so much my going to London for a fortnight."

He spoke in almost an irritated tone. Indeed, he did not himself know how impatient he was to get away from trammels which he had found irksome.

She went over to him, and placed her hand gently on his head.

"Am I too jealous of you, Harry? I hate England because I think sometimes you have still a lingering wish to be back there. But I do not *fear* your going; I know you will be as anxious to come to me as I shall be to see you."

So Lord Knottingley went forth from that house, which he never saw again. His wife and daughter were at the window; the former pale and calm, the latter vaguely unhappy over an excitement and disturbance which she could not understand. As the horses started he kissed his hands to them both, tenderly as he had kissed them three minutes before on the threshold; and as the carriage disappeared round the first turning of the road he waved his handkerchief. Annie Napier had seen the last of her husband she was to see in this world. She came away from the window, still quite calm, but with a strange look on her pale and beautiful face; and then she sate down, and took her little girl on her knee, and put her arms round her, and drew her closely to her.

"Mamma, why do you cry?" the little one said, looking up into the sad, silent face.

Her mother did not speak. Was the coming shadow already hovering over her? She drew her daughter the more closely to her; and the little girl, thrown back on her usual resource for expressing her alarm, only murmured disconsolately, "Oh, Nu, Nu, I don't know what to do."

CHAPTER III.

THE MARCHIONESS.

Of what befel Lord Knottingley in England—of the influences brought to bear on him, of the acquaintances and relatives who counselled him (if he did receive any counsel but from his own inclination)—his wife never knew anything. Week after week passed, and she heard nothing from England. Again and again she wrote: there was no answer. But at length there arrived at Thun his lordship's man of business, Mr. Chetwynd, who brought with him all the news for which she had sought.

She was seated at the window overlooking the lake, oppressed and almost terrified by the strange shadows which the sunset was weaving among the mountains opposite. The sun had so far sunk that only the peaks of the splendid hills burned like tongues of fire; and in the deep valleys on the eastern side the thick purple darkness was giving birth to a cold grey mist which crept along in nebulous masses like the progress of a great army. Down at the opposite shore the mist got bluer and denser; and over all the lake the faint haze dulled the sombre glow caught from the lurid red above. Up there, high over the mountains, there were other mountains and valleys; and, as she looked, she thought she saw an angel, with streaming violet hair which floated away eastward, and he held to his mouth a trumpet, white as silver, which almost touched the peak of the Wetterhorn; and then the long, flowing robes of scarlet and gold became an island, with a fringe of yellow light that dazzled her sad eyes. When she turned rapidly to see that a servant had brought her a letter, the same cloud-visions danced before her, pictured in flames upon the darkness of the room.

"Will it please your ladyship to see Mr. Chetwynd this evening or to-morrow morning?" the servant inquired.

"Did Mr. Chetwynd bring this letter?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Yes, your ladyship," said the man.

"Tell him I will see him this evening—by-and-by—in half an hour."

Standing there, with a faint pink light streaming in upon the paper, she read these words:

"DEAR ANNIE,—Things have changed greatly since I was in England before; and my present visit seems to have brought me back again to life. It would be impossible for me to let you know how many reflections have been suggested to me since I came here; and perhaps I ought to go on at once to the main purport of my letter. You are my wife—*legally married*—as you know; and no one can deprive you of the privileges pertaining to your rank, any more than they can deprive you of my esteem and affection. At the same time you know how *very* exclusive my friends are; and I am *convinced* that for you to seek companionship with them would only bring you *discomfort* and *vexation*. Now your own good

sense, my dear, will show you that I cannot always remain away from England and allow my property to be left in the hands of agents. I see so many alterations for the worse, and so much *urgent need* for improvement, that I am certain I must remain in England for several years, if not for life. Now, my dear, I have a proposal to make which you will think cruel at first; but which—I know well—you will afterwards regard as being the wisest thing you could do for all of us. Nobody here seems to know of our marriage; certainly none of my own family seem to take it for granted that I have a wife living; and if I were to bring you over I should have to introduce you, with explanations which would be awkward to both you and me—which, indeed, would be *insulting* to you. What I desire you to do is to remain in the house you now occupy, which shall be yours; a sufficient income—to be named by yourself—will be settled upon you; and Annie will be supplied with whatever governesses and masters she requires. I hope you will see the propriety of this arrangement; and more particularly on account of one circumstance which, unfortunately, I am compelled to explain. You know I never allowed you to become friends with any of the English people we met in Italy. The reason was simply that they, in common with my relatives, believed that you and I were not married; and could I drag you, my dear, into the ignominy of an explanation? For the same reason, I hope you will conceal your real rank in the event of your ever meeting with English people at Thun; and while I wait your answer—which I trust you will *calmly* consider—I am, whatever unhappy circumstances may divide us,

"**Your loving husband**, "HARRY ORMOND."

She read this letter to the very end, and seemed not to understand it; she was only conscious of a dull sense of pain. Then she turned away from it—from its callous phrases, its weak reasoning, its obvious lies, all of which seemed a message from a stranger, not from Harry Ormond—and accidentally she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror. She saw there what recalled her to herself; for the ghastly face she beheld, tinged with the faint glow of the sunset, was terror-stricken and wild. In the next second she had banished that look; she rang the bell; and then stood erect and firm, with all the fire of her old profession tingling in her.

"Bid Mr. Chetwynd come here," she said to the servant.

In a minute or two the door was again opened, and there entered a tall, grey-haired man, with a grave and rather kindly expression of face.

She held out the letter, and said, in a cold, clear tone:

"Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"I do, your ladyship," said he.

"And you have been sent to see what money I should take for keeping out of the way, and not troubling Lord Knottingley? Very well——"

"I assure your ladyship——"

"You need not speak," she said, with a dignity of gesture which abashed him—which made him regard her with the half-frightened, half-admiring look she had many a time seen on the faces of the scene-shifters after one of her passionate climaxes—"I presume I am still the Marchioness of Knottingley?"

"Certainly."

"And my husband has commissioned you to receive my instructions?"

"He has, your ladyship; and if you would only allow me to explain the circumstances——"

"Mr. Chetwynd, you and I used to talk frankly with each other. I hope you will not embarrass yourself by making an apology for his lordship, when he himself has done that so admirably in this letter. Now, be good enough to attend to what I say. You will secure for me and my daughter a passage to America by the earliest vessel we can reach from here; and to-morrow morning you will accompany us on the first stage of the journey. I will take so much money from you as will land us in New York; whatever surplus there may be will be returned to Lord Knottingley."

"May I beg your ladyship to consider—to remain here until I communicate with his lordship?"

"I have considered," she said, calmly, in a tone which put an end to further remonstrance, "and I do not choose to remain in this house another day."

So Mr. Chetwynd withdrew. He saw nothing of this strangely self-possessed woman until the carriage was at the door next morning, ready to take her from the house which she had cast for ever behind her.

When he did see her he scarcely recognised her. She was haggard and white; her eyes were red and wild; she appeared to be utterly broken down. She was dressed in black, and so was the little girl she led by the hand. He did not know that she had spent the entire night in her daughter's room, and that it was not sleep which had occupied those long hours.

So it was that Annie Napier and her daughter arrived in America; and there she went again upon the stage, under the name of Annie Brunel, and earned a living for both of them. But the old fire had gone out; and there was not one who recognised in the actress her who had several years before been the idol of London. One message only she sent to her husband; and it was written, immediately on her reaching New York, in these words:

"HARRY ORMOND,—I married you for your love. When you take that from me, I do not care to have anything in its place. Nor need you try to buy my silence; I shall never trouble you.

"ANNIE NAPIER."

On the receipt of that brief note, Harry Ormond had a severe fit of compunction. The freedom of his new life was strong upon him, however; and in process of time he, like most men of his stamp, grew to have a conviction that he was not responsible for the wrong he had done. If she had wilfully relinquished the luxury he offered her, was he to blame?

Ten years afterwards, Lord Knottingley lay very sick. He was surrounded by attentive relatives, who, having affectionately interested themselves in him during his life, naturally expected to be paid for their solicitude at his death. But at the last moment remorse struck him. As the drowning man is said to be confronted by a ghastly panorama of his whole life, so he, in these last hours, recalled the old tenderness and love of his youth, which he had so cruelly outraged. He would have sent for her then; he would have braved the ridicule and indignation which he had once so feared; but it was too late. One act of reparation was alone possible. When Harry Ormond Marquis of Knottingley died, it was found that he had left, by a will dated only a few days before his death, his whole property to his wife, of whom nobody knew anything, accompanying the bequest with such expressions of affection and penitence as sorely puzzled his lady relatives.

Not for several months did the lawyers who acted for the trustees discover where the missing wife had taken up her abode in America; and then an elderly gentleman waited upon the actress to break the news of her husband's death, and to invite her to become the mistress of a large property and the wearer of a proud title.

"How pleased she will be!" he had said to himself, before seeing her.

Once in her presence, however, he did not so tastily judge the tender-eyed, beautiful, melancholy woman; and it was with all the delicacy he could command that he told his story, and watched its effect upon her handsome, sad face.

But these ten years of labour had not quite broken Annie Napier's spirit. Out of her grief and her tears—for she was a woman, and could not help still loving the lover of her youth—she rose with her old grandeur of manner, and refused the offer. Not theatrically, nor angrily, but simply and definitely, so that the messenger from England, perplexed and astonished, could only beg of her to think, not of herself, but of her daughter.

"My daughter," she said, perhaps rather bitterly, "will never seek, any more

than myself, to go amongst those people. God knows that it is she alone whom I consider in everything I do. I have taught her to earn her own bread; and I will teach her that her only chance of happiness is to marry, if she does marry, in her own profession. You appear to be surprised, sir; but what I say to you is not the result of any hasty impulse. Have you seen her?" she added, with a touch of pride. "Have you seen her since you came over? Some years hence you may find her in England, and she will reap my old triumphs again."

"If you will only consider what you are taking from her—the position she would hold—the——"

For an instant the large dark eyes of the actress were filled with a strange, wistful look; was she striving—as we often do strive—to anticipate the current of years, and look over the long future lying in wait for this girl of hers?

"I have considered, sir, many a year ago. She has been brought up in perfect ignorance of her birth and name; and there is no one of her associates who knows our secret. So she will remain."

This unlooked-for termination to his mission so astounded the lawyer, that he could not at first comprehend the decision of her tone.

"You will understand, madam," he said, "that professionally I have no resource but to return to England with your message. But may I not beg you to reflect? Is it not possible that you have been moved to this decision by a—what shall I say?—a view of things which may appear natural to you in your professional life, but which is looked upon otherwise by the outside world?——"

"You think I am led astray by theatrical notions of life?" she said, with a smile. "It was my experience of your 'outside world' which made me resolve that my girl should never suffer that which I have suffered. The resolution is a very old one, sir. But supposing that I should die, would she then have this property—would it belong to her?"

"Undoubtedly, if she chooses to accept it."

After a few moments' silence, the prudent and tender mother having calculated every possibility which might affect her daughter's happiness, she said to him:

"In that case, sir, I can always provide against her suffering want. I will give her to-day your address in England, and tell her that if at any future time I am taken from her, and if she should ever be in need, she can go to you; and then, sir, you will remember who Annie Brunel is."

"And you absolutely condemn your daughter to be an actress, when a word from you could make her an English lady——"

The woman before him drew herself up.

"When my daughter ceases to believe that an actress may be a lady, it will

be time for her to apply to you for the rank she has lost."

CHAPTER IV.
THE ACTRESS.

It was near midnight when an unusually notable and brilliant little party sate down to supper in the largest hall of an hotel in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Brilliant the meeting was, for beneath the strong lights shone the long white table with its gleaming crystal, and silver, and flowers; and notable it was in that the persons sitting there were, every one of them, marked by an obvious individualism of face and dress. They wore no mere company of cultivated nothings, as like each other in brain, costume, and manner, as the wine-glasses before them; scarcely a man or woman of them had not his or her own special character rendered apparent by this or that peculiarity of facial line or intentional adornment.

But there was one woman there—or girl, rather, for she was clearly not over twenty—whose character you could not easily catch. You might watch the expression of her eyes, listen to her bright, rapid, cheerful talk, and study her bearing towards her associates; and then confess that there was something elusive about her—she had not exhibited her real nature to you—you knew nothing of her but those superficial characteristics which were no index to the spirit underneath.

Slight in figure, and somewhat pale and dark, there was nevertheless a certain dignity about her features, and a stateliness in her gestures, which gave an almost massive grandeur to her appearance. Then her magnificent black hair lay around the clear, calm face, which was rendered the more intensely spiritual by large eyes of a deep and tender grey. They were eyes, under these long eyelashes, capable of a great sadness, and yet they were not sad. There seemed to play around the beautiful, intellectual face a bright, superficial, unconscious vivacity; and she herself appeared to take a quite infantine interest in the cheerful trivialities around her. For the rest, she was dressed in a gleaming white *moiré*, with tight sleeves which came down to her tiny wrists, and there ended in a faint line of blue; and through the great braided masses of her black hair there was wound a thick cord of twisted silver, which also had a thread of blue cunningly interwoven with it. The artistic possibilities of her fine face and complexion were

made the most of; for she *was* an artist, one of the few true artists who have been seen upon our modern stage.

This was Miss Annie Brunel, who in three months from the date of her arrival in this country had won the heart of London. The young American actress, with her slight and nervous physique, her beautiful head, and the dark lustre of her eyes, was photographed, lithographed, and written about everywhere: people went and wept covertly beneath the spell of her voice; for once unanimity prevailed among all the critics who were worth attention, and they said that the new actress was a woman of genius. Who could doubt it that had witnessed the utter self-abandonment of her impersonations? She did not come upon the stage with a thought about her jewellery, a consciousness of her splendid hair, and an eye to the critical corner of the stalls. On the stage she was no longer mistress of herself. Her eyes deepened until they were almost black; her face was stirred with the white light of passion; and her words were instinct with the tenderness which thrills a theatre to its core. When the sudden intensity died down, when she resumed her ordinary speech and dress, she seemed to have come out of a trance. Not a trace remained of that fire and those intonations, which were the result of unconscious creation; her eyes resumed their serene, happy indifference, her face its pleased, childlike expression. Swift, active, dexterous she was, full of all sorts of genial and merry activities; that kindling of the eye and tremor of the voice belonged to the dream-life she led elsewhere.

The supper was rather a nondescript affair, resembling the little entertainment sometimes given by an author on the production of his new piece. As the play, however, in which Miss Brunel had just appeared was "Romeo and Juliet," there was a little difficulty about the author's being present to perform the ordinary duties; and so the manager's very good friend, the Graf von Schönstein, had stepped in and offered to play the part of host on the occasion.

The Graf, indeed, occupied the chair—a large and corpulent man, with a broad, fair face, small blue eyes, red hands, a frilled shirt, flowered waistcoat, and much jewellery. He had made the acquaintance of Miss Brunel during the previous year in America, and lost no time in renewing it now that she had so suddenly become famous in England. Of the Graf, who it may be mentioned was once a respectable tea-broker in Thames Street, E.C., we shall hear more.

On the left of the chairman sate the manager, a middle-aged man, with grey hair and a melancholy face; on the right Miss Brunel, and next to her a young man of the name of Will Anerley, a friend of Count Schönstein. Then followed several members of the company, an elderly little woman who officiated as Miss Brunel's guardian, two or three critics, and a young man who spoke to nobody, but kept his eyes intently fixed upon a charming *soubrette* (with whom he had quarrelled some days before) who was wickedly flirting with Mercutio. There was no lack

of jest and talk down both sides of the table, for the wine-glasses were kept well filled; and occasionally there rang out, clear and full, the mellifluous laughter of the Nurse—a stout, big, red-faced woman, who had a habit of using her pocket handkerchief where a table-napkin might have been more appropriate—as she cracked her small jokes with Benvolio, who sate opposite to her. Then Friar Lawrence, who had thrown aside his robe and become comic, happened to jolt a little champagne into Lady Capulet's lap; and the angrier she grew over his carelessness, the more did the people laugh, until she herself burst out with a big, good-natured guffaw.

Meanwhile the small clique at the upper end of the table was engaged in a conversation by itself, Count Schönstein appealing to the manager vehemently:

"Was I not right in begging you to give the public Miss Brunel's 'Juliet?' There never was such a triumph, Miss Brunel; I assure you, you have taken London by storm. And with the public satisfied, will the critics object? You will not see a dissentient voice in the papers on Monday morning. What do you say to that, Mr. Helstone?"

The man whom he addressed had forsaken the cluster of his brother critics, and was busily engaged in amusing the pretty *soubrette*, whom he had entirely drawn away from poor Mercutio.

"Why," he said, with a faint smile, apparently bent upon puzzling the gorgeous-looking gentleman who had imprudently interrupted him, "I should be sorry to see such unanimity, for Miss Brunel's sake. Conscientious journalism, like every conscientious journalist, knows that there are two sides to every question, and will do its best to write on both. The odds will be the truth."

"Do you mean to tell me," asked the Count, somewhat pompously, "that you have no more conscience than to advocate different things in different papers?"

"If I write what I know on one side of a subject in one paper, and write up the other side in another paper, I free myself from a charge of suppressing truth; and I——"

Whereupon the *soubrette*, with the brown curls and the wicked blue eyes, pulled his sleeve and made him upset a claret glass.

"What a clumsy creature you are," she whispered. "And what is the use of talking to that ridiculous old fool? Tell me, do you think Miss Brunel handsome?"

"I think she has the face of a woman of genius," he said, with a glance of genuine admiration.

"Bah! that means nothing. Don't you think she shows her teeth on purpose when she laughs; and then those big, soft eyes make her look affectedly sentimental. Why do you grin so? I suppose I am not as handsome as she is; but I wonder if she could put on my gloves and boots?"

"You have adorable hands and feet, Miss Featherstone; everybody allows

that."

"Thank you. They say that every ugly woman has pretty hands and feet."

"Nature leaves no creature absolutely unprotected, my dear. Let me give you some vanilla cream."

"You are a brute. I hate you."

"I have generally found that when a young lady says she hates you, she means she loves you—if you have a good income."

"I have generally found that when a young lady rejects her suitor because of his want of brain, he instantly says she cast him off because of his want of money. But I wish you'd keep quiet, and let me hear what Mr. Melton is saying about next week. If he thinks I'll play the people in with a farce, as well as play in the burlesque, he is mistaken. However, since you people have taken to write up Miss Brunel, she will order everything; and if the poor dear thinks seven too soon for her nerves after tea, I suppose she will get played whatever she wants."

"Spiteful thing! You're thinking of her handsome face and eyes and hair: why don't you look in the mirror and calm yourself?"

The little group at the head of the table had now split itself into two sections; and while Count Schönstein talked almost exclusively to Mr. Melton, Miss Brunel was engaged in what was apparently an interesting conversation with Will Anerley, who sate next her. But a patient observer would have noticed that the stout and pompous Count kept his eyes pretty well fixed upon the pair on his right; and that he did not seem wholly pleased by the amused look which was on Miss Brunel's face as she spoke, in rather a low tone, to her companion:

"You confess you are disappointed with me. That is quite natural; but tell me how I differ from what you expected me to be."

She turned her large, lustrous eyes upon him; and there was a faint smile on her face.

"Well," he said, "on the stage you are so unlike any one I ever saw that I did not expect to find you in private life like—like any one else, in fact."

"Do you mean that I am like the young ladies you would expect to find in your friends' house, if you were asked to go and meet some strangers?"

"Precisely."

"You are too kind," she said, looking down. "I have always been taught, and I know, that private people and professional people are separated by the greatest differences of character and habits; and that if I went amongst those young ladies of whom you speak, I should feel like some dreadfully wicked person who had got into heaven by mistake and was very uncomfortable. Have you any sisters?"

"One. Well, she is not my sister, but a distant relation who has been brought up in my father's house as if she were my sister."

"Am I like her?"

"No. I mean, you are not like her in appearance; but in manner, and in what you think, and so forth, you would find her as like yourself as possible. I cannot understand your strange notion that some unaccountable barrier exists between you and other people."

"That is because you have never lived a professional life," she said. "I know, myself, that there is the greatest difference between me now and when I am in one of my parts. Then I am almost unconscious of myself—I scarcely know what I'm doing; and now I should like to go on sitting like this, making fun with you or with anybody, or amusing myself in any way. Do you know, I fancy nothing would give me so much delight as battledore and shuttlecock if I might have it in my own house; but I am afraid to propose such a thing to my guardian, Mrs. Christmas, or she would think I was mad. Did you never wish you were only ten years old again, that you might get some fun without being laughed at?"

"I used constantly to go bird's-nesting in Russia, when we were too lazy to go on a regular shooting-party, and never enjoyed anything half so much. And you know cricket has been made a manly game in order to let men think themselves boys for an hour or two."

"I should like you to become acquainted with my dear old Christmas—do you see her down there?—and then you would know how a professional life alters one. It was she, not my dear mother, who taught me all the gestures, positions, and elocution which are the raw material we actresses use to deceive you. How she scolds me when I do anything that differs from her prescriptions! And indeed she cannot understand how one, in the hurry of a part, should abandon one's-self to chance, and forget the ordinary 'business.' Now the poor old creature has to content herself with a little delicate compliment or two instead of the applause of the pit; and I am sometimes put to my wits' end to say something kind to her, being her only audience. Won't you come and help me some afternoon?"

The unconscious audacity of the proposal, so quietly and so simply expressed, staggered the young man; and he could only manage to mention something about the very great pleasure it would give him to do so.

He was very much charmed with his companion; but he was forced to confess to himself that she did, after all, differ a good deal from the gentlewomen whom he was in the habit of meeting. Nor was it wonderful that she should: the daughter of an actress, brought up from her childhood among stage-traditions, driven at an early period, by her mother's death, to earn her own living, and having encountered for several years all the vicissitudes and experience of a half-vagrant life, it would have been a miracle had she not caught up some angular peculiarities from this rough-and-ready education. Anerley was amazed to find that easy audacity and frankness of speech, her waywardness and occasional eccentricity of behaviour, conjoined with an almost ridiculous simplicity. The very

attitude her Bohemianism led her to adopt towards the respectable in life, was in itself the result of a profound childlike ignorance; and, as he afterwards discovered, was chiefly the result of the tuition of a tender and anxious mother, who was afraid of her daughter ever straying from the folds of a profession which is so generous and kindly to the destitute and unprotected. All this, and much more, he was afterwards to learn of the young girl who had so interested him. In the meantime she seemed to him to be a spoilt child, who had something of the sensitiveness and sagacity of a woman.

"Look how he blushes," said the charming *soubrette* to her companion.

"Who?"

"The gentleman beside Miss Brunel."

"Are you jealous, that you watch these two so closely?"

"I'm not; but I do consider him handsome—handsomer than any man I know. He is not smooth, and fat, and polished, like most gentlemen who do nothing. He looks like an engine-driver cleaned—and then his great brown moustache and his thick hair—no, I'll tell you what he's like; he is precisely the Ancient Briton you see in bronzes, with the thin face and the matted hair——"

"And the scanty dress. I suppose the ancient Britons, like Scotchmen nowadays, wore an indelicate costume, in order to save cloth."

"I *do* consider him handsome; but *her*! And as for her being a great actress, and a genius, and all that, I don't consider her to be a bit better than any of us."

"If that is the case, I can quite understand and approve your depreciation of her."

"I will box your ears."

"Don't. They might tell tales; and you know I'm married."

"*Tant pis pour toi.*"

The Ancient Briton had meanwhile recovered his equanimity; and both he and Miss Brunel had joined in an argument Mr. Melton was setting forth about the deliciousness of being without restraint. The grave manager, under the influence of a little champagne, invariably rose into the realm of abstract propositions; and indeed his three companions, all of them in a merry mood, helped him out with a dozen suggestions and confirmations.

"And worst of all," said Miss Brunel, "I dislike being bound down by time. Why must I go home just now, merely because it is late? I should like at this very moment to go straight out into the country, without any object, and without any prospect of return."

"And why not do so?" cried Count Schönstein. "My brougham can be brought round in a few minutes; let us four get in and drive straight away out of London—anywhere."

"A capital idea," said Melton. "What do you say, Miss Brunel?"

"I will go with pleasure," she replied, with bright childish fun in her eyes. "But we must take Mrs. Christmas with us. And that will be five?"

"Then let me go outside and smoke," said Will Anerley.

The supper party now broke up; and the ladies went off to get their bonnets, wrappers, and cloaks. In a few minutes Count Schönstein's brougham was at the door; and Miss Brunel, having explained to Mrs. Christmas the position of affairs, introduced her to Will Anerley. She had come forward to the door of the brougham, and Anerley saw a very small bright-eyed woman, with remarkably white hair, who was in an extreme nervous flutter. He was about to go outside, as he had promised, when Count Schönstein made the offer, which his position demanded, to go instead.

"Yes, do," said Miss Brunel, putting her hand lightly on Will Anerley's arm.

The Count was, therefore, taken at his word; Anerley remained by the young actress's side; and Mrs. Christmas being dragged in, away rolled the brougham.

"And wherever are you going at this time of night, Miss Annie?" said the old woman in amazement.

"For a drive into the country, mother. Look how bright it is!"

And bright it was. There was no moon as yet, but there was clear starlight; and as they drove past the Green Park, the long rows of ruddy lamps hung in the far darkness like strings of golden points, the counterpart of the gleaming silver points above. And there, away in the north, glimmered the pale jewels of Cassiopeia; the white star on Andromeda's forehead stood out from the dark sea; Orion coldly burned in the south, and the red eye of Aldebaran throbbed in the strange twilight. The dark grey streets, and the orange lamps, and the tall houses, and the solitary figures of men and women hurried past and disappeared; but the great blue vault, with its twinkling eyes, accompanied the carriage-windows, rolled onward with them, and always glimmered in.

This mad frolic was probably pleasant enough for every one of the merry little party inside the vehicle; but it could scarcely be very fascinating to the victimized Count, who found himself driving through the chill night-air in company with his own coachman. Perhaps, however, he wished to earn the gratitude of Miss Brunel by this dumb obedience to her whim; for he did not seek to arrest or alter the course of the brougham as it was driven blindly out into the country. He could hear the laughter from within the carriage; for they were all in the hest of moods—except, perhaps, Miss Brunel, whom the sight of the stars rather saddened.

At length they came to a toll-bar. Melton put his head out and asked the Count where they were.

"Hounslow."

"Is that the Bell Inn?"

"Yes."

"Then suppose we get out, wake the people up, and give the horses a rest, while we have a little trip on foot to Hounslow Heath?"

"Is not that where all the murders and robberies used to be committed?" Miss Brunel was heard to say.

"This is the very inn," said Will Anerley, "which the gentlemen of the road used to frequent; but unfortunately, the Heath has been all enclosed. There is no more Heath."

"We shall find something that will do for it," said Melton, as the party left the brougham, and passed down the opposite road.

Once out of the glare of the lamp at the toll-bar, they had nothing to guide them but the cold, clear starlight. Black lay the hedges on either side; black stood the tall trees against the sky; blacker still the deep ditch which ran along the side of the path, or disappeared under the gravelled pathway leading up to some road-side cottage. How singularly the light laughter of the little party smote upon the deep, intense silence of the place; and what a strange contrast there was between their gay abandonment and the sombre gloom around them! There was something weird and striking running through the absurdity of this incomprehensible excursion.

"There," said Melton, going up to a gate, and peering over into a vague, dark meadow, "is a bit of the old Heath, I know. Was it here, I wonder, that Claude Duval danced his celebrated dance with the lady?"

"Let us suppose it was," said the Count. "And why should we not have a dance now on the Heath? Mr. Melton, will you give us some music?"

"With pleasure," said the manager, opening the gate, and allowing his merry companions to pass into the meadow.

They went along until they were within a short distance of a clump of trees; and then, the Count having been ingeniously compelled to take Mrs. Christmas as his partner, Miss Brunel being Anerley's *vis-à-vis*, the manager proceeded to sing a set of quadrilles in rather an unmelodious manner, varying *la, la, la*, with *tow, row, row*. The great, pompous Count puffed, and blew, and guffawed; the little Mrs. Christmas danced with a prim and grave precision; while all did their best to help out the figures, and stumbled, and set each other right again, and laughed right heartily over the mad performance.

Then there was a sudden shriek, clear and sharp, that rang through the darkness; the dancing suddenly ceased; and Anerley sprang forward just in time to prevent Miss Brunel from sinking to the ground, her face pale as death.

"Did you not see it?" she gasped, still trembling. "Something white flashed past through the trees there—in a moment—and it seemed to have no shape."

"By Jove, I saw it too!" said Melton, who had abruptly ceased his singing; "and for the life of me I can't imagine what it was."

"A white cow," suggested Anerley.

"I tell you it flew past like a streak of lightning," said Melton.

"More likely a white doe belonging to the park over there," said the Count, who was inwardly the most terrified person present.

"Let us get away from here," said Miss Brunel, who had recovered her self-composure, but was very grave. "Whatever it was, the grass is too wet for us to remain."

So they left the meadow, and walked rather silently back to the toll-bar, got into the brougham, and were driven to their respective homes.

CHAPTER V.

ST. MARY-KIRBY.

Champagne has many good qualities, but none more marked than the mild and temporary nature of the stimulus it affords. The bright and cheerful excitement it produces—so long as it is neither Russian champagne, nor one of those highly ingenious products which chemistry and the wit of man have devised—does not last so long as to interfere with any serious occupation, even should that be merely sleep; while it involves none of the gloomy reaction which too often haunts the sparkle of other wines with a warning shadow. When Will Anerley got up on the morning following the wild escapade on Hounslow Heath, it was not indulgence in wine which smote him with a half-conscious remorse. He had neither a throbbing headache nor a feverish pulse. But as he looked out of his bedroom window and saw the pale sun glimmering down on the empty streets, the strange calm of a Sunday morning—touching even in the cramped thoroughfares of London—fell upon him, and he thought of the hectic gaiety of the previous night, and knew that all the evening one tender girlish heart had been wearying for his coming, away down in a quiet Kentish vale.

His absence was the more inexcusable in that it was uncertain how soon he might have to leave England. He was a civil engineer; and from the time he had left the apprentice stool his life had been a series of foreign excursions. He had been two years in Turkey, another year in Canada, six months in Russia, and so on; and at this moment he had been but a short time home from Wallachia,

whence he had returned with his face browner his frame tougher than ever. There was little of the young Englishman about him. There was a Celtic intensity in him which had long ago robbed him of the loose fat, the lazy gait, the apathetic indifference which generally fall to the lot of lads born and brought up as he had been; and now—with his big brown moustache, thick hair, and hazel eyes, and with that subdued determination in his look, which had made the little *soubrette* call him an Ancient Briton—he was a man whom some would call handsome, but whom most people would admire chiefly on account of the intelligence, firmness of character, and determination written upon his face.

He dressed and breakfasted hastily; got a cab, and was just in time to catch the train. After nearly an hour's drive down through Kent—pleasant enough on that bright Spring morning—he reached Horton, the station nearest to St. Mary-Kirby.

Horton stands on the top of a hill sloping down into the valley in which lies St. Mary-Kirby; and if you climb, as Will Anerley did, to the top of a coal heap which generally stands besides the empty trucks of the station, you will see the long wooded hollow from end to end, with its villages, churches, and breadths of field and meadow. It was not to look again, however, on that pretty bit of scenery which he knew so well that he scrambled to the top of the coals, and stood there, with his hand shading his eyes from the sunlight. It was Dove Anerley he wished to see come along the valley, on her way to church; and he waited there to discover what route she should take, that so he might intercept her.

Yet there seemed to be no living thing in the quiet valley. Sleepily lay the narrow river in its winding channel, marked by twin rows of pollard willows, now green with their first leaves; sleepily lay the thin blue smoke above the far white cottages and the grey churches; sleepily lay the warm sunlight over the ruddy ploughed fields, the green meadows, the dark fir-wood along the top of the hill; and sleepily it struck on the great, gleaming chalk-pit on the side of the incline; while a faint blue haze hung around the dim horizon, half hiding the white specks of houses on the distant uplands. It was a beautiful picture in the tender light of the young spring; but there was no Dove Anerley there.

He looked at his watch.

"Half-past ten," he thought, "and as our church is under repair, she is sure to walk to Woodhill church. But if I go down into the valley, I shall be sure to miss her."

As he spoke, there was visible a tiny speck of grey and brown crossing a broad meadow near the river; and almost at the same moment the subdued and distant music of the church bells floated up on the air. Will Anerley leaped from the coal-heap to the ground; and then straight down the hill he went, making

free use of the fields on his way.

He suddenly found that the still valley was full of life, and sound, and gladness; that the morning was a miracle of mornings; that the breath of the sweet spring air seemed laden with the secret odours of innumerable flowers. And, indeed, as he walked on, there was plenty to delight him, even had Dove Anerley not been there. For the lamblike March had bequeathed to his fickle sister a legacy of golden weather, and she now carried it in her open hand, sharing it with all of us. The orchards were white with bloom, here and there a rose-red apple-tree among the snowy bunches of the pears; the meadows were thick with daisies and cowslips, the grey sheep throwing sharp black shadows on the glowing green; the tall elms, sprinkled over with young leaves, rose from rough and ragged earth banks that were covered with withered brier, and glistening celandine, dull coltsfoot, and ruddy dead-nettle; the stately chesnuts had burst their resinous buds and were already showing brown spikes of closed flowers; along the hedges, where the blackbird was nursing her young, and the thrush sitting on her second nestful of blue eggs, the blossoms of the blackthorn sparkled here and there like white stars among the rich, thick green of the elm; and through all these colours and lights and shadows ran, and hummed, and sung the coarse cawing of rooks, the murmur of bees, the splashing of the river down at the mill, and the silvery music of a lark which hung as if suspended by a thread from the cold, clear blue above.

St. Mary-Kirby was just visible and no more. You could see the quaint old mill down by the riverside, and near it an ancient farm-house, with black cattle and horses in the yard, and white pigeons flying about the rusty-red tiles of the farm buildings. Further up, the old grey church, built of "Kentish rag," shone brightly in the sunshine; and then, among the trees, you caught a glimpse of the cottages, of Mr. Anerley's house, fronting the village-green, and of the old inn with its swaying sign. There is not in Kent a more thoroughly English village than St. Mary-Kirby; and one, at least, of its inhabitants used to pray fervently every Sunday morning that no railway should ever come near its precincts.

When Will Anerley reached the bottom of the valley, he found a number of St. Mary-Kirby people walking in isolated groups, towards Woodhill church; but one only of these people had chosen a somewhat circuitous route through the meadows lying on the south side of the river. Why she had chosen this route was probably known only to herself; but, at any rate, Will paused by the side of a stile to which the path through the meadows led. He had recognised from a considerable distance the slate-grey silk dress and brown velvet jacket which she wore; and now, as he watched her coming along, he saw that she, too, had recognised him, and that there was a pleased look in her eyes.

"Why did you come this way?" he asked, as she drew near.

"Because I thought I should meet you," she replied, with a frank smile.

He helped her up and down the rude wooden steps, and as she alit upon the other side she suffered him to touch her cheek with his lips.

"Good morning, Dove."

"Good morning, Will. I made up my mind to scold you dreadfully; and all the way over from St. Mary I have been thinking what I should say to you; and now I haven't it in my heart to say a single word."

"Heaght" for "heart," she said, and "woghd" for "word;" and there was a quaint softness in this purring, half-foreign pronunciation which made her utterances all the more tender, and seemed to harmonize with the childlike prettiness of the large violet eyes set in the delicate face, which was surrounded by crisp and wavy light-brown hair.

"That's a good girl," he said; and then she put her hand on his arm, and they walked away between the green hedges, towards Woodhill Church.

It was at a concert in St. James's Hall that I first saw Dove Anerley; and while the people sang "Athalie," I sate and wondered what was the story written on that beautiful, almost sad face. It was one of those rare faces which tantalize you in the very act of admiring them. There was nothing in it of that mature, vigorous, definite beauty of form and complexion which a man may calmly observe and criticise in the face of a woman; but a tender uncertainty, a half-suggested and shrinking loveliness, which made one vaguely conscious that this frail and beautiful smile of nature might suddenly vanish from the fine features. It was not that the girl seemed unwell, or even in any degree fragile; but simply that one, in looking at her face, could not help regretting that her loveliness was not less delicate and more pronounced, that there was not more life and less sensitiveness in her large violet eyes. How beautiful she looked that evening! The passionate music seemed to have called up a flush upon her bright complexion, and lent some strange wistfulness to her big eyes; and then, when she turned to her companions and smiled, her pretty mouth and nut-white teeth might have driven a painter mad. Indeed, I know of at least one artist then present who forgot all about Mendelssohn in trying so to fix her expression on his memory that he might afterwards reproduce it on canvas—her expression, her face, and the loose golden-brown hair bound down by a band of dark-blue velvet. It was two years afterwards that accident threw me in the way of the Anerleys. I had never forgotten the meaning apparently written on that sensitive face; but Dove's story, as I then heard it, differed entirely from what I had imagined.

"Why have you come alone this morning?" said Will Anerley to his companion, as they walked.

"You know papa never goes to church," said the young girl. "And mamma has never gone to hear Mr. Oldham since he spoke to her about the Athanasian

creed. I suppose you did not hear about that since you came home?"

"No," said Will; though he had an idea why his mother—whom Dove had also been taught to call "mamma"—feared the Athanasian creed.

"You know," continued the girl, very seriously, "how anxious mamma is because papa won't go to church, and because of his studies and the strange things he says at times; and sometimes she gets very sad about it. It is the only thing she is ever sad about; and when I tell her that there can't be much wrong in what so good a man believes, she only gets the sadder, and sometimes cries a little bit. Well, this Sunday morning she and I were talking about it all the way to church, and she was very much disturbed. I don't think she had ever paid any attention to the Athanasian creed before; but on that morning, Mr. Oldham read it, and I saw her look strangely at him and at the book. Then all at once her face got quite white, she shut the book, and without a word to me walked out of the church and went straight home."

"And I suppose my father laughed a little, and tried to make her believe that he had already constructed some theoretical fire-escape from the dangers with which he was threatened?"

"Mr. Oldham came over next day to call upon mamma, and he was talking very seriously to her, and making her very miserable—indeed, she was crying nearly all the time—when papa came into the room."

"Oh—was it by the door that Mr. Oldham left?"

"What do you mean? Papa stood there, with that curious smile he has on his face when he puzzles and perplexes people, you know; and in a few minutes Mr. Oldham was in a terrible rage. I remember distinctly one thing papa said. 'Mr. Oldham,' he said, with a sort of twinkle in his eye, 'I am not surprised that you have the Athanasian creed in your service; for clergymen, like other men, must be allowed the use of bad language occasionally. But you should indulge yourself privately, and not frighten women when they go to pray in your church.'"

"How very wicked of him! But then, Dove, Mr. Oldham belongs to the next parish; and he had no business to go poaching on Mr. Bexley's manor."

"And so very anxious she is about you also, Will. She is sometimes very sad about papa; but she can't help seeing what a good man he is. She says to me that you are young, and that if you grow up to believe what he believes, you may not be quite the same—you know, dear, that is only a feeling she has."

"Who wouldn't be orthodox to please such a mother?" said Will.

"And I, too," said the girl, with a touch of colour in her cheek, and in rather a lower voice, "I should be grieved to think that—that—that you did not care about going to church, and that you did not believe as we do."

"What should have made you think about all these things?" asked Anerley, with some astonishment.

"Well, when you wrote to us from Jassy, saying you were coming home, mamma came to papa and begged him to lock up all those dangerous books he is so fond of. 'My dear,' he said to her, 'Will knows more about such matters than I know; for he has breathed the new atmosphere of these new times, whereas I have nothing to help me but reading.' Is it true, Will?"

"Is what true? I tell you, darling, I will be whatever you wish me to be; so don't distress your mind about it."

It was their arrival at the church-door which stopped this conversation. They entered, and seated themselves in a tall, damp pew, while a small organ was sending its smooth and solemn notes through the hushed little building.

They were not "engaged," these two; but themselves and everybody connected with them looked forward to their marriage as a matter of course. Dove Anerley was the daughter of a distant relative of Mrs. Anerley's, who had gladly escaped from a variety of misfortunes by the easy gateway of death; and Mr. Anerley had adopted the child, brought her up, and grown passionately fond of her. He was a man of very peculiar notions, which had earned for him among the vulgar the charitable title of atheist and materialist; and so this dangerous and wicked person sat down one day before his son, when the young man had come home from college, and said to him:

"Attend to what I am going to say, Will. You have a good prospect before you: you have a sound constitution, a tolerable education, and plenty of natural ability. I am not going to spoil your chances in life by letting you fancy that you will have any money at my death—do you understand? I will start you in any profession you choose; thereafter you must fight your own battle, as befits a man; and whatever I leave will go to your mother and to Dove. If you were a fool, I should make some provision for you; as it is, I won't."

"Why, you don't suppose, father, I would rob either Dove or my mother of anything you could give them?"

That was all that passed between the two men on the subject; and in time it came to be regarded as a matter of course that Dove Anerley was to inherit whatever wealth her foster-father should leave behind him, irrespective of the provision for his widow. Had Will Anerley stayed at home, and been accustomed to regard Dove as his sister, he would never have thought of marrying her. But even in his boyhood he had been of a singularly active and inquiring character; always anxious to study new subjects, new scenes, new faces; never satisfied with any achievement as an ultimate result; and so, his apprenticeship completed, instead of hiring himself out as an assistant to the engineer of some railway or other company, and spending a dull life in a dingy office, he threw himself boldly upon the world, and went up and down, acquiring such knowledge as no man can gain by the study of books. Nor was it only in professional

directions that his inquiries extended! He had caught what is called "the spirit" of these times; was full of vague idealisms, particularly of a philanthropic kind; and was moved by a restless desire to trace back to first principles the commonest conditions of modern existence. That is a phase through which most young men who read books pass. Now and again only do we find a man of sufficient strength of character to preserve those gentle tendencies against the rough wear and tear of travel and its consequent experience. Great, therefore, was his delight to have a profession which allowed him to move freely about; and wherever he went the tender remembrance of Dove Anerley went with him.

As for her, she had never taken any pains to conceal from anybody her fondness for him—a fondness which had grown to be a part of her life. He was mixed up in all the finest aspirations, he was the creator of all the noblest idealisms, of her too delicately sensitive organization. In that supreme religious exaltation which is produced by fine music, by earnest prayer, or by a beautiful sunset, his was the human face towards which, unconsciously to herself, she looked for the divine sympathy and compassion which in such moments man begs from the Deity. Even now, as they stood in the old oaken pew, and as she sang sweetly and clearly that tenderest of hymns—

"Abide with me. Fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!"

—was she guilty of any great crime in involuntarily making him the object of that impassioned cry? Her love was her religion, her religion her love; she knew not how to distinguish between them, and like the old Romans had but one word to describe this holiest feeling of her nature.

"Now, Will," she said, cheerfully, as the people streamed out of the close little building into the sweet-smelling air, "let us have a nice long walk through Woodhill Wood on our way home; it is covered with flowers just now; and then you will tell me why you did not come down last night. Everybody expected you, and dinner was as dull as it could be without you. The Hepburns were over, you know, and Mr. Drysdale, and they came half an hour too soon and sate in the drawing-room, and talked of nothing but the number of breeding partridges, and the condition of the trout, and how they hoped the orchards wouldn't suffer by this early hot weather. Only big John Hepburn—who does nothing in the world but shoot and go to hounds, you know—made papa laugh very much by stretching his long legs, yawning, and saying disconsolately, 'Ah, yes, Mr. Anerley, we're getting into the dreary summer months.' He couldn't understand why

papa laughed, and said he had made no joke he was aware of."

By this time they had walked through the tall green grass of the churchyard, had clambered up the hill a bit, and left the warm sunshine for the cool shade of the wood. Only here and there did the sunlight glimmer down through the dense forest of young oak and birch; but there was no need of sunlight to make that tangled carpeting of moss and grass and wild-flowers any the brighter. All around them, and as far as they could see down the glades between the trees, the earth was thick with anemones and great clusters of primroses, here and there a few wild hyacinths among patches of tenderly veined wood-sorrel, and everywhere the blush-coloured cuckoo-flower with its coronet of pale pink buds. Hushed and still the place was, except when a jay went screaming from one tall tree to another, or some cawing rook flew past through the width of fleecy blue and white overhead.

"I stayed in town, then, Dove, to go to a little supper, and there I met Miss Brunel."

"The actress whom everybody is talking about?"

"Yes."

"You met her privately?"

"Yes; why should that astonish you?"

"Do tell me what she is like—what she said to you—did she speak to you?"

"She is a very handsome girl, with splendid hair and eyes, and the most charming manner. What amused me chiefly was the half-maternal way in which she talked to me—who might have been her father,—and the airs of profound experience which she quite unconsciously gave herself. Then all the time she was ready to be amused by the tiniest things; indeed, it was quite a pleasure to sit near her and watch the comfortable, self-satisfied, almost childish way in which she delighted herself with everything."

Will spoke quite warmly; his companion was silent for some time afterwards.

"Why are you so quiet this morning, Dove?" he asked.

"Am I more than usually quiet?" she said.

"Indeed," he continued, without taking further notice of the matter, "I *was* vexed with myself for not coming down last evening. The fact is, I may not have many Saturday afternoons down at the old place before I leave again. I am thinking of going to Honduras——"

"To Honduras!" she repeated, rather faintly; "why should you go to Honduras?"

"They want to sink some Artesian wells about——"

"Is there no one in Honduras can sink Artesian wells?" she asked, with a scarcely-concealed pout of vexation. "Your father says you have thrown away

plenty of your life in going abroad, and that now you should settle here and get up a good connexion in your own country."

"Although Miss Brunel made me feel old by her efforts to play the mother to me, Dove, I am young enough to feel a touch of wandering blood stir in me yet."

"Send Miss Brunel to make the Artesian wells!" said Dove, with a quick flush on her face, and then she broke out laughing, partly because she was amused at herself, and partly because she was out of humour with him.

Indeed nothing delighted him so much as to see a little harmless break in the even gentleness of the young girl's manner. It was like the rustling of a piece of tissue paper, or the crumpling of a rose-leaf; the little petulances of which she was sometimes guilty were but a source of amusement to both of them.

CHAPTER VI.

CHESNUT BANK.

At last they reached the brow of the hill, and beneath them lay St. Mary-Kirby, the sunlight falling lightly on the grey church, the white wooden cottages, the broad green common, and on two tall-necked swans floating on the glasslike mill-head.

Mr. Anerley's house—known in the neighbourhood as Chesnut Bank—was separated from the common by a large circular pond which was fed by a spring, and that again was divided from the house by a tall hedge, a row of short limes with black stems and young green leaves, and a pretty large lawn. Behind the house was a long garden now almost smothered in blossom, and along the carriage-drive stood rows of lilacs and acacias, with here and there an almond-tree, which bore a sprinkling of deep pink flowers. It was an old-fashioned house of red brick, the original builder's intention having clearly been to sacrifice to inside comfort outside appearance. When Mr. Anerley, therefore, had one side of it partly rebuilt, he had no scruple in adorning the drawing-room with French windows, which opened out upon the lawn, while the dining-room at the other side of the building had two large bay windows of the usual height from the ground. The house, nevertheless, was very snug and comfortable; and if you looked across the common and the pond, and saw it nestled among the thick foliage of lime and lilac and birch, you would say it was a very charming little

country residence.

When Dove and her companion got down to this sheltered little place, they found it as usual alive with children. The gathering together from all his friends and relations of whatever small boys and girls they could spare, was a hobby of Mr. Anerley's. He liked to keep a perpetual children's party going at Chesnut Bank; and there was not a governess in one of his friends' houses who did not owe to him many a grateful holiday. Then this monstrous ogre of a materialist, who already smelt of brimstone in the nostrils of the people around, was as careful about the proprieties and go-to-bed prayers of the little ones as he was convinced that amusement ought to be their chief education. Indeed he once caught the Buttons of the small establishment amusing himself and a companion by teaching a little boy to repeat some highly improper phrases, and before the youthful joker knew where he was he felt the lithe curl of a horsewhip round his legs—a sensation he remembered for many a day after while gaily polishing his spoons and washing out his decanters.

At this moment a little girl was seated at the piano laboriously playing a hymn-tune possessed of no very recondite chords; while on the lawn in front Mr. Anerley lay at full length, a book between his face and the sunshine. Mrs. Anerley sat on a low chair beside him, also reading, a large deerhound at her feet; while two or three more children were scampering over the lawn, occasionally "coming a cropper" over a croquet-hoop. She was a pretty little woman, with dark brown hair and eyes—nervous, sensitive, and full of the tenderest idealisms—altogether a noble, affectionate, and lovable little woman. Her husband was a rather tall and spare man, with short rough grey hair and whiskers, an aquiline nose, and gentle grey eyes. He was a keen sportsman and a languid student: a man who liked to cover his weaknesses of sentiment with a veil of kindly humour; and seemed to live very easily and comfortably, considering that he was accused of harbouring materialism—that terrible quicklime, which, according to some profound calculators, is about to shrivel up the heavens and the earth, and all the gentle humanities which have been growing up through so many thousand years.

"Hillo, Will," said Mr. Anerley, as the young man approached and kissed his mother, "why didn't you come down last night?"

"Old Hubbard got me to stay in town with him that we might go to a supper."

"He told me he would likely see you; and asked us all to walk over to the Place in the evening. Poor man, he has never been himself since the Lord Chamberlain refused to let him attend a levee as the Count von Schönstein. Will, when anybody offers you 30,000*l.* a year, don't take it."

"I won't, father."

"Hubbard used to be as jolly, happy, and stupid a man as you could wish

to meet; and since he got that money left him, he has been the most miserable of mortals. I asked him yesterday why he did not go amongst the city people, become a councillor, or alderman, or mayor, or get a baronetcy by buying a railway, or do something of the kind; and he crushed me with his contemptuous silence. He must have spent a lot of money in buying his countship; and yet he can't get one of the old families to look at him. If some indigent lady does not marry him, or if the Prince of Wales does not pick him up as a butt, he will die of spleen."

"And he is a good sort of fellow, too," said Will. "It is a shame to invent stories about his frantic efforts to get among the aristocracy, as they're doing in town just now. I think it's one's duty to cheer him up a bit. Fancy him living all by himself in that great house—a man who can no more read than he can shoot, or fish, or ride. By the way, he tumbled off his horse in the Park on Friday morning, and nearly knocked over a little girl of Lady Charlton's, who was out for the first time. And I had half promised to introduce him to Lady Charlton; I suppose he'll decline now, after making an exhibition of himself."

"He won't, you'll see. My poor Hubbard would kiss the ground on which Lady Charlton treads, although I suppose he hasn't seen her yet."

"I think you are two spiteful wretches," said Dove, "lying there, on such a beautiful day, and laughing at one of your own friends. I think the Count a very nice gentleman, and——"

"And he brought you down a coronet of blue pearls the other day," said Mrs. Anerley, with a smile.

"Why, I've never seen that wonderful head-gear you were talking about, Dove," said Will. "Do go and put it on now."

Dove was nowise loth; she knew as well as anybody how pretty she looked in her new article of attire. In a few minutes she returned, and stood at the open glass door, the creepers on the front of the house framing her in as if she were a picture. This head-dress—which I cannot describe scientifically—the Count had purchased abroad; and, had he gone over Europe, he could not have found anything to suit Dove's face and hair so well. There was first a simple tiara of blue pearls fixed on a gleaming blue band; then there were one or two loose strings of the pearls taken back to bind down a soft thick swathe of white muslin which came down under the chin and encompassed the pretty head. The blue strings among the light brown hair, the thick, soft, snowy circle round the slightly flushed face, the pleased, self-conscious eyes, and the half-smiling mouth—altogether they formed such a bright, soft, charming little picture that Mr. Anerley cried out:

"Come here at once, Dove, and kiss me, or I shall believe you're a fairy!"

And when he had his arm round her neck, he said:

"I expected every moment to see you fly right away up into the air, and

then we should have seen no more of you than if you were a little white pigeon quite lost up in the blue."

"But I should come down again, papa, when I wanted something to eat."

"Or your glass of port wine after dinner, eh?"

They had dinner early at Chesnut Bank on Sundays, to let the servants get to afternoon church. And on Sundays, also, all the children dined downstairs; so that they had quite a fine party to-day, when they assembled round the table. Dove had seen that all the little boys' and girls' costume was correct; had got fresh flowers for the table; and wore herself a pretty white dress with blue ribbons—adding considerably to the brightness and liveliness of the family gathering.

"Had you a good sermon to-day, Dove?" asked Mr. Anerley.

"Yes, papa; but I don't like Mr. Oldham."

She had never forgiven the good man for his too great anxiety about the Athanasian Creed.

"By the way, mamma," continued Mr. Anerley, "don't let me forget to tell you what I was reading in the papers this morning—although it will shock you, I know. They are going to secularize the Church."

Mrs. Anerley looked up—vaguely conscious that something dreadful was going to happen.

"The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are to be abolished; the churches are to be turned into schoolrooms; and the clergymen may, if they like, remain and be schoolmasters. If they don't, they must walk out."

"Quite true, mother," continued Will, taking up the wondrous tale; "and the Government means to cut up the entire ecclesiastical property, the glebe-lands, and what not, into small farms for the use of the poor people all over the three Kingdoms."

"The Prime Minister himself says it is useless trying to save the soul of a man until you give him a soul; and says that no man has a soul who is not properly fed and educated."

"He says no man can have a soul," repeated Will, "who has less than twenty shillings a week; and until that minimum is reached, the clergymen must turn farm-bailiffs or teachers. After then, the people may think about getting up churches once more. All the bishops are to be provided with a home in the Dramatic College at Maybury; the archbishops, in consideration of their inexperience of the world——"

"They're only laughing at you, mamma," said Dove.

"And a pretty example to set the children," said Mrs. Anerley. "Whoever laughs at mamma is sent upstairs to bed at once."

"Dove," said Will, suddenly, "do you know where you are going to-morrow?"

"No."

"Up to town. We're all going, except those young people who must remain in expectation of what we shall bring them when we return. You shall see, Dove—what shall you not see? I have always promised to give you a good dose of town; and now you shall have it. You shall sit up in a wire cage in the House of Commons, and look over the heads of the reporters on the drowsy gentlemen beneath. You shall see Mr. Gladstone, lying back, with his head in the air; you shall see Mr. Disraeli, apparently going to cry; and Lord Stanley, with his hat on the back of his head, and his hands in his pockets, looking as if he had just lost a bet."

"I shouldn't care a bit about one of them," said Dove.

"Then you shall go to another wire cage at Evans's; and you shall see a row of pale little boys in black, with their hands behind them, singing to rows of decorous gentlemen; or you may light upon the audience in its idiotic stage, and find them applauding Philistinic politics over their raw chops. Then—and listen, mamma!—the programme begins with a box, to-morrow evening, at the —— theatre, where Miss Annie Brunel is playing her 'Juliet.'"

"The new actress, Will?" asked his father.

"Yes."

"Ah! *now* you promise us something worth seeing," said Dove, with glad eyes. "And oh, mamma, Will knows Miss Brunel, and has spoken to her, and says that she is——"

"Lovely," she was about to say; but she added "pretty," moderating her enthusiasm.

"Yes, I think she is rather pghetty," said Will; at which all the children laughed. "But you'll judge for yourself to-morrow night."

After dinner, and when the children had received a tiny sip of port wine along with their fruit, Mr. Anerley proposed to Will that they should smoke outside; and so a small table, some decanters and glasses, and a few chairs were carried out, and placed under a great cedar tree, which was now beginning to get a soft green velvet over its dark shelves of branches.

"Dove," whispered Mr. Anerley, "go and ask mamma if I mayn't have my song to-day?"

"But, papa, it's Sunday."

"Tell mamma to take all the children into the meadow, with some bread for the pony. They won't hear it, then."

This was accordingly done; and then Dove, opening the French window of the drawing-room, so that the music might pass out to the gentlemen underneath the cedar, sang, very prettily indeed, Mr. Anerley's particular song—"Where the bee sucks." Her voice was not a powerful one, but it was very tender and expres-

sive; and there was a quaint softness in that purring habit of hers which made her sing, "Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now."

And when she went outside to Mr. Anerley, and knelt down beside him, to ask him if he was satisfied, he put his arm round her waist and said, with a smile,

"Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now, my darling. I should have been miserable all the afternoon if I had not heard my own song. I believe I wrote it, Dove."

"You mustn't sleep now, papa," she said, blushing a little over her bad pronunciation, "for you said we were going to walk over to the Place this afternoon."

"So I did; and we will start presently."

CHAPTER VII.

BALNACLUITH PLACE.

"It often surprises me," said Mr. Anerley, as the little party made its way across the common of St. Mary-Kirby in the warm evening glow, "that Hubbard cares to keep up acquaintance with us. We always dislike people who have known us in ill-fortune, or penury, or great depression. I even hate the flavour of cigars that I have smoked when recovering from sickness; I must have others when I get quite well again. Now, Hubbard, with his deer-park, and harriers, and thirty thousand a year, ought to be disgusted with people who knew him as a tea-broker."

"Don't be so ill-natured about Mr. Hubbard, dear," said his wife, with a smile. "I'm sure he is a big, soft, stupid, well-meaning sort of man."

Mr. Anerley was not quite so certain about the softness and good intentions of the Count; but he charitably forbore to speak. Dove and Will, who had stood for a few seconds on the bridge, to watch the two swans come sailing towards them in expectation of crumbs—cleaving the burnished gold of the mill-head into long purple lines—now came up; and they walked away from the still little village, along the green lanes, until they drew near the Place.

It was a great, sombre, fine old building, which had figured in history under another name—a large building of gloomy red brick, with innumerable mullioned windows, and peaks, and stone griffins—a building that had here and there grown grey and orange with the lichens and rain and wind of many years. It stood upon a high terrace on the side of a hill sloping down to the river, which ran along the valley to St. Mary-Kirby; and at this point the stream—a line of flashing gold

winding through the soft green—divided the terrace and lawn of the house from the great park opposite, with its magnificent elms and its small close-lying herd of deer. Round about the Place, too, were some fine trees, on a particular cluster of which a colony of rooks had established themselves at some bygone time. Altogether a noble and handsome old building was this Balnacluith Place, for which the Graf von Schönstein had—not without a purpose—expended a large sum of money, on his accession to fortune. Alas! the influence of the Place had fled the moment he bought it. The brilliant gentlemen and lovely ladies whom the Count had pictured to himself dining in the great hall, or walking in the broad park, never appeared. The grand old house had lost its mesmeric power; and no longer drew down from London those brilliant parties of wits, and beaux, and belles who once—as the Count had informed himself—held their merry revels there. He had sparkling wines at his command; lights he could have in abundance; when he chose, the dining-hall was brilliant with plate, and flowers, and fruit—but the ladies and gentlemen whom he had mentally invited stayed away. And he was not the man to go out into the highways and byways, and gather in beggars to his feast. He had aimed at a particular kind of guests: they had not come; but there was yet hope of their coming.

When the Anerleys drew near they perceived the figure of a man walking solitarily up and down the stone terrace in front of the house. His only companions were the couchant lions at each end of the terrace, which had kept guard there, over the few steps, for nearly a couple of centuries.

"It is Hubbard himself," said Mr. Anerley.

"He looks like the ghost of some dead owner of the house, come back to take his accustomed stroll," said Will.

"At all events, he is smoking," said Dove.

When the Count perceived his visitors, he threw away his cigar, and came down to meet them, saluting them with florid and formal courtesy.

"No need to ask how *you* are, Miss Anerley—charming as ever. Persuaded our friend Will to give up his wandering life, eh?"

This was the Count's great joke: it had never been known to fail—at least in rendering Dove very uncomfortable.

"What a fine evening! Look how beautiful the trees are down there!" he continued, allowing his eye to roam over the prospect before him in innocent pride—looking, indeed, as if he thought that God had prepared the sunset simply to light up Count Schönstein's park.

"It is a fine park; and a beautiful evening, too," said Mr. Anerley. "It is a pity that most beautiful things make one sad."

"That is because we don't possess them," said the Count, laughing; he was of a practical turn of mind.

The Count turned to the ladies, and—as was his universal custom when he wished to be polite—he insisted on their going inside and having a glass of wine.

"Look here, Anerley," he said, when both of them declined, "you must come and try some port I got down last night—bought it at the sale of Major Benson's cellar on Thursday—10*l.* a dozen, and cheap at the money."

"If it was sent home last night, I'd rather not," said Mr. Anerley, with a smile.

"I didn't mean that particular wine," replied the Count, unblushingly. "Or will you all stay and dine with me? Do; I dine at eight."

This was what is bluntly called a lie; the Count—except when circumstances compelled him—never forsook his old dinner-hour of five. He had, in fact, only begun his second cigar after dinner when the Anerley's arrived. But the Count probably fancied that a mere courtesy-lie wasn't much, and trusted to his visitors declining the invitation, which they did.

"I would rather go down and see the deer," said Dove. "Didn't you say you had some roe-deer amongst them?"

"Those I had brought from Schönstein?" said the Count, rather pompously. "They all died, as Hermann said they would. But it was an experiment, you know. I must get Hermann, if we're going into the park; the deer won't come to me."

He went into the house for a few moments, and reappeared, followed by the keeper, a splendid-looking fellow, with a brown, handsome face, great shoulders, and long legs encased in rough top-boots. This Hermann had been the head-keeper, chief forester, and what not, of Schönstein, when Mr. Hubbard bought the place; and on the principle of the Portuguese navigators, who brought home men and women from the Guinea Coast to prove that they had been there, the Count carried the big Schwarzwalder over to England with him, as a specimen of what he had purchased abroad. Unlike most of his Schwarzwald brethren, Hermann knew not a word of English; Hubbard knew not a word of German; and for many a month after his expatriation the efforts of master and man to understand each other formed a constant comedy at the Place. In one or two cases Mr. Anerley was besought to act as interpreter; and even now nothing delighted the stalwart, good-natured Blackforester so much as a long talk in his native language with any of his master's guests who were complaisant enough to humour him.

"Hermann," said the Count, loudly, to let his visitors know that *now* he could support his rank by talking in the language of the country which gave it him, "das Fräulein wunscht die—die Rehe zu sehen——"

"The Rehe are all died, Herr Graf," said the sturdy keeper, who would not have his native tongue burlesqued.

"Ich meine die—die—the deer that are there," said the Count, sharply and

hotly, "und sie müssen, wissen Sie, etwas—etwas—eh—ah—etwas Speise——"

"Futter, nicht wahr?" suggested Will, looking gravely at Dove.

"Yes, yes, of course; the fellow knows well enough. I mean to get the deer to come up to him."

"They will come without nothing, Herr Graf," said the tall forester.

They crossed the small iron bridge leading from the lawn over the river into the park. The deer were for the most part lying down, underneath the shadow of three large oaks, one or two only still standing and nibbling the grass. When our party drew near, however, the whole herd rose and retreated a little, while one of the bucks came proudly to the front and stood with his small head and tall horns erect, watching the approach of the strangers.

"Will you come with me, Fräulein?" said Hermann; and Dove went forward with him, leaving the others behind.

No sooner had the keeper thus made himself distinctly visible, than two or three of the does came timidly forward, alternating a little quiet canter with a distrustful pause, and at last one of them came quite up to the keeper, and looked rather wistfully at his hand with her large soft brown eyes.

"This is her I call *Lämmchen*," said Hermann, stroking the small neck of the hind, "she is so tame. And there is *Leopard* over there, with the spots on him. I speak to them in German; they know it all the same."

One of the bucks now seemed also desirous to approach; looking about him in a sheepish way, however, as if it were beneath his dignity for him to follow the example of the women of his tribe.

"Komm her, du furchtsamer Kerl!" said Hermann, going forward, and taking hold of him by one of his broad, palmated horns; "he is a fine deer, is he not? Look at his horns and his bright colours. He is better than for to be in a park, like the cows. He should be in the woods."

He took a piece of brown bread from his pocket and gave it to Dove, who held it to the small mouth of the buck, where it was speedily nibbled up. Then she stroked his neck, and looked at his big, apprehensive eyes; and then they went back to the group whom they had left.

"Miss Anerley," said the Count, "won't you persuade those people to go inside and have some tea? I ought to be able to give you good tea, you know."

It was when the Count wished to be very modest and complaisant indeed that he joked about his old calling.

They went inside, and sat in a large, sombre, oaken-panelled room, with the fast fading light coldly falling through the diamond panes of the tall and narrow windows. Then lamps were brought in, and tea; and they sat talking and chatting for nearly an hour.

When they went out upon the terrace again to go home, there was a pale

moonlight lying over the lawn, hitting sharply here and there on the stone mullions of the windows, and touching greyly and softly a thin mist which had settled down upon the park. It was a beautiful, still night; and as Dove and Will went home, they allowed Mr. and Mrs. Anerley to get on so far in front of them, that at last they were only visible as dark specks on the white road.

For some time they walked on in silence; and then Will said, carelessly:

"Will you go up to town with me to-morrow morning, Dove, and I'll devote the whole day to you; or will you come up with my father in the afternoon?"

She did not answer him; and then, in a second or two, when he looked down, he was surprised to find her eyes full of tears.

"Whatever is the matter, Dove?"

"Oh, Will," she said, turning the beautiful, wet eyes up to his face—and they were very beautiful in the soft moonlight—"I have been wanting to speak to you all day; and I have been so afraid. I wanted to ask you not to—not to go to Honduras—won't you give it up, if I ask you, Will?"

"Why should that trouble you, Dove? If I do go, it will only be a short trip; and then it will be of great advantage to me in this way, that if——"

"But Will, dear, listen to me for a moment," she said, with a piteous entreaty in her voice. "I know why you have always to go away from England, although you have been too kind-hearted to speak of it—I know it quite well—it's because I am to have the money that belongs to you, and you have to fight your way all by yourself, and leave your family year after year, and all because of me—and I won't have the money, Will—I hate it—and it's making me more miserable every day."

"Darling, don't distress yourself like that," he said, soothingly, for she was now crying very bitterly. "I assure you, you mistake the whole affair. I won't go to Honduras, if you like—I'll do anything you ask me. But really, Dove, I go abroad merely because, as I believe, one of my ancestors must have married a gipsy. I like to wander about, and see people, and live differently, and get generally woke up to what's going on in the world. Bless you, my darling, if it were money I wanted, I ought to have remained at home from the beginning. My father has only done what any well-thinking man would have done in his place—and you mustn't fret yourself about such a trifle——"

"I knew you would never acknowledge I was robbing you, Will; but I am. And all the time you were in Russia, and in Canada, whenever there was a heavy storm blowing, I used to lie awake at night and cry; because I knew it was I who had sent you away out there, and I thought you might be in a ship and in danger—all through me. And this morning, when you—when you said you were going to Honduras, I made up my mind then to go to papa to-morrow morning, and I'll tell him I won't have the money—I'll go away from you altogether rather, and be

a governess——"

"Now, now, Dove, don't vex me and yourself about nothing," he said to her kindly. "I won't go to Honduras."

"You won't?"

"I won't."

She raised her head a little bit—in an entreating way—and the compact was sealed.

"I'll tell you what I shall do," he said, taking the hand that lay on his arm into his own. "I will stay at home, get myself into some regular work, take a small house somewhere near here, and then you'll come and be my wife, won't you, Dove?"

There was a slight pressure on his hand: that was her only answer. They walked on for some little time in silence; and then, catching a glimpse of her face, he stopped to dry the tears from her cheeks. While engaged in that interesting occupation, she said to him, with a little smile:

"It looks as if *I* had asked *you*, Will—doesn't it?"

"I don't think so," he said.

"It wouldn't matter, if I did—would it?" she asked, simply. "For you know how fond I am of you, Will."

They talked of that and a good many other relevant matters until they had reached St. Mary-Kirby. They paused for a moment on the bridge—to look at the dark shadows about the mill and the white sheen of the moonlight on the water; and then she whispered timidly:

"When shall we be married, Will?"

"We shall be maghied whenever you like, Dove," he said, lightly and cheerfully.

CHAPTER VIII.

JULIET.

By the time the "playing-in" farce was over, the house was quite full. That morning's papers had written in such a fashion about the new triumph of Miss Brunel on Saturday night, that long before the box-office was closed there was not a registered place in the building which had not been seized upon. Will foresaw what was likely to happen, and had asked Mr. Melton to secure him a box.

When the little party drove from the Langham—Will's rooms in town scarcely offering them the accommodation they required—Dove was in high spirits. It was the first time she had gone anywhere with the young gentleman opposite her since their "engagement;" and she already felt that comfortable sense of extended possession which married people enjoy. She took her seat in the brougham, which Count Schönstein had kindly placed at their disposal, with a new and fluttering pleasure; she already imagined herself to have the importance and the claims to attention of a wife; and she accepted Will's little courtesies in this light, and made herself very happy over the altered aspect of their relations.

When her opera-cloak had been hung up, and her tiny bouquet, opera-glass, and bill placed daintily before her, the graceful little woman ensconced herself in the corner, and timidly peeped round the curtain. She was dressed in a very faint blue silk, with sharp broad lines of white about it; and over and through her rippling brown hair ran the strings of blue pearls which Count Schönstein had given her. Not even Mrs. Anerley, who saw her often enough, could forbear to look with a tender pride upon the girl; and as for Mr. Anerley, whose tall, upright figure was hid in the shadow of the box, he would fain have sat down beside his adopted daughter, with his arm round her waist, and forgotten all about what they had come to see.

The orchestra finished its overture, chiefly composed of the delicate "Sonnambula" music, and the curtain rose. Dove was disappointed at not seeing Miss Brunel; and paid but little attention to the preliminary scenes.

Suddenly there was an extraordinary commotion throughout the house, and a burst of that fine, strong, thunderous music which artists love to hear—and then Dove saw advance a girlish-looking creature with a calm, somewhat pale, and interesting face, and beautiful black hair. She was only girlish in the slightness of her figure: there was an artistic completeness in her motions and a self-possession in her bearing which gave her something of a queenly look. She wore a magnificent white satin dress, the train of which lay in splendid masses behind her; and down over this white and gold fell a black lace veil, partly hiding the rich hair, and enclosing the clear, beautiful dark face. Dove was spell-bound by that face. It somehow suggested Italy to her, and blue skies, and music, and the passionate artistic warmth of the South. Nor was the illusion destroyed by the low chest-voice with which the girl replied to the questions of Lady Capulet. And from that moment, Dove thought no more of Miss Brunel and Will's friend. She was only Juliet, and Dove followed her sad story with an aching heart and a trembling lip.

During the matchless balcony scene, Will saw this intense sympathetic emotion growing upon the girl. I believe it is considered to be the proper thing for young ladies to be able to turn round and smile compassionately to each other,

when the tragic sadness on the stage is making the women in the pit sob bitterly, and raising great lumps in the throats of the men. It is a pretty accomplishment, in its way; and may be indicative of other qualities which these young persons are accused of possessing. Dove's emotional tendencies had never been educated, however; and in this balcony-scene, as I say, she watched the lovers with a painful interest, which wrote its varying story every moment on her face. The theatre was still as death. The scarcely-uttered tendernesses of Juliet were heard as distinctly as if they had been breathed into one's ear; and the eyes of the audience drank in the trembling lights and shadows of her girlish passion with an unconscious delight and admiration. The abandonment of her affection, the reluctant declarations, the coy shrinkings, and piteous, playful, tender apologies were so blended as to make the scene an artistic marvel; and Dove sat "laughin' maist like to greet," as the old Scotch song says. Indeed she scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry with the delight—the absolute delight—which this piece of true art gave her; and when at last Juliet had forced herself to the parting—

> "'Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone:
> And yet no farther than a wanton's bird;
> Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
> Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
> And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
> So loving-jealous of his liberty"—

when, lingeringly and sadly, she had withdrawn from the balcony, Dove rose suddenly, and with a half-choked sob in her voice, said:

"Oh, Will, I should like so much to see her—and—and——"

"Kiss her," she had nearly said; but thinking it might be ridiculous, she stopped.

"It's against the rules, Dove," said Will, with a smile. "Besides, that isn't Miss Brunel you've been looking at; that is Juliet. Both are very nice ladies; but they are quite unlike each other."

Dove was terribly disappointed. She would like to have declared her conviction that Miss Brunel was Juliet, that she had every bit the same tenderness, and sweetness, and loveliness; but she was afraid her enthusiasm might make Mrs. Anerley laugh at her, and so she bore the rebuff patiently.

Presently, however, some one tapped at the box-door; and the next moment Will was introducing the manager, Mr. Melton, to his companions.

"My young friend here," said Will to Melton, while Dove's pretty face assumed an extra tinge of colour, "has been so much struck by Miss Brunel, that she would like to go and thank her personally."

Now Mr. Melton was in a very good humour. The house was crammed; there was almost no "paper" in it; and the prospect of a good run through the popularity of his new acquisition had warmed up his impassive nature into quite a pronounced geniality.

"Then you ought to introduce the young lady to Miss Brunel," said Mr. Melton, blithely. "If you like, I'll take you round at the end of the act, when Miss Brunel will have a little 'wait.'"

"Will you go, Dove?" asked Will.

"Yes," she said, timidly.

Just as the curtain fell upon the scene in Friar Lawrence's cell, at the end of the second act, Mr. Melton conducted Dove and Will down a tortuous little stone stair into a narrow passage, from which they entered into the wings. A noisy and prolonged recall was thundering throughout the house, and Miss Brunel was being led on to the stage by Romeo to receive renewed plaudits. When she returned and passed under the glare of the jets in one of the entrances, Will went forward to shake hands with her.

"I have to congratulate you again," he said.

"Thank you," she said, simply.

There had been a pleased smile of welcome in her eyes when they met; and yet it seemed to him that there was a strange, intense expression in her look which was not natural to it. Once or twice before he had seen her in the same circumstances; and invariably this unconscious, mesmeric intensity was present in her eyes. He explained it to himself by supposing that the emotional idealism of her assumed character had not quite died out of her yet.

Then she turned and saw Dove standing with Mr. Melton. Will begged to introduce his "sister;" and the brief ceremony was sufficiently singular. For a moment the dark, lambent eyes of Miss Brunel were fixed upon the fair young girl with a sort of hesitating look—an inquiring, apprehensive look, which Will never forgot; then all at once she frankly extended her hand. Dove, a little frightened, approached and shook hands with her.

"Mr. Anerley has spoken to me about you," said Annie Brunel; and Dove was conscious that the dark-haired girl before her knew her secret.

How singular it was to hear herself addressed in those low, rich tones which a few minutes ago were addressing Romeo in the moonlight! Dove almost felt herself enchanted; and could have believed at that moment that she herself belonged to the old, sad, sweet play, which seems to contain everything that was ever uttered about man's love and woman's devotion.

"I must go down to my dressing-room now," said Miss Brunel to Dove. "Will you come with me, if you are curious to see the place? I will send some one round with you to your box afterwards."

Will saw that Dove would like to go, so he settled the proposal by telling her not to be in Miss Brunel's way; and then he and Melton returned to the front of the house.

Dove was now conducted by her companion down into the theatrical Hades which lies beneath the stage. She saw the figures of the carpenters gliding like the spirits of the damned through the dusky twilight; she saw the cumbrous woodwork, the machinery of the traps, and what not, rendered faintly visible by the glimmering jets; and then she was led into the bright little room which was appropriated to Miss Brunel's use.

"You may go home if you like, now, Sarah," said the latter to her dresser. "Mrs. Christmas is in the theatre, and will be here presently."

"Thank you, miss," said the tidy little woman, who immediately hurried away home to get supper ready for her husband, a gasman in the theatre.

It was the best single dressing-room in the place; but it was not a very grand apartment. There was, however, a full-length mirror at one end, which had been privately presented (with a hint as to its destination) by Count Schönstein to Mr. Melton; and the manager had thought that the least *he* could do was to newly paper the little chamber. At present it was in a state of confusion which largely excited Dove's curiosity. The implements of stage effect were displayed before her, on the floor, on the table, and on the marble slab underneath the smaller looking-glass; and all around lay or hung divers articles of costume and ornament, the peculiarly bright materials and prominent decorations of which were very new to her. But it needed only a glance at Juliet's clear, beautiful face to see that she required very little "making-up," nor was Dove less surprised to find that the lace and similar little delicacies of the young actress's costume were real and valuable.

"My mother taught me to make all these things myself," she explained to Dove. "She was very particular about them; and used to say that when one meant to spend one's life in a profession, one ought to have as much pride in wearing real lace on the stage as out of doors."

"And do you mean to spend all your life in your profession?" asked Dove, timidly.

"Yes; why not?" said the girl, with a smile.

"I—I don't know," stammered Dove, blushing dreadfully.

"Come, be frank with me," said Annie Brunel, taking the girl's hand in hers. "Don't you think it very wicked to be an actress?"

Dove was now forced to explain herself.

"I don't, indeed," she said. "But I couldn't help thinking that you are too young and—and too pretty—to waste all your life in a theatre."

"Oh, nonsense," said Miss Brunel, laughing in a motherly sort of way. "I live

only in the theatre. I find my life wasted whenever I go out of it, and spend my time in amusing myself like a child. I have nothing to interest me but the theatre; nothing to live for out of it; and it is only when I get into the spirit of my part that I feel myself all throbbing over with a delicious life. You cannot understand that? Why, my very fingers tingle with enjoyment; I get quite a new warmth within me; and many a time I can't help laughing or crying quite naturally when the scene suggests it. I'm sure no one in front has half the delight in a play that I have. I scarcely see the wings, and the prompter, and the scene-shifters; I forget the abominable smell of gas; and I should like to keep on the character for ever—if it is one that pleases me. When I get a new and unpleasant part, I hate acting. I feel as if I were doing exactly what Mrs. Christmas taught me; and that the people must be laughing at me; and I become afraid of the critics, and hope that I shan't forget the cues."

Here the call-boy came running to the door; Juliet was wanted for the second scene. She hastily departed; and Dove was left alone.

"How very friendly she must be with Will, to receive me so kindly, and talk to me so frankly," thought Dove; when it was her own pretty face that had won upon the young actress's heart.

The scene in Capulet's House is a short one, and Annie Brunel was speedily back in her room. She brought with her Mrs. Christmas; and the bright, white-haired little woman made a pert courtesy when she was introduced, and said how sorry she was to hear that the young lady had been sitting alone. The next moment she was running into a series of ludicrous stories about the mistakes inexperienced people had made in trying to find their way about the theatre by themselves; and it must be confessed that her anecdotes were sometimes so very humorous that it was as well that only ladies heard them.

"And something of the same kind," she continued, with her merry little eyes sparkling, "happened to Mr. ——, the celebrated author, you know, with Nelly Featherstone, who is in this theatre at the present moment—or ought to be. You know it was a benefit night, Miss—Anerley?—yes, Miss Anerley; and there was a general hurry-scurry, and he had been left in the wings. He asked a super how he should get to Mr. Crimp (and it was his benefit, my dear, and he had several friends with him, all drinking in his room), and the man told him to go to the first dressing-room on the right when he went downstairs. But his right was our left, as you know, my dear; and there were in the first dressing-room on the left Nelly Featherstone and her sister, and another girl, all dressing as hard as ever they could for the burlesque. Nelly was 'Perseus,' and before she had got on her tights, she was in—in a transition state, shall we say, my dear?"

Here the merry little woman laughed until the tears ran down her withered grey cheeks. "And up to the door goes Mr. ——, and opens it without thinking.

Oh, Lor! what a fright he must have got! Nelly screamed at the pitch of her voice, and fell into a chair, and screamed again; and her sister Jeanie (*she* had some clothes on) ran at the poor man, and said something very offensive, and slammed the door in his face. Poor fellow, he nearly died of shame; and Nelly's scream told everybody of his blunder, and Crimp and all his friends shrieked over it—but not before him, my dear, for he was much too celebrated a man to be laughed at. Only he sent her next day an explanation and an apology through the manager, and as beautiful a bouquet as ever you saw; and he got a friend of his to write a lovely notice of her in the *Diurnal* itself, when old Yellowjaw's piece was—Mercy, gracious me! There's the call-boy again—run, Miss Annie!"

"Good-bye," said Miss Brunel, hurriedly, shaking hands with Dove. "I should like you to come often and see me."

She bent over her for a moment, kissed her lightly, and left.

"You know what that means?" said Mrs. Christmas to Dove. "That means that she will speak to no one this night again until her part is finished. All the theatre knows her way, and humours her. It's when the genius is working on her—that's what I say; and I know it, for I've seen it in her mother. *There* was the sweetest woman you ever heard of—not very friendly, Miss, you know, in the way of talking of her own affairs—and it's nothing I could ever make out about her life before I knew her—but the sweetest creature! the tenderest creature! And she was such a rare good actress, too—but nothing like her daughter; she knew that, and used to sit and talk for hours—it was the only thing she would talk about—over what she expected Miss Annie to be. And once she said to me, with tears running down her face, 'I pray every night that my little girl may be kept always an actress; and that she may never look for happiness outside her own profession.' But it's a shame to keep you here, Miss, if you've never seen Miss Annie's 'Juliet;' she said I was to take you back to your box when you wished to go."

So once more Dove passed through the gloomy region and worked her way upward to the light of the theatre. Her friends were astonished at her long absence; but they were too much enthralled by what was going on upon the stage to speak to her. And again Dove looked down upon that queenly little person with whom she had been talking; and could not explain to herself the strange sensation she then experienced. It seemed as if her visit to the dressing-room had been a trance; and that she had really been speaking with Juliet. In the dressing-room she had seen before her only a fine-looking, intellectual, and very courteous lady; but now upon the stage, she could not see this lady at all. She even lost the power of remembering her. Those jet-black tresses, those fine eyes, and that pale, beautiful forehead—above all, that rich, majestic voice—all these belonged to Juliet, were Juliet, and she knew that it was a Juliet in nature, if not

in name, who had spoken to her, and taken her hand, and kissed her.

This is perhaps the severest test to which an artist can be put. When you know the writer of a book, you cannot help under-estimating the book. You are familiar with the author's personality, his habit of thought, perhaps with the material on which he works; you think of him more than of his book; and nothing but the soundest and most concentrated effort will overcome the influence of this unwittingly unjust scrutiny. When you know an actor or an actress, you involuntarily search for himself or herself in the assumed character; you look at the character from within, not from without; you destroy the illusion by a knowledge of its material elements. Nothing but the power of genius will force upon you under these circumstances the idealism which the artist is labouring to complete.

But Dove was an easy subject for the spiritual magnetism of art. Her keenly sympathetic nature vibrated to the least motion of the magician's hand; and when the passionate climax of Juliet's misery was reached, Dove had entirely lost self-control. For a little time she tried to retain her composure, although Mrs. Anerley saw her lips suddenly tremble when Juliet begged the Friar to show her some means of remaining faithful to her husband—

"And I will do it without fear or doubt,
To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love."

But in the final scene she quite broke down. She rose and went to the back of the box, and stood in a corner, sobbing bitterly. Mr. Anerley drew her towards him; and tried to soothe her, in his quiet, kindly way.

"My darling, why should you vex yourself? You will see 'Juliet' alive in a few minutes."

"I know it well enough," she said, trying to assume her ordinary manner, "but it's very wrong for any one to write things like that, to make people cry."

"The naughty Shakespeare shan't do it again, that he shan't," said Will, compassionately. "And as for Miss Brunel, who is most in fault—but here she comes!"

Will picked out of the corner the large bouquet which lay there; and returned in time to let it drop—nearly the first of a fine collection of similar tributes which welcomed the triumph of the young actress—almost at her feet. Romeo picked it up, along with two others; she took this particular one and sent a single bright look so clearly up to the box, that a good many heads were turned thither. When Romeo had picked up the remaining bouquets, and when she had again and again bowed her acknowledgments of the cordial applause of the theatre, the

girl with the pale face and the black hair retired, and the people calmed down.

"Now, Dove," said Will, "if you wish to be cheered up a bit before going, there is as absurd a farce as ever was written to follow. Shall we stay?"

"Just as you please, Will," said Dove, looking down.

The first of her new duties, she thought, was submission and obedience; and she hoped neither Mr. nor Mrs. Anerley noticed her little conjugal effort.

It was agreed, however, that they should go home at once; and Will went off to hunt up Count Schönstein's brougham. In a short space of time they were seated in the Langham hotel, awaiting supper.

"And not the least pleasant part of a play," said Mr. Anerley, dogmatically, as he fingered one of his wine-glasses, "is the supper after. You come out of the gas and the heat into a cool, fresh room; and—and—waiter! bring some ice, please."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNT'S BROTHER.

On that same evening Herr Graf von Schönstein dined with his brother, Mr. John Hubbard, at his residence, Rose Villa, Haverstock Hill. The Count, since his grand accession to fortune, was not a frequent visitor at his brother's house; but when he did go there he was treated with much deference and apparent kindness.

There were at dinner only the Count, his brother, his brother's wife, and her sister. When the two ladies rose to go into the drawing-room, Mrs. Hubbard said to the Count, who had sprung to the door:

"Pray don't leave us two poor creatures all to ourselves; you may smoke in the drawing-room whenever you please to come in."

"Jack," said the Count, returning to the table and pulling out his cigar-case, "that wife of yours is an angel."

And so she was an angel—that is, a being without predicates. She was a mild, colourless, pretty woman, never out of temper, never enthusiastic, absolutely ignorant of everything beyond drawing-room accomplishments, scarcely proud even of her smooth, light-brown hair, her blue eyes, and rounded cheeks. She knew, of course, that there were few women of her age looked so well and so young; she did not know to attribute that rotundity and youthfulness of face to

her easy temperament, her good disposition, and lack of brain. Mrs. John Hubbard was conscious of thinking seriously only upon one subject; and that was whether the Count, her brother-in-law, could be induced to marry her sister, or whether he would remain unmarried, and leave his large fortune to her eldest boy Alexander, a young gentleman of eight, who now, in Highland dress, was about to sit down to the piano and delight his mother and aunt with a *staccato* rendering of "La ci darem la mano."

There were reasons why Mrs. Hubbard should be disquieted upon this point.

"Quite an angel," said the Count, oracularly. "But we mustn't go into the drawing-room just yet. I want to talk to you, Jack, about that young lady, you know."

"Miss Brunel?"

"Yes. Will you mind my taking a glass of that pale port of yours with my cigar? I know it's a shame, but——"

"Don't mention it, Fred; I wish you'd come oftener and try it."

John Hubbard straightened himself up in the wide easy chair, and prepared to receive his brother's disclosures or questions on a matter which was deeply interesting to them both. John was very unlike his stout, pompous brother; a thin little man, with grey hair and grey eyes; troubled by a certain twitching of the eyebrows, and affected generally by a weak and extremely nervous constitution. An avaricious man who sees his younger brother become possessed of thirty thousand a year, which he himself expected to get, generally exhibits other than fraternal feelings; but whatever John Hubbard may have felt, the fact remains, that so soon as his brother Frederick became the undoubted owner of this money, he, John, began to observe towards him a severe deference and courtesy. When the Count went to dine at Rose Villa, there were no tricks played upon him in the matter of wine. The claret-cup was not composed of "sudden death," at ten shillings a dozen, with a superabundance of water, and cucumber peel instead of borage. The dry sherry was not removed with the fish, in the hope that the dulled after-dinner palate might accept some Hambro' decoction with equanimity. One wine was pretty much the same as another wine to the Count von Schönstein; but he was pleased to know that his brother thought so much of him as to be regardless of expense.

"Are you quite sure, Jack," said the younger brother, drawing his chair near, "that nobody, beyond those you mentioned to me, knows who Miss Brunel is?"

"As far as I know, Fred; as far as I know," said the other, in an injured querulous tone. "I can't hold myself responsible, and I'm not infallible."

"In a matter of this kind," said the Count, smiling benignly, "most people seem to think that Cayley and Hubbard are infallible. They say you are the repos-

itories of all the scandals of the aristocracy; and that you might turn England upside down by publishing what you know. But I daresay that's exaggerated. Now, don't you think that some one who remembers that story of twenty-five years ago, and happens to see Miss Brunel, might recognise the resemblance between her and her mother, and then begin to inquire into the affair?"

There was a strong twitching of John Hubbard's eyebrows. He was far from being a good-tempered man; and to be compelled to sit and play the hypocrite was almost too much for him. He saw clearly whither these questions tended. He knew his brother's ruling passion; he knew there was nothing he would not do to be admitted among those people who had refused to recognise his purchased title. Again and again he had inwardly cursed his folly in telling the Count the story of Annie Napier and her daughter; that breach of professional confidence was likely to lose his family thirty thousand a year. Can one conceive a more tantalising position for a narrow-minded and avaricious man to assume than the involuntary prompting and guidance of a scheme which is likely, in the most gratuitous way, to deceive his own most dearly cherished hopes? If some one else had suggested to the Count a marriage with Miss Brunel as a possible passport to society, John Hubbard would not have been so chagrined. He would have been able to dissuade his brother from the step with such reasons as he could discover. But he had himself told the Count the real history of Annie Brunel; he was compelled to furnish him with all sorts of information; and saw, through his own instrumentality, that money slipping out of his fingers which otherwise might have been his or his son's.

"I have explained it to you before, Fred," he said, patiently. "Old Mr. Cayley, who went out to America to see the Marquis of Knottingley's wife, lives down in Suffolk, where he is not likely to meet people who have much interest in Miss Brunel. Besides, he has a very fine sense of honour in these matters, and would not break a pledge he gave to Miss Brunel's mother, not to seek in any way to induce her daughter to leave the stage. And you know the people who knew of the marriage were very few; and most of them are dead. Mr. Palk is in his dotage, and lives in Westmoreland. Then who is likely to remember Miss Napier's appearance: or to perceive a likeness between her and Miss Brunel beyond the casual likenesses which occur constantly on the stage? I believe I could count on my ten fingers all the people who know who Miss Brunel really is. There's my wife—one; old Mr. Cayley—two; Cayley, my partner—three; you yourself——"

He stopped; for his brother was evidently not listening to him. So preoccupied was the Count, indeed, that he broke the ash off the end of his cigar upon the edge of his wine-glass, allowing the ash to fall into the port.

"I hope I haven't poisoned you with some of my wines," said John Hubbard, with a thin laugh.

"I beg your pardon!" said his brother, reaching over for another glass; "I really didn't know what I was about. The whole affair seems to me so romantic and impossible—like a play, you know, or something of that sort. I can scarcely believe it; and yet you lawyer fellows must sometimes meet with such cases."

"I have one of my people down in Southend just now, trying if he can trace anything about a woman and her child who, we believe, lived there eighteen years ago. If we find her, a curious story will come out. But I never in the whole course of my life heard of any woman, except Miss Napier, who refused a title and a fortune, which were by right her own. I suppose the common-sense of actresses gets poisoned by the romantic sentiment in which they live and breathe."

"If you mean as regards money," said the Count, with a patronising smile, "I can assure you that most actresses have an uncommonly small proportion of sentiment and a very tolerable share of sense. Miss Brunel's mother must have been an extraordinary woman in many respects—what you and I would consider a fool, though many people would give her folly a fine name. Now, about revealing this secret, to Miss Brunel, don't you think some of the Marquis's relatives might do that?"

"They would cut their fingers off first," said John Hubbard, with nervous decision. "They knew every action of her mother after she left this country—so old Mr. Cayley told me; they now watch her daughter closely, and try to discover everything they can about her; and their intensest hope is that she may never learn what a splendid property lies at her command, so that it may revert to them or their heirs, as the will directs. And what a property it is, Fred!"

"Ah! I suppose so," said the Count, with a sigh.

To do him justice, he did not consider so much as another might have done the money he would get by marrying Miss Brunel: his desire to marry her was wholly selfish, but the selfishness was begotten of no greed of money.

"The trustees are as diligent in looking after the property as though it were to be given up to-morrow. And how those rents accumulate! It was Lord Belsford who proposed to use up some of the money in buying off the mortgages which still hung over the Northamptonshire estate from the time of the Marquis's father; and now that has been done, it is nothing but a huge machine turning out money for nobody's use."

The little nervous lawyer seemed to be quite overwhelmed by the contemplation of such a thing. If *he* had had the option of becoming the proprietor of this valuable coining machine, he would not have allowed the opportunity to pass. And even now it occurred to him that in the event of his brother marrying Miss Brunel, and acquiring this vast wealth, the Count might, out of gratitude for the service done him in the matter, leave his thirty thousand pounds a year to the young gentleman in the adjoining drawing-room. The alternative was pos-

sible, but it was remote; John Hubbard would vastly have preferred his brother remaining unmarried.

"You know why I am so anxious to know all about this matter, Jack," said the Count, uneasily.

His brother nodded.

"It is a hazardous thing—seems to me almost impossible," continued the Count—and he was never tired of reiterating his doubts on the subject—"that such a fortune and title should belong to anybody without their knowing it."

"It was her mother's wish," said John Hubbard.

"Oh, I know," said the Count, "that she has been brought up to regard with apprehension every one out of her profession; and I know she believes that under no circumstances ought she to leave the stage. And yet I fancy she will not be very grateful either to her mother, or to old Mr. Cayley, or to the trustees, for keeping her in ignorance of her good fortune. And if she should consent to be my wife, she will probably accuse me of having used the secret for my own purpose."

The Count spoke as if such an accusation would do him a great injury. But the possibility of the future he had chalked out for himself drove away this ugly after-thought. He became quite excited. His face was flushed; his hand trembled as he lifted his glass.

"God knows," he said, earnestly, "that it is not her money I want. I'm not a fortune-hunter."

"You have a lot of money," said his brother, gently; while he watched his face with those mild grey eyes. "If you were to marry Miss Brunel, you could afford to part with what you have now."

"What do you take me for?" said the Count, with a touch of virtuous indignation. "If I were to marry Miss Brunel, I should insist on her settling all her money on herself. I have enough to live upon, thank God!"

John Hubbard's mind was made up on the spot.

"You will never marry Miss Brunel, Fred," he said, quietly.

"Why?" said the other, suddenly putting down the glass he had been lifting.

"Simply because her relatives on the father's side won't allow it."

"You said they——"

"They are content to say nothing while they hope to secure the reversion of the property through Miss Brunel's dying intestate," said John Hubbard, calmly, though his eyebrows were twitching nervously. "When, however, they understand that you, a brother of mine, and therefore likely to know how matters stand, are about to marry Miss Brunel, they will inform her of her true position, and implore her not to marry a man beneath her in rank. And you know, Fred, they will be able to point to your previous silence as a witness against you."

The first impulse of Count Schönstein was to dart an angry glance at the

pale, quiet little man before him, as though the latter had dealt him an unprovoked blow; then, when he saw in his brother's calm face only corroborative testimony of the appalling truth he had uttered, the Count leant back in his chair, unable to conceal his fright and dismay.

At that moment, Master Alexander entered the room, and said:

"Please, Uncle Frederick, mamma says coffee is in the drawing-room, and will you come and have some?"

"Yes, yes, my boy," said the Count, jumping up from his chair.

He scarcely knew what he was about. John Hubbard rose also, and then they walked into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Hubbard saw something in her brother-in-law's face which she not unnaturally, but quite wrongly, attributed to his having taken too much wine.

Miss Fleet, Mrs. Hubbard's sister, was singing a certain popular ballad, expressing her wish that the laird might marry the lady of high degree, and declaring that, for her part, she would sooner dance upon the green with Donald. Miss Fleet's voice trembled consciously when the Count entered the room. She was a fine, roseate, country-looking woman of twenty-six or twenty-seven, much coarser and stouter than her elder sister; and she sang with those broad alternations of *piano* and *forte* which some girls, and nearly all actresses, consider to be effective. Miss Fleet, now that the Count had come in, simply roared in the louder passages, and then subsided into an almost inaudible whisper when she meant to be particularly tender.

"Thank you—thank you," said the Count, absently, when she had finished; but her ear detected no particular emphasis in the words for which she had been waiting.

Rose Villa was not a large place, but it possessed the advantage of being enclosed; and from the drawing-room one could slip out into a small garden which was quite surrounded and guarded by a row of trees. The Count sate at the French window leading out into this garden; and was so forgetful of all common politeness as to stare persistently out into the darkness, where the tall black trees were grouped in masses against the faint twinkling sky.

Like a government suddenly knocked out of its reckoning by an adverse vote, he "wished to consider his position." There had been plenty of difficulties in the way before; but this last stumbling-block so cruelly pointed out by his brother seemed the most irremovable of all. In a moment of temporary spleen, he was almost ready to give the whole thing up; and return to——

Then a vision of that lonely great house near St. Mary-Kirby arose before him, and he shrank from the weariness and dullness of his life there, from the restless hoping against hope which he had pursued there, from the constant disappointments following his best-directed efforts.

If he were to marry the girl, would not his path be clear? Beautiful in person, graceful in manner, with an intellect a thousand times superior to that of any woman she was likely to meet, he would have every reason to be proud of his wife; and then, as the husband of Lady Annie Ormond, the only daughter of the Marquis of Knottingley, and the owner of those fine estates which had such tempting shooting, would not their friendship be sought after and valued by the very persons who now, taking their cue from the Lord Chamberlain, doubtless, were graceless enough to look upon him as an interloper or adventurer?

Not by means of any chain of philosophic reasoning, but through a bitter experience, Count Schönstein had arrived at the conclusion that a large sum of money, *per se*, was not happiness. It was doubtless very well that he could have the finest wines and cigars, drive in comfortable vehicles, and be unhampered in spending money ostentatiously; but even when he was only a tea-broker, he had a modest brougham, such wine and cigars as he required, and spent quite as much in fashionable charities as he did now. He had found out that a man cannot, by doubling his income, eat two dinners a day instead of one. With thirty thousand a year he could drink no more wine than was possible to him when his annual income was to be counted in hundreds. Consequently he got tired of material pleasures which could not be increased; and sometimes he even ceased to enjoy boasting of the high prices he paid for such luxuries as he used. Like every other human being, he was forced to fix his desires upon something he did not possess; and he stupidly chose a difficult thing. Unaided, he might as well have sought to get up a crusade among Scotchmen for the restoration of the sacred stone which now rests in Westminster Abbey. He had set his heart upon gaining admission to the aristocracy; and the moon for which he cried was to be reached by no ladder of his making.

Mrs. Hubbard thought he was ill. Having attentively but covertly regarded him for some time, she went to her husband, who was getting himself another cup of coffee.

"John," she whispered, "has your brother been drinking Miss Betham's sherry by mistake?"

"No, my dear: how could he? There was none on the table."

Off goes Master Alexander to his uncle.

"Uncle Frederick, mamma wants to know if you've been drinking Miss Betham's sherry."

"If you will tell mo who Miss Betham is, I shall be able to——"

"Don't you know Miss Betham, our governess? She has some sherry every day for lunch, and nobody else will take the sherry that's kept for her, and——"

"Never mind the boy," said John Hubbard, coming hastily forward, with an awkward laugh. "It was only a joke. I said you looked as dull as though you'd

been drinking Miss Betham's sherry; we do keep a light wholesome wine for her, and for the servants, when they get ill, you know."

Master Alexander said nothing; but he resolved to inform Miss Betham of the "crammer" his papa had made use of. Nor did Uncle Frederick care to ask how a light and wholesome wine (which in reality would have blushed at the sight of a grape) was likely to have made him ill.

The Count rose abruptly, opened the glass door, and, without a word of apology to the ladies, beckoned his brother to follow. They passed out into the garden, and the Count began to pace heavily up and down the gravelled pathway under the trees.

"I can't afford to give up this so easily as you seem to think, Jack," he said; and he spoke roughly and angrily.

"I always knew you had a strong will, Frederick," said his brother, gently.

"I've set my heart on it, I tell you. What's the use of my money to me? D—n it, Jack, I might as well be down in Thames Street again!"

"Few people would grumble if they had your good luck," said the elder brother, in his mildest voice.

"I don't care what few people, or what many people, would do. I know that when I make up my mind to a thing, I stick to it; and instead of you sitting quietly by and throwing obstacles in my way, the least you ought to do would be to help me."

"You're very unfair, Fred," said John Hubbard, in an injured tone; "wasn't I the first to tell you about Miss Brunel? And now——"

"And now you try to throw cold water on the whole business. But I am not a child. Miss Brunel's friends may be very aristocratic and very fine; but they have not all the power in their hands. Look here, Jack, what's to prevent my marrying Miss Brunel before they know anything about it? And after the marriage is over they may make what disclosures they please; I shall be beforehand with them."

"Are you sure that Miss Brunel will marry you, Fred?" said his brother, insidiously.

The Count laughed out, in his stormy and contemptuous way:

"Your brain has been turned, Jack, by hearing of that one actress who refused a lot of money. Take my word for it, you will never hear of another. If I offer Annie Brunel Balnacluith Place, my house in Bayswater, the place over in Baden, what horses and carriages she pleases, with as much company at home and gadding about abroad as she can wish for, I am not very apprehensive about her answer. When we were younger, Jack, we could have imagined some Joan of Arc declining these things; but now we know better."

"It is a strong temptation," said his brother, absently: he did not like to say how very uncertain he considered Annie Brunel's acceptance of the offer.

"And, besides," added the Count, with virtuous warmth, "I do not think I flatter myself when I look upon the money as not the only inducement. I'll make as good a husband to her as any one I know; and I don't think my disposition is quarrelsome or niggardly. And besides, Jack, she must remember that it is not every one who would marry an actress, and consent never to look into her past life, which in the case of an actress must have been made up of a good many experiences, you know. Of course I don't mean to depreciate her. She is doubtless a very honest, and good, and ladylike girl; but still—she mustn't expect too much."

And the Count was quite sincere in making this ingenuous speech. He rather considered himself a praiseworthy person in stooping to this unequal match. He had not the least perception of the selfishness of the view he took of the whole matter. It was quite natural to him to think only of his own ends and purposes, and he took no shame to himself for it. He never for a moment regarded the scheme from her point of view, nor stayed to inquire what might be the possible results of it where she was concerned. He did not even consider what her regard for him would probably be after she discovered the reasons which had induced him to marry her; nor that she was likely to have little respect for a man who had played upon her ignorance to further his own designs. The Count was conscious of acting quite honestly (to his own nature), and never thought that any one would accuse him of deceit in so doing.

CHAPTER X.

MISS BRUNEL AT HOME.

Will Anerley did not forget his promise to visit Annie Brunel, but he seemed in no hurry to fulfil it. Had he been a young man about town, the temptation of having something special to say at his club or at dancing parties about the new actress, of whom everybody was talking, would have proved too much for him. When a man, however, spends most of his dancing years abroad, and gets a good deal knocked about the world, he ceases to long for the petty celebrity of social gossip, and has no great desire to become a temporary hero among a lot of well-meaning but not very profound people, who are sure to mispronounce his name and take him for somebody else.

It happened one morning, however, that he had been invited to breakfast with a noble lord, then in the government, who was desirous of getting some spe-

cial information wherewith to confound an opposition member who had given notice of his intention to ask a particularly ugly question in the House. His lordship thanked Will heartily for his kindness, hoped he might be able to return the service in some slight way; hinted something about a day's fishing if Anerley happened to be in the neighbourhood of a place of which he had never heard before; and then proceeded to get in order the catapult with which he hoped that evening to demolish the indiscreet member.

Having nothing particular to do just then, Will thought he would take a stroll in Kensington Gardens, and proceeded to take a short cut in that direction. Passing a little *cul-de-sac* of a street, which had not above half-a-dozen houses on each side, it struck him that the name on the wall was familiar to him. He then remembered that this was the place in which Annie Brunel lived; and thinking the occasion very opportune, he turned the corner and walked down to the proper house. They were very pretty little houses, with white pillars and porticoes draped with Virginian creepers, and with a good many trees around them. Miss Brunel had been fortunate enough to get the offer of one of these houses, furnished, at a moderate rent, and she and Mrs. Christmas had decided at once to accept it. It was a quiet little place, pleasantly situated, with a tolerably large garden behind.

Will passed inside the gate, and was about to ascend the steps, when the door above was opened, and a young lady came out of the house. Somehow he fancied he had seen her before—where, he knew not. She was rather an attractive-looking little person, with a pert, slightly up-turned nose, big and rather wicked blue eyes, short, loose brown curls, and a decided look of violet-powder about her forehead and neck. The saucy bright eyes looked at Will for a moment with a bold familiar glance, and there was a shadow of a smile on her pretty lips.

Of course he took off his hat, and muttered something like "Good morning."

"Good morning," she said, holding out her hand, and looking at him with those dangerous blue eyes. "Don't you remember me?"

The moment he heard the voice, he recognised it. It was the thrilling voice of "Perseus," of "Good-for-nothing" Nan, of "Peggy Green," of "The Little Rebel," of "Mrs. White," of "Fatima," of "Rose Dufard"—of Nelly Featherstone. Had her eyelashes been caked with cosmetique, her lips reddened with salve, and the violet-powder of her face tempered with glycerine and rouge, he would have recognised her at once; but there was a good deal of difference between Miss Featherstone in morning costume, with cold daylight on her face, and Miss Featherstone in the dashing and glittering garments of "Conrad the Corsair," with the glare of the footlights on her forced complexion and brilliant ornaments. For the rest, he had only heard of her as a good and well-meaning little girl, to whom

Nature had given a deadly pair of eyes and a warm temperament. He was at first rather taken aback by her proffered friendship; but a few commonplaces relieved him from the predicament. She gave him a parting smile full of sweetness; and he went up to the door, and entered the house, leaving his card with the servant.

Presently Mrs. Christmas entered the drawing-room, and said that Miss Brunel would be glad to see him out in the garden, where she was then engaged.

"You seem to have been ill, Mrs. Christmas," said Will. "I hope that wild adventure upon Hounslow Heath had nothing to do with it."

"Indeed, I'm afraid it had, Mr. Anerley," said the little woman, whose bright eyes were unnaturally bright, her face also being unusually pale. "I have never been well since; but old folks like me mustn't complain, you know, Mr. Anerley. We mustn't complain if we get ill at times."

"I'm sorry you've been ill. You ought to go and live in the warm fresh air of the country, when the summer's fully in."

"I've never left Miss Annie for a day since her mother died, Mr. Anerley; and I'm not going to forsake her now. It would be hard on both of us."

"But she might go with you?"

"That's easy saying."

They went out and crossed a little bit of lawn, which had a few vases upon it, and here and there a plot of spring annuals. A short distance down the side-path they came to a small summer-house, which was arched over with a piece of light framework; and in front of this framework stood Annie Brunel, on a chair, tying up with loops of string the bright-leaved creepers, which were yet in their erratic youth. Her hands were busy over her head, and her face was upturned, showing the fine outline of her neck and figure—a shapeliness of bust which was not lessened by a tight-fitting and pretty morning dress, which Will thought the most graceful thing he had ever seen, particularly as it caught streaks of sunlight now and again through the diamond spaces above.

When he went up to her and shook hands with her, he fancied he observed a slight tinge of embarrassment in her face; but that quickly wore off, and she returned to her usual bright happiness of manner, continuing her work by fits and snatches. And every position into which her beautiful figure fell seemed more admirable than its predecessor.

"I wonder," thought Will, "if any man ever lifted her down from the saddle; and did he immediately die of joy?"

Perhaps he was sorry at the moment that one's descent from a chair is so obviously an easy feat.

"I'm doing this out of pure mischief," she said, "and earning for myself such heaps of muttered scolding and ill will. The gardener comes to us twice a week; and he is quite savage if I have meddled with anything in the meantime. I can't

pacify him. I have tried every means; but he is too obdurate. Miss Featherstone says I ought to hire a young gardener, and I might have the garden done any way I wished."

"Sulky servants are always the best servants," said Will, rather absently; for the clear, dark Italian face, and the bright smile, and the white teeth, oppressed him with a vague, delicious melancholy. "But a gardener, whether he is good or bad, is always sulky. My mother is afraid to touch one of the plants in the greenhouse until it is half withered; and when some people come, and she carries off a lot of the plants for the hall and dinner-table, she trembles to meet the old man next morning. I suppose gardeners get so fond of their flowers as to be jealous, and jealousy is always cross. By-the-bye, wasn't that Miss Featherstone who left as I came in?"

"Yes."

"I scarcely knew her. In fact, I only saw her once before off the stage—at that supper; and yet she was kind enough to bid me good morning."

"Then she must have thought you were a newspaper gentleman," said Mrs. Christmas, with a good-natured little laugh. "She is very partial to them. And that one she knows just now teaches her such dreadful things, and the heedless girl repeats them wherever she goes, to make people laugh. What was it she said this morning, Miss Annie?—that on St. Patrick's Day there were so many wicked things done in Ireland, that the recording angel had to take to shorthand."

"Well, Lady Jane," said Miss Brunel, "you need not have repeated what she said; and it's very wrong of you to say anything against poor Nelly, who is a warm-hearted, mad little creature."

"She's not so simple as she looks," said Mrs. Christmas, nodding her head sagaciously. "I am an old woman, and I know. And the way she uses that poor young gentleman—him in the government office, who was at the supper, you know, Mr. Anerley—is downright shameful. She told me this morning that he made her swear on an open prayer-book never to put bismuth on her arms or neck again; I suppose because he expects to marry her, and doesn't want to have her all shrivelled up, and bismuth is very bad, you know, for that; and that newspaper gentleman whom she knows said, whenever she wanted to quarrel with the poor young man, and make him believe that she had perjured herself all for the love of shiny white arms, she ought to——!"

"Mr. Anerley," said the young girl, looking down from her work, "will you silence that talkative child by giving it a piece of sugar? What must you think of us actresses if she goes on like that?"

"*She*—bah!" said the old woman, in a melodramatic whisper, with a nod towards Miss Brunel. "She knows no more of Nelly Featherstone and the rest of 'em than an infant does. They don't talk to her like they do to an old woman like

me."

"Now I have finished," said the young lady, jumping lightly down from the chair (Will did not even get the chance of taking her hand), "and we'll go inside, if you please."

"Shall I bring in the chair?" asked Will.

"Oh, no! We leave the old thing out here: it is for no other use."

Somehow it seemed to be quite a valuable chair in his eyes: he would have given a good deal to be its owner just then.

As they got indoors, Mrs. Christmas went upstairs, and Will followed Annie Brunel into the drawing-room, which was rather prettily furnished, and had a good deal of loose music scattered about the tables and piano. He had been in finer drawing-rooms, with grander ladies; and yet he had never before felt so rough and uncultivated. He wished he had looked particularly at his hair and moustache before corning out, and hoped they were not very matted, and loose, and reckless—which they certainly were. Indeed, he looked like some stalwart and bronzed seaman who had just come off a long voyage, and who seemed to regard with a sort of wonder the little daintinesses of land-life.

"I thought you had quite run away with my sis——, with that young lady, the other evening when she went to see you," he said.

"You would have been sorry for that," she replied, with a quiet smile.

Will was not at all so pleased with the gentle motherly tone in which she uttered these words as he ought to have been. She seemed to take it for granted that his love-secret was known to her; he would have preferred—without any particular reason—its not being known.

"What a gentle, loveable girl she is!" continued the young actress. "I never knew any one who so thoroughly won me over in a few minutes. She was so sweet, and quiet, and frank; one could tell by her face everything she thought. She must be very sensitive and affectionate; I hope so tender a creature will never have to suffer much. And you—you must be very proud of her."

"We all are."

Miss Brunel widened her eyes slightly, but said nothing.

"By the way," said Will, with an evident effort, "I gathered together a number of Suabian peasant-songs when I was out there, which I should like to hear you sing. I know you will like them, they are so tender and simple. Dove has tried one or two of them, but her voice is scarcely low and full enough for them——"

"Dove is your *sister's* name, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And how do you know I can sing at all?" she asked, with a smile.

"As well ask a star if it has light," said he, warmly.

"You have lived too long in the East," she retorted, gently.

When Mrs. Christmas came into the room at that moment, there was a slight constraint visible upon both the young people. Will felt that he had gone a little too far; while Annie Brunel seemed to think that she had rather rudely warned him off such dangerous ground. The danger was not in the words, but in his tone.

Mrs. Christmas had just received an East London local paper, in which some youthful poet had poured forth his rhapsodies over Annie Brunel and her 'Juliet.' There was nothing remarkable in the verses, except that the author hoped to meet Miss Brunel in heaven. This was natural enough. The almost inevitable climax of a commonplace poem is heaven, simply because heaven is the only idealism of commonplace minds. It is almost a matter of necessity, therefore, that hymns should end with "above," or "Eden," or "Paradise;" and that magazine poets should lay down their pen with a sigh of relief when they have left their readers somewhere among the fixed stars.

"It is kind of him to suppose that an actress may get to heaven at all," said Annie Brunel, when Mrs. Christmas had read the verses.

Once or twice before Will had remarked this tendency towards bitterness of feeling in the young girl's contemplation of the non-professional world. He could not divine its cause. He was vexed to see it; and now he said, boldly:

"You ought not to speak like that, Miss Brunel. You wrong both yourself and those of whom you speak. You really have imbibed—I don't know how—a singular prejudice against people out of your own profession."

"Don't they refuse in France to bury actors in consecrated ground?"

"If they did, the freaks of a clergy should never be blamed upon the people of any country. I suppose the priests, through the use of the confessional, were so dismayed about the prospects of their charge in the next world, that they thought this distinction the only piece of worldly consolation they could give them. But indeed, Miss Brunel, you must abandon that touch of Bohemianism which you unconsciously allow to escape you sometimes, and which is unfair to——"

"I won't have you argue for these people," she said, with a smile. "I was glad you came here this morning, for I want to win you over to us. Didn't I say, Lady Jane, when I first met him, that he was so unlike the other—what shall I call them?—outsiders? Well, perhaps it is foolish of me to talk about these people, for I know nothing whatever of them; but I have been educated to consider them as so much raw material to be deluded and impressed by stage effect, and I shall never be able to regard them as anything else than strangers. Haven't you seen the little girl in pink cotton and spangles who stands by while her father is performing tricks before a lot of village people? Haven't you seen her watch all the faces round, calculating the effect of the performance, and wondering how much it will produce in halfpence? No, you needn't laugh: that is precisely my attitude

and feeling towards the public."

"You may tell that to one who has never seen you on the stage," said Will. "I *know* that you have no more thought of calculating the effect of what you are doing than the music of a violin has."

"That is because I am then a performer myself, and have to attend to my business. When I stand in one of the entrances, and hear the buzz of the theatre, I say to myself, 'My big children up there in the boxes, you have paid so much to be amused, and you don't care much for me; but in a few minutes I'll have you all as quiet as mice, and in a few minutes more I'll have the prettiest and best among you crying.'"

"My poor Dove's eyes were tremulous all the evening after seeing you," he said.

"I like to hear you speak kindly of her," she replied, looking him straight in the face with her clear and frank eyes. "She will need all the tenderness that friends can give her to make her life a happy one."

Will felt a dull sense of pain at his heart (why, he knew not) on hearing these true and touching words: somehow he fancied there was a sympathy almost prophetic in them.

"Come," she said, briskly, as she rose and went to the piano, "I am going to put you to the test. I make all my new friends submit to it; and according as they pass through it I regard them afterwards. I am going to play three funeral marches—Handel's, Beethoven's, and Mendelssohn's. When the person experimented on prefers a certain one of them, I consider her—I have not tried the experiment on a gentleman as yet—merely emotional and commonplace; therefore I don't care much for her. If she likes a certain other one, I think she is rather more intellectual, with some dramatic sensitiveness; and then I like her a good deal better. When she likes the third, then I think she must have the divinest sympathies, and I am ready to fall in love with her."

She had sat down to the piano.

"But the peril of failure is too great; I dare not risk it," said Will. "It is as hard a trial as the three caskets in the 'Merchant of Venice;' only, if the prize were to be the same, the chance——"

He had spoken quite thoughtlessly; but he saw in a moment, by the pain and confusion of the young actress, what a blunder he had made.

"Pray don't mind what I said, Miss Brunel," he urged. "I was talking to you without thinking, as I should have talked to Dove. I will submit to the three funeral marches, if you like——"

"I will spare you," she said, good-naturedly. "If you had some of your Suabian songs here just now, I should sing them to you. But really it seems a pity to use up such fine weather indoors; are you particularly engaged to-day?"

"I have no engagement if I can be of service to you."

"Mr. Anerley, I am neither a bulbul nor a gazelle. Shall I be trespassing on your time if I ask you to take a walk with me?"

"No."

"Lady Jane—Mrs. Christmas, I mean—and I take a stroll under the trees in Kensington Gardens every forenoon when I have no rehearsal."

"And I," said Will, "was on my way to the same place, for the same purpose, when I happened to see the name of the street, and thought I might venture to trespass on your patience."

So she went and dressed; and then together they passed out into the open air and the sunlight.

Will Anerley left that house a very different man from him who had entered it an hour and a half before. Nor was he conscious of the change.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE PARK.

He only knew that he experienced a subtle pleasure in listening to the talk of this young girl, in watching the varying expression of her face, in admiring her beautiful eyes. The easy and graceful friendship they both seemed to entertain for each other was the simplest, most natural thing in the world. There could be no danger in it. Anerley's life had been too full of action to give him the deadly gift of introspection; but in no possible mood of self-analysis could he have regarded the temporary satisfaction of being near to and talking with the young actress as anything else than a pleasant and ordinary and harmless accident. He never for a moment dreamed of its producing any great result. Had the thing been suggested to him, he would have replied that both he and she understood each other perfectly: they had plenty to think of in life without indulging in folly: they had their separate work and interests and duties, and the casual pleasure they might obtain by meeting as acquaintances was nobody's concern but their own.

The first attitude of affection is exclusiveness. When one sees two young people sending glances across a dinner-table which are intelligible to themselves alone; when one perceives them whispering to each other while elsewhere the talk is general; when one observes them, on opposite sides at croquet, missing

hoops, and slipping balls, and playing to aid each other in the most gratuitous, open, and unblushing manner, it needs no profound divination to detect a secret co-partnership between them. Two quite unselfish lovers immediately become selfish in their united position of antagonism to the rest of the world. And when the girl is pretty, the rest of the world consider such selfishness to be simply hateful.

These two young people, who were not lovers, nor had any intention of becoming lovers, walked up Victoria Road, and so made their way into the cool green shadow of the great elms and leafy lindens which make Kensington Gardens so delightful a lounge. It was now May—the only month in which London trees seem to look cheerful—and the weather was at its freshest and best.

"Mr. Melton proposes to close the theatre in a week or so," said Annie Brunel, "for a month, in order to have it done up anew. He is very anxious that I should not accept any engagement for that month; and I have been thinking I ought to take Mrs. Christmas down to the seaside, or perhaps over to the warm banks of the Rhine, for a week or two. Did you remark how very poorly she is?"

"I did," said Will. "I asked her about it. She seems to fancy that our madcap journey to Hounslow Heath brought the attack on."

"The grass was so wet, you know. I blame myself for it all; and indeed there's nothing I wouldn't do for the dear old creature. She was my only companion and friend for many a year."

"Won't you find it very dull going away all by yourselves?"

"Well, no. She is never dull. I never tire of her society a moment—she is so full of vivacity and kindliness and funny stories; but I do not like the idea of our going away anywhere alone. Hitherto, you know, I have always been in a manner compelled to go by an engagement."

"Bring her down to St. Mary-Kirby, and let Dove and you go about with her."

"Thank you. You have told me so much of that quiet little valley, and the quiet way of living there, that I should feel like an evil spirit invading paradise."

"Now, now—you are at it again," he said, laughing. "I won't have you malign our honest country folks like that. My mother would make you her daughter: she has a general faculty for making pets of everybody. And my father would give you a touch of the old squirelike courtesy he sometimes brings out when he is very grand and polite to some London young lady who comes down to see us."

She only smiled in reply—a trifle sadly.

"I should like to see a little of that peaceful sort of life—perhaps even to try it. Day after day to be always the same, always meeting the same people, always looking out on the same trees and fields and river, and hoping only for some change in the weather, or for a favourable turn to the fortunes of one's pet

hero. But then other cares must come. That gentle little Dove, for instance—isn't she sitting just now wondering when you will come to see her, and getting quite vexed because you stay so long away?"

"You seem to have a great affection for Dove," he said.

"Haven't you?"

"Well, of course; who could help it?"

"If I were a man I should not try to help it; I should be prouder of the love of such a girl than of anything under heaven."

Such conversations are not common between young unmarried people, but neither of these two seemed to consider it strange that they should so talk; for, indeed, Annie Brunel assumed towards Will an amusingly matter-of-fact, kindly, almost maternal manner—so much so that, without hesitation she would have told him that a little more attention to the brushing of his rough brown hair and moustache might not have been inappropriate before visiting a lady. Sometimes he was amused, sometimes tantalized by this tone. He was a man verging towards thirty, who had all his wits about him, who had seen plenty of the world, and knew far more of its ways and beliefs and habits than he would have liked to reveal to his companion then beside him; and he could scarcely refrain from laughing at the airs of superior worldly wisdom which the young actress gave herself, revealing in the assumption the charming simplicity of her character.

They walked down one of the long avenues and crossed over into Hyde Park. The Row was very full at this time; and the brightness of the day seemed to have awoke an artificial briskness among the melancholy men and plethoric girls who had come out for their forced exercise.

"I have been in nearly every capital in Europe," said Will to his companion, "and I have never seen such a company of handsome men and women as you may see here almost any day. And I never saw anywhere people out to enjoy themselves looking so intensely sad over it."

"These are my employers;" said Miss Brunel, with a smile on her pale dark face. "These are the people who pay me to amuse them."

"Look at this big heavy man coming up now," said Will. "Look how he bobs in his saddle; one doesn't often see such a—— Why, it is——"

"Count Schönstein," said Miss Brunel.

It was. And as the Count came up and saw Will walking by the side of a closely-veiled and gracefully-dressed young lady, he took off his hat in his finest manner, and was about to ride on. Perhaps it was the luxuriant black hair or the graceful figure of the young girl which made him pause for a second and recognise her. At all events, he no sooner saw who she was than he stopped his horse, clumsily got down from the saddle, and drawing the reins over the animal's head, came forward to the railing.

"The very two people whom I wished to see," he observed, with a pompous magnanimity. (Indeed there were several reasons why he was glad just then to observe that Annie Brunel had taken kindly to the young man whom he had introduced to her.) "Do you know, Miss Brunel, that Melton is going to close his theatre for a month?"

"Yes."

"Could anything be more opportune? Now listen to what I have to propose. You want a good holiday in this fine weather. Very well. I must go over to Schönstein at once to see about some alterations and improvements I want made; and I propose to make it worth Mr. Anerley's while to go with me and superintend part of these improvements. That is an affair of necessity and business on my part and his; but why should you and Mrs. Christmas not accept our convoy over there? Even if you only go as far as one of the Rhine villages, we could see you safely that distance. Or if I could persuade you to come and see my place, such as it is—for a week or two. I think the excursion would be delightful; and if I can't entertain you as sumptuously as a king, yet I won't starve you, and I'll give you the best wine to be bought for good money in Baden."

Will coloured up at the hideous barbarity of the closing sentence; but Miss Brunel answered, good-naturedly:

"You're very kind indeed, Count; and I am sure the wine must be a great inducement to Mr. Anerley. But if I go anywhere for a holiday, it will be for Mrs. Christmas' sake; and I must see what she says about it first."

"Oh, if it is Mrs. Christmas," said the Count, with a laugh, "I must try to persuade her."

"No; I won't have any coercion. I will place the matter before her in all its details, and she shall decide. If we don't go, I hope you'll have a pleasant journey all the same."

"And as for you, Anerley, what do you say?"

"As our arrangement will be a business matter, we'll settle it another time," said Will, in a decided tone, which prevented the Count making further reference to buying and selling.

"I won't take any denial from any one of you," said the Count, with a prodigious laugh. "As for Mrs. Christmas, if that little woman dares to thwart me, I'll have her portrait published in the illustrated papers as the wife of Rip Van Winkle."

With which astounding witticism, the Count proceeded to get on horseback again—a rather difficult matter. Will held the stirrup for him, however; and eventually he shook himself into the saddle.

Annie Brunel had lifted her veil to speak to the Count; and as her companion now saw that there was a good deal of whispering and nodding going on

among several knots of riders, he thought it prudent to withdraw himself and her into the Park. From thence they took their way back through Kensington Gardens, and so home.

"Would it look strange in English eyes," asked Miss Brunel, frankly, "if Mrs. Christmas and I, in travelling about, were to visit the Count's place?"

"I don't think so," said Will. "And if it did, it wouldn't matter. I think the party would be a very merry and pleasant one; and you would not allow Mrs. Christmas to feel that for her sake you were moping alone in some dull seaside lodgings. The Count is really very good-natured and kind; and I think you would enjoy the quaint old people and their manners down in the Black Forest."

"Have you been there?"

"Oh, yes. I have had a passing glance at every place, pretty nearly. There you may have a little deer-shooting, if you like: I have seen two ladies go out with guns, though they never did anything beyond letting one of the guns fall and nearly killing a keeper."

"Will it be very expensive going over?" she asked quite naïvely, as though she had been calculating the propriety of accepting a country engagement.

"Not at all. Are you going to say 'Yes'?"

"If Mrs. Christmas does, I will."

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD-BYE.

"Cras ingens iterabimus æquor; do you know what that means, Dove?" asked Will.

"Something dreadful, I suppose," she said.

"*Cras*, on Monday night, *iterabimus*, I must leave, *ingens æquor*, for Germany. Didn't I say I should never leave England again without you, Dove? But this is only for a week or two, my darling; and it is on business; and I am come to crave your forgiveness and permission."

What did she say? Not one word. But, being seated at the piano just then, and having some knowledge of how she could most easily reach her lover's heart and make him sorry for his fickleness, she began to play, with great tenderness, with graceful and touching chords, that weird, wild, cruel air, 'The Coulin,'—the old Irish air that seems to have in it all the love and agony of parting which

mankind has ever experienced. It is only now and again that humanity has expressed its pain or passion in one of those strong audible throbs—as when, for instance, God put the *Marseillaise* into the bursting heart of Rouget de Lille. One wonders how men live after writing such things.

And as for Will, he never could bear 'The Coulin;' he put his hand on her shoulder, and said:

"Don't play that any more, Dove. That isn't the parting of love at all—it is the parting of death."

"Ah, why should you say that?" she said, rising and creeping close to him, with tears suddenly starting to her eyes. "Why should you say that, Will? You don't expect us to be parted *that* way?"

"Come," he said, leading her out of the drawing-room into the open air. "The man who wrote 'The Coulin' had probably a broken heart; but that is no reason why we should break ours over his misery. My father is teaching Carry and Totty to fish for sticklebacks in the pond; shall we go and help them?"

He had gone down to bid good-bye to St. Mary-Kirby and its people. The warm valley was very tempting at this time; but did not peremptory business call him away? For after the first yellow flush of the buttercups had died out of the meadows, they were growing white with the snow of the ox-eye; and the walnut trees were changing from brown to green; and instead of the lilacs, the bushy, red-budded honeysuckle was opening, and burdening the air with its perfume.

Then they had fine weather just then; would it be finer on the Rhine? The white heat of midday was without haze. Sharp and clear were the white houses, specks only, on the far uplands; the fir-woods lay black against the blinding sky; and down here in the valley the long-grassed meadows seemed to grow dark in the heat, though there was a light shimmering of sunny green surrounding like a halo each pollard-willow by the riverside. In the clear pools the grey trout threw black shadows on the sand beneath, and lay motionless, with their eyes watching your every movement on the bank. St. Mary-Kirby lay hot and white among the green meadows, and by the side of the cool stream; but the people of St. Mary-Kirby prayed for rain to swell the fruit of their orchards and fields.

On their way down to a little gate, which, at one end of Mr. Anerley's garden, allowed you to go out upon a small bank overlooking the pond, Will explained to his companion the necessity for his going abroad, the probabilities of his stay, and so forth. She knew that he was going with Count Schönstein; but she did not know that Annie Brunel was to be of the party. Will had no particular reason for not mentioning the circumstance; but as he strictly confined himself to the business aspect of the case, Miss Brunel was somehow omitted.

Nor, when they arrived at the pond, and found Mr. Anerley superintending the operations of two young anglers, did he consider it necessary to tell his father

that Annie Brunel was going with them. Perhaps she had slipped out of his mind altogether. Perhaps he fancied he had no right to reveal the Count's private arrangements. At all events, Miss Brunel's name was not at that time mentioned.

"The stickleback," observed Mr. Anerley, sententiously, when they drew near, "must be of very ancient lineage. Any long-continued necessity on the part of any animal produces a corresponding organ or function; can you explain to me, therefore, why Scotchmen are not born with a mackintosh?"

"No," said Dove.

"Because Nature has not had time to develope it. You observe that my stickleback here, whom I have just caught, has had time to acquire special means of defence and attack. I, a man, can only clumsily use for defence or attack limbs which are properly adapted for other purposes——"

"Which proves that mankind has never experienced the necessity of having specially destructive organs," said Will, to Dove's great delight.

She knew not which, if either, was right but the philosopher of Chesnut Bank had such a habit of inflicting upon his womankind theories which they did not understand, and could not contradict, that she had a malicious pleasure in witnessing what she supposed was his discomfiture.

"It serves you right, papa," she said. "You presume on our ignorance, when you have only mamma and me. Now you have somebody to talk to you in your own way."

"When I observed," continued Mr. Anerley, "that mankind had no special organ of attack and defence, I ought to have excluded women. The tongue of woman, an educational result which owes its origin to——"

"Don't let him go on, Dove," said Will, "or he'll say something very wicked."

"Has papa been talking nonsense to you all day, Carry?" asked Dove.

"No," said the matter-of-fact Carry, "it was the story of the 'King of the White Bears.'"

"I pghesumed on theigh ignoghance," said Mr. Anerley, mimicking his adopted daughter's pronunciation.

"We must give him up, Dove," said Will. "A man who will employ ridicule in a scientific argument is not worth answering. If he were not my father, I should express my feelings more strongly; as it is——"

Here Mrs. Anerley appeared, her pretty kindly face lit up by some unusual and pleasurable excitement. She was almost out of breath too.

"Hubert, do you know what's going to happen?"

"Never having been able, my dear, to calculate the probable line of *your* actions——"

"Be quiet. The Bishop is coming to open the church, when the alterations are complete. And, Mrs. Bexley says, that as their house is so far off, he will

lunch with us."

"Dear me!" observed Mr. Anerley, "a bishop! I shall become quite respectable. What sort of wine will the exalted creature propose to drink—if a bishop drinks at all?"

"There will be several clergymen, you know, and——"

"With a bishop in the house, shall I be able to see any lesser lights? I shall allow you women to sit down in the chair he has used, as you all do when the Prince of Wales appears in public. There is a Hindoo custom resembling this—not wholly a religious observance, you know——"

Mr. Anerley stopped, perhaps luckily; pretending to have a dreadful struggle with an obstinate stickleback.

"Mr. Bexley is charmed with the embroidery that Dove has done for the altar-cloth," continued Mrs. Anerley; "and even poor old Mr. Ribston came hobbling up to me and said 'as it was werry nice indeed; only, ma'am, I should ha' preferred it without the bits o' red, which is the mark of the Scarlet Woman. Not as I mean,' he said, though, 'that either you, ma'am, or Mrs. Bexley, would turn us into Papishes without our knowin' of it; only there's some games up as I hear of, and one has to be p'tickler, and not be mixed up wi' them as is ruinin' the Church!'"

"Very proper, too," said Mr. Anerley, having arranged the stickleback question. "I should think that old Ribston fancied he had hit you and Dove pretty hard there. Would you think Dove was a pupil of the Scarlet Woman, Carry?"

"Who is the Scarlet Woman?" said Carry, with her big brown eyes staring.

"Mother Redcap," said Mr. Anerley. "A relation of the old woman who lived in a shoe."

"Hubert," said Mrs. Anerley, sharply, "you may teach the children stickleback fishing; but you'd better leave other things alone. You may be pulling down more than you can build up again, as Mr. Ribston said about these old pillars in the nave."

"Mr. Ribston, my dear, is not a reflective man. He laments the destruction of anything old, not seeing that as we destroy antiquities so the years are making other antiquities. Mamma, box that girl's ears! she is laughing at me."

In the evening Will had to walk over to Balnacluith Place, in order to complete the arrangements with the Count as to their starting on the Monday evening. Dove went with him; and when they got there the red sunset was flaring over the gloomy old house, and lighting up its windows with streaks of fire. Here and there, too, the tall bare trunks of one or two Scotch firs turned scarlet against the faint grey-green of the east; and the smooth river had broad splashes of crimson upon it, as it lay down there among the cool meadows, apparently motionless.

Will's reticence was unfortunate. They had scarcely begun to talk about their journey when Count Schönstein mentioned something about Miss Brunel's probable arrangements.

"Is Miss Brunel going with you?" said Dove, her soft eyes lighting up with a faint surprise.

"Yes. Didn't you know?" replied Count Schönstein. "She is going to take a short holiday, and we hope to be honoured by her presence at Schönstein."

Dove looked at Will; he was examining a cartridge-pouch the Count had brought in, and did not observe her inquiring glance.

On their way home, he observed that she was very quiet. At first he thought she was subdued by the exceeding beauty of the twilight, which had here and there a yellow star lying lambent in the pale grey; or that she was listening to the strong, luscious music of the nightingales, which abound in the valley of St. Mary-Kirby. Presently, however, he saw that she was wilfully silent, and then he asked her what had displeased her. Her sense of wrong was of that tremulous and tender character which never reached the length of indignation; and just now, when she wanted to be very angry with him, she merely said, not in a very firm voice:

"I did not think you would deceive me, Will."

"Well, now," he said, "you have been wasting all this beautiful time and annoying yourself by nursing your grievance silently. Why didn't you speak out at once, Dove, and say how I have deceived you?"

"You said you were going abroad on business."

"So I am."

"Count Schönstein talks as if it were merely a pleasure excursion."

"So it is, to him."

"Miss Brunel is going with you."

"Well?"

"You know quite well what I mean," she said, petulantly. "Why didn't you tell me she was going with you? Why did you conceal her going from me, as if there was no confidence between us?——"

"My darling, I didn't conceal her going from you. I didn't tell you, because her going was no business of mine—because—because——"

"Because you thought I would be jealous," she said, with a little wilful colour in her face.

"My darling," said Will, gravely, "you don't consider what you're saying. You wrong Annie Brunel quite as much as you wrong me and yourself. I don't know what you've seen in her to warrant your supposing for an instant that——"

"Oh, Will, Will," she cried, passionately, imploringly, "don't talk like that to me, or you'll break my heart. Be friends with me, Will—dear Will—for if I'm not

friends with you, what's the use of living? And I'm very sorry, Will; and I didn't mean it; but all the same you should have told me, *and I hate her*!"

"Now you are yourself, Dove," he said, laughing. "And if Miss Brunel were here just now, you would fling your arms round her neck, and beg her to forgive you——"

"I am never going to fling my arms round any person's neck," said Dove, "except, perhaps, one person—that is, when the person deserves it—but I don't think he ever will; and as for Miss Brunel, I don't know what business she has going abroad just now, and I don't know why I should be so fond of her, although I hate her quite the same; and if she were here just now, as you say, I would tell her she ought to be ashamed of herself, cheating people into liking her."

"You talk very prettily, Dove, but with a touch of incoherence. You ought to hear how Annie Brunel speaks of *you*; and you ought to know what a kindly, tender, almost motherly interest she has in you."

"Then you have seen her lately?" said Dove, peeping up.

"Yes, once or twice."

"Does she know that we are to be married?" asked Dove, looking down again.

"She knows that we are to be magghied. You foolish little darling, she saw it in your face the moment you met her; and you might have seen that she knew your secret."

"Actresses are witches, dear," said Dove, gravely. "They know everything."

"They are like witches in having suffered a good deal of persecution at the hands of the ignorant and vulgar."

"Is that me, dear?" she asked, demurely. "No? Then, I shan't make fun any more. But if you're really going away on Monday evening, Will, I want to bid you good-bye to-night—and not before all the people you know; and I'll tell you all that you have got to do when you are away in thinking about me. There's the moon getting up now behind Woodhill Church; and every night at ten, Will, all the time you are away, I'll go up to my room and look up at her, and you'll do the same, darling, won't you, just to please me? And then I'll know that my Will is thinking of me, and of St. Mary-Kirby; and then you'll know, darling, that I'm thinking of you, and if I could only send a kiss over to you, I'd do it. It won't be much trouble to you, will it? And if I'm lonely and miserable all the day, and if the 'Coulin,' that I can't help playing sometimes, makes me cry, I shall know that at ten you and I will be able to speak to each other that way——"

"I'll do everything you ask me," said Will, to her gently; "but—but don't play the 'Coulin' any more, Dove."

"Why, dear? Ah! you said it was the parting of death. Why did you say

that?"

CHAPTER XIII.

"MIT DEINEN SCHÖNEN AUGEN."

Well, the first time Will fulfilled his promise to Dove was when he and Annie Brunel, Mrs. Christmas and the Count (Hermann and another of the Count's servants being in another carriage), were rolling southwards in the Dover express. Here and there he caught a glimpse of the moon, as it loomed suddenly and nearly over the top of some tall embankment; but somehow his attention was so much taken up by the young girl opposite him, that Dove and her pretty request were in danger of being forgotten.

Besides themselves there was only a young Frenchman in the carriage—a grave, handsome young man, with melancholy black eyes and a carefully waxed moustache—who sate and covertly stared at Miss Brunel all the way. Perhaps he had seen her in the theatre; but in any case, the beautiful, clear, dark artist-face of the young actress, with its large deep eyes, was quite sufficient to imbue a susceptible young Frenchman with a vague sadness. Fortunately, she dropped a glove; and he, having picked it up and handed it to her with a grave and earnest politeness, leant back in his seat, apparently thrilled with a secret happiness.

The little party was in very good spirits; and Annie Brunel was especially bright and cheerful in her subdued, motherly way. Will suddenly found himself released from the irritating pleasure of having to humour the whims and coax the moods of an almost childish, petulant, pretty and engaging girl; and talking instead with one who seemed to have a gift of beautifying and ennobling everything of which she spoke. Whatever she mentioned, indeed, acquired a new importance in his eyes. He had never discovered so many things of which he would like to know more; he had never discovered that the things he did know, and the places he had seen, and the people he had met, were so full of life, and colour, and dramatic interest.

"You two people talk like children going off for holidays," said the Count, disentangling himself from a series of discursive theatrical reminiscences offered him by Mrs. Christmas.

"So we are," said Annie Brunel.

The Count introduced himself into the conversation; and then the colour

and light seemed to Will to die out of it. The fact was, Count Schönstein was very much pleased to see that Miss Brunel took so kindly to his friend, as it rendered his own relations with her more secure. He was very grateful to Will, also, for coming with him on this particular excursion; knowing thoroughly that he could never have induced Mrs. Christmas and Miss Brunel to go with him alone. These considerations were well enough in their way; but at the same time he did not think it quite fair that Will should have all the pleasure of Miss Brunel's society to himself. To be shut out from their conversation not only annoyed him, but made him feel old. As it was, Miss Brunel had a provoking habit of speaking to him as if he really were old, and only capable of affording her information. Worst of all, she sometimes inadvertently spoke of herself and Will as "we;" and referred to the Count as if he were some third party whom the two young people were good enough to patronise.

"But then," said the Count to himself, "she has not seen Schönstein. Anerley is perhaps a more suitable companion for her; but then she knows that he has no money, and that he has already mated himself. Once I have shown her Schönstein, I shall be able to dispense with his services: she will need no further inducement. And I never should have had the chance of showing her Schönstein but for him."

The night was so fine that they all remained on deck during the short passage over to Calais; walking up and down in the pale moonlight, that lay along the sea and touched the great black funnels and the tall, smooth masts and yards. Looking down upon the deck beneath, Will had seen Hermann tenderly wrap up the fat little English girl who was to be Miss Brunel's maid, and who was very melancholy indeed over parting with her mother, the Count's Kentish housekeeper; and then the stalwart keeper went forward to the bow and smoked cheap cigars fiercely for the rest of the voyage, thinking probably of the old companions he was going to see.

The Count was very quiet. He scarcely spoke. He sate down and wrapped himself up in his great Viennese travelling-coat; allowing Will and Miss Brunel to promenade the deck. It was simply impossible for any one to become sick on such a night; but I do not think the Count considered himself quite safe until he stood, tall, stout, and pompous, on Calais pier.

"You are a good sailor, I suppose, Anerley?" he said, grandly. "I do think it ridiculous when a man can't cross the Channel without becoming sick."

"A man would have to try very hard to be sick to-night. Hermann, you speak French, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the tall keeper, as he bundled the trembling Polly up the gangway, and then began to look out for such articles of his master's luggage as had not been booked to Cologne.

They were going the Rhine way, instead of *viâ* Paris and Strasbourg; and so in due time they found themselves in the Brussels and Cologne train. We have at present nothing to do with their journey, or any incident of it, except that which befel two of the party that evening in a commonplace hotel overlooking the Rhine.

Romance in a Rhine hotel! exclaims the reader; and I submit to the implied indignation of the protest.

Perhaps the first time you saw the Rhine you thought romance possible. Perhaps you went round that way on your wedding trip; but in any case, the man who lingers about the noble river, and hides himself away from hasty tourists in some little village, and finds himself for the first time in the dreamland of the German ballad-singers, with a faint legendary mist still hanging about the brown ruins, and with a mystic glamour of witchcraft touching the green islands and the dark hills, may forget the guide-books and grow to love the Rhine. Then let him never afterwards use the river as a highway. The eight or ten hours of perspiring Cockney—the odour of cooking—the exclamations and chatter—the parasol-and-smelling-bottle element which one cannot help associating with the one day's journey up or down the Rhine, are a nightmare for after years. One should never visit the Rhine twice; unless one has plenty of time, no companions, an intimacy with German songs, a liking for Rüdesheimer, a stock of English cigars, and a thorough contempt for practical English energy.

Yet it was the Rhine did all the mischief that night. Imagine for a moment the position. They had arrived in Cologne somewhere about five in the afternoon, and had driven to the Hôtel de Hollande, which, as everybody knows, overlooks the river. Then they had dined. Then they had walked round to the Cathedral, where the Count proudly contributed a single Friedrich towards helping King William in his efforts to complete the building. Then they had gone to one of the shops opposite, where the Count, in purchasing some photographs, insisted on talking German to a man who knew English thoroughly. Then he had stalked into Jean Marie Farina's place at the corner, and brought out one of Farina's largest bottles for Miss Brunel; he carrying it down to the hotel, the observant townspeople turning and staring at the big Englishman. By this time the sun had gone down, the twilight was growing darker, the faint lights of the city beginning to tell through the grey.

There were gardens, said the porter, at the top of the hotel—beautiful gardens, looking down on the river; if the gentlemen wished to smoke, wine could be carried up.

"No," said the Count. "I must commit the rudeness of going off to my room. I did not sleep, like you people, in the train."

So he bade them good-night and disappeared.

"But we ought to go up and see the gardens," said Annie Brunel.

"I think so," said Will. "Mrs. Christmas, will you take my arm? It is a long climb. And now that you have surrendered yourself to my care, may I recommend a luxury peculiar to the place? One ought never to sit in Rhine gardens without sparkling Muscatel, seltzer-water, and ice, to be drank out of frosted champagne-glasses, in the open air, with flowers around us, and the river below——"

"You anticipate," said Miss Brunel. "Perhaps the gardens are only a smoking-room, filled with people."

The "gardens" turned out to be a long and spacious balcony, not projecting from the building, but formed out of the upper floor. There were tables and chairs about; and a raised seat which ran along the entire front. The pillars supporting the roof were wound round with trailing evergreens, the tendrils and leaves of which scarcely stirred in the cool night air; finally, the place was quite empty.

Annie Brunel stepped over to the front of the balcony, and looked down; then a little cry of surprise and delight escaped her.

"Come," she said to Mrs. Christmas—"come over here; it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

Beautiful enough it was—far too beautiful to be put down here in words. The moon had arisen by this time—the yellow moon of the Rhine—and it had come up and over the vague brown shadows of Deutz until it hung above the river. Where it touched the water there was a broad lane of broken, rippling silver; but all the rest of the wide and silent stream was of a dull olive hue, on which (looking from this great height) you saw the sharp black hulls of the boats. Then far along the opposite bank, and across the bridges, and down on the quays underneath were glittering beads of orange fire; and on the river there were other lights—moving crimson and green spots which marked the lazy barges and the steamers out there. When one of the boats came slowly up, the olive-green plain was cleft in two, and you saw waving lines of silver widening out to the bank on either side; then the throb of the paddle and the roar of the steam ceased; a green lamp was run up to the masthead, to beam there like a fire-fly; the olive river grew smooth and silent again; and the perfect, breathless peace of the night was unbroken. A clear, transparent night, without darkness; and yet these points of orange, and green, and scarlet burned sharply; and the soft moonlight on the river shone whiter than phosphorus. So still a night, too, that the voices on the quays floated up to this high balcony—vague, echo-like, undistinguishable.

Annie Brunel was too much impressed by the singular loveliness of the night and of the picture before her to say anything. She sate up on the raised bench; and looking out from between the pillars, Will could see her figure, framed, as it were, by the surrounding leaves. Against the clear dark sky her head was softly defined, and her face caught a pale tinge of the moonlight as she

sate quite still and seemed to listen.

He forgot all about the iced wine and his cigar. He forgot even Mrs. Christmas, who sate in the shadow of one of the pillars, and also looked down on the broad panorama before her.

Then Miss Brunel began to talk to him; and it seemed to him that her voice was unusually low, and sad, and tender. It may have been the melancholy of the place—for all very beautiful things haunt us and torture us with a vague, strange longing—or it may be that some old recollections had been awakened within her; but she spoke to him with a frank, close, touching confidence, such as he had never seen her exhibit to any one. Nor was he aware of the manner in which he reciprocated these confidences; nor of the dangerous simplicity of many things he said to her—suggestions which she was too much preoccupied to notice. But even in such rare moments as these, when we seem to throw off the cold attudinizing of life and speak direct to each other, heart to heart, a double mental process is possible, and we may be unconsciously shaping our wishes in accordance with those too exalted sentiments born of incautious speech. And Will went on in this fashion. The past was past; let no harm be said of it; and yet it had been unsatisfactory to him. There had been no generous warmth in it; no passionate glow; only the vague commonplaces of pleasure, which left no throb of regret behind them. And now he felt within him a capacity, a desire, for a fuller and richer life—a new, fresh, hopeful life, with undreamed of emotions and sensations. Why should he not leave England for ever? What was England to him? With only one companion, who had aspirations like his own, who could receive his confidences, who might love with a passion strong as that he knew lay latent in his own heart, who had these divine, exalted sympathies—

He was looking up at the beautiful face of the young girl, cold and clear-cut like marble, in the moonlight; and he was not aware that he had been thinking of her. All at once that horrible consciousness flashed in upon him like a bolt of consuming fire; his heart gave one big throb, and he almost staggered back as he said to himself, with remorse, and horror, and shame—

"O God, I love this woman with my whole soul; and what shall I say to my poor Dove?"

She sate up there, pure and calm, like some glorified saint, and saw nothing of the hell of contending emotions which raged below in her companion's breast. Unconscious of it all, she sate and dreamed the dreams of a happy and contented soul. As for him, he was overwhelmed with shame, and pity, and despair. And as he thought of Dove, and St. Mary-Kirby, the dull sonorous striking of some great bell suddenly reminded him of his promise.

He hastily pulled out his watch—half-past ten, English time. She, down in the quiet Kentish vale, had remembered his promise (indeed, had she not dreamed

of it all day?) had gone to her window, and tenderly thought of her lover, and with happy tears in her eyes had sent him many a kindly message across the sea; *he*—what his thoughts had been at the same moment he scarcely dared confess to his awakened self.

CHAPTER XIV.
THE OUTCAST.

"Quite true, my dear," said Mr. Anerley, gently. "If I had risen at six, gone and dipped myself in the river, and then taken a walk, I should have been in a sufficiently self-satisfied and virtuous frame of mind to have accompanied you to church. But I try to avoid carnal pride. Indeed, I don't know how Satan managed to develop so much intolerable vanity, unless he was in the habit of rising at a prodigiously early hour and taking a cold bath."

"Oh, papa, how dare you say such a thing?" said a soft voice just beside him; and he turned to the open breakfast-room window to see Dove's pretty face, under a bright little summer bonnet, looking in at him reproachfully.

"Come, get away to church, both of you," he said. "There goes the cracked bell."

So Mrs. Anerley and Dove went alone to church; the former very silent and sad. The tender little woman could do nothing for this husband of hers—nothing but pray for him, in an inaudible way, during those moments of solemn silence which occur between divisions of the service.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Mr. Anerley rose, and also walked along to the little grey building. All the people by this time were inside; and as he entered the churchyard the choir was singing. He sate down on one of the gravestones that were placed among the long, green, rank grass; and having pulled his straw hat over his forehead, to shelter his eyes and face from the strong sunlight, he listened, in a dreamy way, to the sweet singing of the children and the solemn and soft intoning of the organ.

It was his favourite method of going to church.

"You get all the emotional exaltation of the service," he used to say, "without having your intellect ruffled. And when the children have done their singing, instead of listening to a feeble sermon, you sit out in the clear sunlight and look down on the quiet valley, and the river, and the trees."

So he sate, and listened and dreamed, while the softened music played upon his fancies, and produced a moving panorama of pious scenes—of the old Jew-life, the early Christian wanderings, the mediæval mysteries, and superstitions, and heroisms.

"How fortunate religion has been," he thought, "to secure the exclusive aid of music and architecture! Philosophy and science have had to fight their way single-handed; but she has come armed with weapons of emotional coercion to over-awe and convince the intellectually unimpressionable. In a great cathedral, with slow, sonorous chanting reverberating through the long stone galleries, and tapers lit in the mysterious twilight, every man thinks it is religion, not art, which almost forces him down upon his knees."

Here the music ceased abruptly, and presently there was a confused murmur of syllables—the clergyman either preaching or reading.

"Sermons are like Scotch bagpipes," said Mr. Anerley to himself, as he rose and left the churchyard to wander down to the riverside. "They sound very well when one doesn't hear them."

That very day there was a conspiracy formed against the carnal peace of mind of this aimlessly speculating philosopher. Mr. Bexley's sermon had been specially touching to the few ladies who attended the little church; and the tender, conjugal soul of Mrs. Anerley was grieved beyond measure as she thought of the outcast whom she had left behind. Rhetorical threats of damnation passed lightly over her; indeed, you cannot easily persuade a woman that the lover of her youth has any cause to fear eternal punishment; but a far less sensitive woman than Mrs. Anerley might well have been saddened by that incomprehensible barrier which existed between her and her husband.

"And it is only on this one point," she thought to herself, bitterly. "Was there ever such a husband as he is—so forbearing, and kind, and generous? Was there ever such a father as he has shown himself to be, both to Will and to this poor Dove? And yet they talk of him as if he were a great sinner; and I know that Mrs. Bexley said she feared he was among the lost."

Be sure Mrs. Bexley did not gain in Mrs. Anerley's esteem by that unhappy conjecture. From the moment of its utterance, the two women, though they outwardly met with cold courtesy, were sworn enemies; and a feud which owed its origin to the question of the eternal destiny of a human soul, condescended to exhibit itself in a bitter rivalry as to which of the two disputants should be able to wear the most stylish bonnet. Was it the righteousness of her cause, or her husband's longer purse, which generally gave Mrs. Anerley the victory over the chagrined and mortified wife of the pastor?

But with Mr. Bexley, Mrs. Anerley continued on the most friendly terms; and on this day, so anxious was she, poor soul, to see her husband united to her

in the bonds of faith, that she talked to Mr. Bexley for a few minutes, and begged him to call round in the evening and try the effect of spiritual counsel on this sheep who had wandered from the fold.

Mr. Bexley was precisely the man to undertake such a responsibility with gladness—nay, with eagerness. Many a time had he dined at Mr. Anerley's house; but, being a gentleman as well as a clergyman, he did not seek to take advantage of his position, and turn the kindly after-dinner talk of the household into a professional *séance*. But when he was appealed to by the wife of the mentally sick man he responded joyously. He was a very shy and nervously sensitive man—as you might have seen by his fine, lank, yellow hair, the singular purity of his complexion, the weakness of his eyes, and a certain spasmodic affection of the corner of his lips—but he had no fear of ridicule when he was on his Master's service. Mr. Anerley and he, indeed, were great friends; and the former, though he used to laugh at the clergyman's ignorance of guns and rods, and at his almost childish optimism, respected him as one honest man respects another. The rationalist looked upon the supernaturalisms of this neighbour of his with much curiosity, some wonder, and a little admiration. Yet he never could quite account for these phenomena. He could not understand, for instance, why one of the most subtle and dispassionate minds of our day should sadly address an old friend as from the other side of the grave, simply because the latter was removed from him by a few (to Mr. Anerley) unimportant and merely technical doctrinal points. Mr. Bexley was a constant puzzle to him. Indeed, the firmest facts in Mr. Bexley's theory of life were what a Sensationalist would at once put down as delusions or mere hypotheses. He was full of the most exalted ideas of duty, of moral responsibility, of the value of fine shades of opinion and psychical experience. He worshipped Dr. Newman, whose verses he regarded as a new light thrown upon the history of the soul. He had a passionate admiration for the *Spectator*; and shed, at least, a good deal of political enlightenment upon his parish by insisting on the farmers around reading each number as it was sent down from London. Mr. Bexley ought never to have been in the service of a State church. He had the "prophetic" instinct. Proselytism came as natural to him as the act of walking. He abhorred and detested leaving things alone, and letting them right themselves. This Kentish Jonah found a Nineveh wherever he went; he was never afraid to attack it single-handed; and most of all, he raised his voice against the materialists and sensationalists—the destroyers of the beautiful idealisms of the soul.

When one's wife and her favourite clergyman enter into league against one's convictions, the chances are that the convictions will suffer. Such combinations are unfair. There are some men, for example, who would refuse to be attended by a doctor who was on very friendly terms with an undertaker; they fear the chance of collusion.

It was almost dusk when Mr. Bexley went round to Chesnut Bank, and then he found Mr. Anerley seated outside, on a carved oaken bench, under some lime-trees fronting the lawn. He was alone, and on the rude table before him were some decanters and bottles, one or two fruit-plates, and a box of cigars.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Bexley," said the lost one; "will you have a cigar?"

"Thank you."

"Sit down. That's claret next you, and there's still some sparkling Burgundy in the bottle. The children are very fond of it—I suppose because it looks like currant-jelly in hysterics."

Cigars and claret don't seem quite the avenue by which to approach an inquiry into the condition of a man's soul; but Mr. Bexley was too excited to heed what he did. He had the proselytising ecstasy upon him. He was like one of the old crusaders about to ride up to the gate of a godless Saracen city and demand its surrender. Did not Greatheart, when about to engage with the giant, refresh himself with the wine which Christiana carried?

"You were not at church this morning," he said, carelessly.

But his assumed carelessness was too evident; his *forte* was not diplomacy.

"Well, no," said Mr. Anerley, quietly: he did not take the trouble to reflect on the object of the question, for he had been considering graver matters when Mr. Bexley arrived.

"You have not been to church for a long time," continued the yellow-haired, soft-voiced preacher, insidiously but nervously. "Indeed, you don't seem to think church-going of any importance."

Mr. Anerley made no answer. Then the other, driven out of the diplomatic method of approach into his natural manner, immediately said—

"Mr. Anerley, do you never think that it is a man's duty to think about things which are not of this world? Do you expect always to be satisfied with worldly good? You and I have had long conversations together; and I have found you so reasonable, so unprejudiced, so free to conviction, that I am amazed you do not recognise the necessity of thinking of something beyond this life that we lead just now."

"Cannot people think of these things outside a church, Mr. Bexley?" he said; but his face was quite grave, if not sad. "As you came into the garden just now, I was perplexing myself with that very question. I was sitting wondering if I should die and become nothing without having discovered how it was I came to live. It seems so singular that one should pass out of consciousness into the inorganic earth without having discovered what the earth is, and without having the least notion of how he himself came to be. Geology only presents you with a notion of tremendous time and change—it gives no clue to the beginning. And if there was no beginning, how is it that my brief consciousness only flickers up

for a short time, and dies down again into darkness and night? How did there come to be a beginning to my consciousness?"

Mr. Bexley was astounded and grieved. He was accustomed, even in that little parish, to find people who had painful doubts about the Mosaic record of creation, who seemed perplexed about the sun, moon, and stars having all been created in order to light up the earth, and who accepted with joy and gladness any possible theory of reconciliation which gave them a more rational view of the world and their belief in the Bible at the same time. But he had not met a man who had passed to one side, as quite unworthy of attention, all theologic solutions of the difficulty whatever.

The very novelty of the obstacle, however, only excited his evangelical fervour. He avowed his object in having visited Chesnut Bank that evening (without, however, revealing at whose suggestion he had undertaken the task), and boldly endeavoured to grapple with the demon of unbelief which had possession of his friend's mind. He insisted on the fallibility of human reason. He pointed out that, without religion, morality was unable to make its way among the uneducated. He demonstrated that every age had its own proper religion, and that an age without a religion was on the brink of suicide. All these things, and many more, he urged with much eloquence and undoubted sincerity, and at the end he was surprised to learn that his auditor quite coincided with everything he had uttered.

"I know," he said, "that the present attitude of the majority of intellectual men in this country is a dangerous and impossible one. Men cannot live in an atmosphere of criticism. What we want just now is a new gospel fitted for the times; we want a crusade of some sort—a powerful belief that will develop all sorts of sympathetic emotions and idealisms, instead of leaving one a prey to cold analysis. But we haven't got it; and those who have gone beyond this tidal flow of the last great religious flood, find themselves stranded on dry land, without a blade of grass or a drop of water in sight. Give me a gospel, and I'll take it with pleasure. Whether it be a new series of religious symbolisms, or a splendid system of ethics, demanding action, or even a belief in humanity as a supreme and beautiful power—anything that can convince me and compel me to admire, I will take. But I don't want to deal in old symbols, and old beliefs, and old theories, that fit me no more than the monkey-jacket in which my mother sent me to school."

"You say you have got beyond us, and yet you acknowledge that you have been disappointed," urged Mr. Bexley. "Why not return to the Church, if only for personal satisfaction? You cannot be happy in your present position. You must be tormented by the most fearful doubts and anticipations. Are you not afflicted by moments of utter darkness, in which you long for the kindly hand of some

spiritual authority to assist you and comfort you? In such perilous moments I believe I should go mad if I were to assure myself, for a single passing instant, that I was alone and unaided—that I had been teaching lies and superstitions all my life—that the world was a big machine, and we the accidental dust thrown out by its great chemic motions—that all the aspirations of our soul, and the voice of conscience, and the standards of right at which we aim, were all delusions and mockeries. I would not have life on such terms. I should know that I only existed through the brute ignorance and superstition of my stronger-made fellow-men not permitting them to kill me and all such as I, and then to seize our means of living. I should look forward to the time when these superstitions should be cleared away, and the world become a general scramble, handed over to those who had the longest claws and the fiercest teeth."

"Then," said Mr. Anerley, with a smile, "if the first glimpse of change is likely to derange your intellect in that fashion, and force you to so many absurd conclusions, you are better where you are. And about those moments of spiritual darkness, and torture, and longing of which you speak—I do not understand what they are. I am never visited by them. I thank God I have a tolerable digestion."

"Digestion!" repeated the other, bitterly. "It all comes to that. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow ye die; and the only resurrection you hope for is to breathe the sunlight again as a buttercup or a dandelion. What is it, may I ask, entices you to remain in the position you occupy—that of being an honest man, credited with constant generous actions, kindly to your inferiors, and what not? Why should you be moral at all? Why should you not, if it pleased you, go into any depths of dissipation and debauchery? There is nothing to restrain you."

"Pardon me, there is. If it were worth the trouble, I dare say I could convince you that my code of morality is not only more comprehensive and more strict than yours, but that it rests on more explicable and more permanent foundations. But it is not worth the trouble to convince a single man at a time in which we are waiting for some great and general renovation."

So they went on, in the faint darkness, under the black branches and the grey sky. Mr. Bexley was not going to relinquish hope at the very outset; and he proceeded from point to point, adducing all the considerations which made it very much more advantageous to be orthodox than to be not orthodox. He might have persuaded a man who was hovering between the two states to go over to the bosom of the Church; but his entreaties, and representations, and arguments had little effect upon a man who was separated from him by the great chasm of a dawning era.

"Perhaps I may lament my present negative, critical attitude," said Mr. Anerley, quite frankly, "but I prefer it to yours. The successive tides of faith which pass over the world leave little circling eddies, and I have been caught in one

of these; I cannot tell in what direction the next great movement will be—I only know I shall not see it."

The end of it was, just then, that Mr. Anerley begged of his neighbour and counsellor to go in-doors and have some supper with them. Mr. Bexley, a little disheartened, but still confident in his spiritual power to overcome, some time or other, the strong resistance of the unconverted man's heart, agreed; and so they both went into the house and entered the dining-room, where the supper-table had just been prepared. Mrs. Anerley started up, with her face red as fire, when she saw her husband and the clergyman enter together; and this obvious departure from her usual self-possessed and easy manner at once struck Mr. Anerley as being very peculiar. Nay, the poor little woman, feeling herself very guilty—harbouring a secret notion that she had tried to entrap her generous and open-minded husband—was more than ordinarily attentive and courteous to him. She was far more civil, and obliging, and formal towards him than towards her stranger-guest; and she never by any chance lifted her eyes to his.

Mr. Anerley saw it all, understood it all, and thought of it with an inward, pitying smile that was scarcely visible upon his lips. "There is a creature," he said to himself, "who might convert any man to anything, if she had the least logical chance on her side."

He saw also, or perhaps feared, that this embarrassment and restraint would only make her uncomfortable for the evening; and so, in his kindly way, he called Dove to him. The young girl went over to him, and he put his arm round her waist, and said:

"Do you see that small woman over there, who looks so guilty? She is guilty; and that gentleman there, whom you have been accustomed to regard as the very pattern of all the virtues in the parish, is her accomplice."

Mrs. Anerley started again, and glanced in a nervous way towards Mr. Bexley. Even her desire for her husband's salvation was lost in the inward vow that never, never again would she seek for aid out of the domestic circle.

"Their secret having been found out, Dove, it remains to award them their punishment. In my royal clemency, however, I leave the sentence in your hands."

"What have they been doing, papa?"

"Ask them. Call upon the female prisoner to stand forward and say why sentence should not be pronounced against her."

"It is not a subject for merriment, Hubert," said his wife, blushing hotly, "and if I did ask Mr. Bexley to speak to you as a friend——"

"You hear, Dove, she confesses to the conspiracy, and also criminates her fellow-prisoner. If I had a black cowl, and some sherry at 12s. a dozen, I should sentence them to drink half a bottle each, having first bade them a final and affectionate farewell."

"As it is, papa," said Dove, maliciously, "you had better give them some of that white Italian wine you are so fond of, and if they survive——"

"Mamma, order this girl to bed."

"That is what poor papa says whenever any one beats him in an argument, or says his wine isn't good," said Dove to Mr. Bexley.

But she went, nevertheless. For it was nearly ten o'clock, and although there was only a faint sickle of the moon now visible, that was still big enough to bear the thin thread of thought which so subtly connected her and her lover. She took out of her bosom a letter which she had received that morning, and she kissed it and held it in her hand, and said, looking up to the pale starlight and the clear white crescent—

"Moon, moon, will you tell him that I've got his letter, and that I've read it twenty times—a hundred times over, and yet he doesn't say a word about coming home? Will you ask him when he is coming back to me—and tell him to come quick, quick, for the days are getting wearier and wearier? Couldn't you come down for a little minute, and whisper to me, and tell me what he has been doing all this time, and what he is looking like, and what he is saying to you just now? Couldn't you give me a little glimpse of him, instead of keeping him to yourself, and staring down as if you didn't see anything at all? And you might as well tell him that I shall begin and hate Miss Brunel if he doesn't come back soon—and I'll play the 'Coulin' all day to myself when I'm alone, and be as miserable and wretched as ever I please. But here is a kiss for him anyway: and you wouldn't be so cruel as not to give him that!"

And Dove, having completed her orisons, went downstairs, with a smile on her sweet face—perhaps not thinking that the nightly staring at the moon, as the reader may perhaps suspect, had somewhat affected her brain. And she found Mr. Bexley more brilliant and eloquent than ever in his exposition of certain spiritual experiences; and she was in such a mood of half-hysteric delight and happiness that she could have put her arm round Mr. Anerley's neck, and begged him, for her sake, to be a little, just a little, more orthodox. As it was, he had promised to go inside the church next Sunday; and his wife was very happy.

CHAPTER XV.

SCHÖN-ROHTRAUT.

Do you know the ballad of 'Schön-Rohtraut'—the king's daughter who would neither spin nor sew, but who fished, and hunted, and rode on horseback through the woods, with her father's page for her only companion? Was there any wonder that the youth grew sad, and inwardly cried to himself—

"O dass ich doch ein Königssohn wär,
Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut lieb' ich so sehr.
Schweig stille, mein Herze!"

One day they rested themselves under a great oak, and the merry Schön-Rohtraut laughed aloud at her woe-stricken page, and cried—

"Why do you look at me so longingly? If you have the heart to do it, come and kiss me, then!"

Whereupon the lad, with a terrible inward tremor, probably, went up and kissed Schön-Rohtraut's laughing lips. And they two rode quite silently home; but the page joyously said to himself, "I do not care now whether she were to be made Empress to-day; for all the leaves in the forest know that I have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth."

There are many of us whose chief consolation it is to know that we have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth. The middle-aged man, getting a trifle grey above the ears, sits by the fire of a winter evening, and thinks of his own particular Schön-Rohtraut.

"I did not marry her; but I loved her in the long-bygone time, and that is enough for me. I had my 'liberal education.' If I had married her, perhaps I should not be loving her now; and all my tender memories of her, and of that pleasant time, would have disappeared. But now no one can dispossess me of the triumphant consciousness that it was my good fortune to have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth."

There is much sympathy abroad upon this matter; and I think we men never get nearer to each other than when we talk, after our wives have gone upstairs to bed, of our lost loves.

This was partly what Will Anerley said to himself as the little party sate under the white awning of the *König Wilhelm*, and slowly steamed up the yellow-green waters of the Rhine. Not without a tremor of conscience he said it; for he had a vague impression that he had been wantonly cruel to Dove. In the first moments of remorse after awaking to a sense of his present position, he had said—

"There remains but one thing to be done. I will at once return to England, and see Annie Brunel no more."

But a man approaching thirty has taught himself to believe that he has great fortitude, especially where the tenderer emotions are concerned; and his next reflection was—

"My sudden departure will only be a revelation to her, and happily she knows nothing about it. Besides, have I not sufficient strength of mind to spend a few days in the pleasant society of this young girl, without committing myself? The mischief is done, and I must suffer for my carelessness; but——"

But he would go on to Schönstein all the same, whither the two ladies had also consented to go. He did not deceive himself when he submitted to his own conscience this theory. He knew there was no danger of his disturbing Miss Brunel's peace of mind, and he knew that Dove would have no further injustice done her. It was he who was to suffer. His thoughtlessness had permitted the growth of a hopeless passion: it would never be known to her who had inspired it, nor to her whom it had dispossessed. He only should carry about with him the scourge; and he was not without a hope that time and travel would for once accommodate themselves to an absurd superstition, and cure him of an unfortunate love.

For the rest, he was almost glad that he had mentally kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth. The consciousness of this passionate and hopeless attachment was in itself a pure and elevated feeling—a maiden delight which had no earthly element mixed with it. It was so different from the kindly, affectionate interest he took in Dove—so different from that familiar liking which made him think nothing of kissing the young girl in an easy fraternal way. To think of kissing Annie Brunel! The page could only look wonderingly and longingly at his beautiful mistress, at her pretty lips and nut-white teeth, and say, "Schweig' stille, mein Herze!"

Quite assured of his own strength of will, he did not seek for a moment to withdraw himself from her, or raise any subtle barrier between them. In fact, he mockingly explained to himself, that as compensation for the pain which he would afterwards have to suffer, he would now sup to the full the delicious enjoyment of her society. He would study as much as he chose the fine artistic head, the beautiful, warm, Italian colour of her face, and her charming figure; and he would gaze his fill into the deep-grey eyes, which were always brightened up by an anticipatory kindliness when he approached. He remarked, however, that he had never seen them intensified by that passionate glow which he had observed on the stage—the emotional earnestness which belonged to what she called her "real life;" there was in the eyes merely a pleased satisfaction and good nature.

"When shall we get away from the Rhine?" she asked, as they were sailing past the black Loreleiberg.

"To-night," said the Count, "we shall stop at Mayence, and go on by rail to

Freiburg to-morrow. Then we shall be away from the line of the tourists."

This was an extraordinary piece of generosity and concession on the part of Count Schönstein; for there was scarcely anything he loved more dearly on earth than to linger about the well-known routes, and figure as a German Count before the Cockney-tourists who crowded the railway stations and *tables d'hôte*.

"I am so glad," said Miss Brunel. "I cannot bear to be among those people. I feel as if I were a parlourmaid sitting in a carriage with her master and mistress, and fancying that she was being stared at for her impertinence by every passer-by. Don't tell me it is absurd, Mr. Anerley; for I know it is absurd. But I cannot help feeling so all the same. When anybody stares at me, I say to myself, 'Well, perhaps you've paid five shillings to stare at me in the theatre, and you think, of course, you have the same right here.'"

Will was very vexed to hear her speak so, partly because he knew that no reasoning would cure her of this cruel impression, and partly because he knew that she had some ground for speaking as she did. Continually, along that insufferably Cockney route, he had seen her stared at and ogled by lank youths from Oxford Street or Mincing Lane, who had got a holiday from counter or desk, and had hoisted a good deal of bunting to celebrate the occasion—bright green ties, striped collars, handkerchiefs marked with Adelina Patti's portrait, white sun hats with scarlet bands, yellow dust-coats and skin gloves. In the intervals between their descents to the cabin, where they drank cognac in preference to "that beastly sour wine," they would sit at a little distance, suck fiercely at their cheap cigars, and stare at the young actress as they were accustomed to stare at the baboons in the Zoological Gardens, or at the Royal Family, or at their favourite barmaid. Then would follow confidential communications to Tom or 'Arry that she was very like "Miss Trebelli," and another head or tails for another "go" of brandy.

"If these creatures were to get to heaven," said Anerley to the Count, in a moment of jealous spleen, "they would ask their nearest way to the Holborn Casino."

It was partly this semi-Bohemian feeling which drew the young artiste towards Count Schönstein and Will Anerley, and allowed her to relish the society of people "out of the profession." Of the personal history of the Count she had got to know something; and while she tolerated his self-sufficiency, and admired his apparent good-nature and even temper, she almost sympathised with him in his attitude towards society. It was the same people whom she had been taught to distrust, who were in league against the poor Count. They would not permit him to mix in their society, because, like herself, he was an adventurer, a person whose position was not secured to him by an ancient royal grant. Will she looked upon in another fashion.

"You have been so much abroad, and mixed with so many people, that you seem not to belong to England. There is nothing English about you—nothing of vanity, and self-importance, and suspicion of outsiders."

But against this praise, as against the whole tone of her mind on the subject, he had uttered many a serious protest.

"You blame us English with the impertinences of a few boys out for a holiday. You have heard stories of actors and actresses having received injuries from persons out of the profession; and you necessarily think there must be a mutual antagonism between the classes."

"I don't think anything about it," she used to say; "I only know what my impression is, however it has been taught me. And I know that there is no sympathy between me and the people whom I try to amuse, and that they despise me and my calling. I don't blame them for it; but how can you expect me to like them? I don't say they are narrow-minded, or prejudiced; but I know that an English lady would not sit down to dinner with an actress, that an English mother would think her son lost if he married an actress; and that a girl in good society who marries an actor is thought to have done something equivalent to running away with her father's footman."

These were the bitter precepts which the Marchioness of Knottingley had left with her daughter; and they had been instilled into the girl at a time when beliefs become part of our flesh and blood.

"There are ignorant and ill-educated women who think so," said Will, calmly; "but you do an injustice to women of education, and good taste, and intelligent sympathies, when you suppose that every one——"

"Let us take your own mother," said Annie Brunel, hastily. "Would she be anxious, supposing she knew me, to introduce me to the rest of her acquaintances? Would she ask me to visit her? Would she be willing that I should be a companion to that pretty little Dove?"

"I think I have answered all these questions before," said Will. "I tell you I can't answer for all the women of England; but for those of them whom I respect I can answer, and my mother is one of them. Has she not already allowed Dove to make your acquaintance?"

"Because I was a curiosity, and she was allowed to come and look at me in my cage," said the actress, with that cruel smile on her lips.

"Miss Brunel," said Will, simply and frankly, "you are exhibiting far more prejudice than you will find in the women you speak about. And I don't know whether you will forgive my saying that it seems a pity one of your years should already possess such suspicions and opinions of other people——"

Wherewith she looked him straight in the face, with a clear searching glance of those big and honest eyes of hers, which would have made a less disin-

terested advocate falter.

"Are you telling me what you believe to be true?" she said.

"Could I have any object in deceiving you?"

"You believe that your mother, a carefully pious and correct lady, who has lived all her life in the country, would dare to avow that she knew an actress?"

"She would be proud to avow it."

"Would she take me to church with her, and give me a seat in her pew, before all her neighbours?"

"Certainly she would."

"And what would they think?"

"Perhaps the parish clerk's wife," said Will, with a mental glance at Mrs. Bexley, "and the vet.'s wife, and a few women of similar extraction or education, might be shocked; but the educated and intelligent of them would only be envious of my mother. Wherever you go, you will find people who believe in witches, and the eternal damnation of unconverted niggers, and the divine right of the nearest squire; but you don't suppose that we are all partial idiots? And even these people, if you went into the St. Mary-Kirby Church, would only have to look at you——"

"You said something like that to me before," she replied, with the same nervous haste to exhibit every objection—was it that she the more wished them to be explained away?—"and I told you I did not think much of the charity that was only extended to me personally because my face was not old and haggard. Suppose that I were old and painted, and——"

"But if you were old, you would not be painted."

"I might."

"In that case, all the women would have some ground to be suspicious of you; and many of them would be angry because you were allowed a luxury denied them by their husbands. Really, Miss Brunel, you do the 'outsiders' an injustice," he added, warming to his work. "Stupid people and uneducated people do not care for nice discriminations. They have always decided opinions. They like to have clear lines of thought and positive decisions. They ticket things off, and stick to their classifications through thick and thin, as if they were infallible. But you do wrong to care for the opinion of the stupid and uneducated."

"I should like to believe you; but how can I? If, as you say, we have fallen so low as even to earn the contempt of the stupid——"

"My darling," he said, and then he stopped as if a bullet had gone through him, "I—I beg your pardon; but I really fancied for the moment I was quarrelling with some of Dove's nonsense——"

She smiled in such an easy way at the mistake, however, that he saw she put no importance upon it.

"I was going to say—how could stupid people exist if they did not despise their superiors in wit, and intellect, and artistic perception? There is a man at my club, for instance, who is intellectually, as he is physically, a head and shoulders taller than any of his brother members. What reputation has he? Simply that of being 'an amusing young fellow, but—but very shallow, don't you know.' The empty-headed idiots of the smoking-room sit and laugh at his keen humour, and delicate irony, and witty stories; and rather patronise and pity him in that he is weak enough to be amusing. A dull man always finds his refuge in calling a man of brighter parts than himself 'shallow.' You should see this friend of mine when he goes down into the country to see his relations; how he is looked upon at the dinner-table as being only fit to make the women smile; and how some simpering fool of a squire, with nothing more brilliant in his library than a pair of hunting-boots, will grin compassionately to some other thick-headed boor, as though it were a ludicrous thing to see a man make himself so like a woman in being witty and entertaining."

"And you think the women in these country-houses more intelligent and amusing than the men?"

"God help country-houses when the women are taken out of them!"

"What a large portion of my life have I wasted over this abominable Bradshaw!" said Count Schönstein, coming up at that moment, and their conversation was for the present stopped.

But Will now recognised more firmly than ever the invisible barrier that was placed between her and the people among whom his life had been cast; and, perhaps, for Dove's sake, he was a little glad that he could never look upon this too-charming young actress but as the inhabitant of another world. And sometimes, too, he involuntarily echoed Dove's exclamation, "You are too beautiful to be an actress?"

When, after a pleasant little supper-party in the Mayence Hotel, at which they stopped, they parted for the night, Will congratulated himself on the resolution he had taken in the morning. It had been such a pleasant day; and who was the worse for it? He was sick at heart when he thought the time would come in which he could no more enjoy the keen pleasure of sitting near this tender creature, of watching her pretty ways, and listening to her voice. The love he felt for her seemed to give him a right of property in her, and he thought of her going for ever away from him as an irreparable and painful loss. There was a quick, anxious throbbing at his heart as he attempted to picture that last interview; for he had resolved that after their return to England, he would not permit himself to see her again. He thought of her going away from him without once knowing of that subtle personal link which seemed to unite them in a secret friendship. She would be quite unconscious of the pain of that parting; she might even think

that he had yielded to the prejudices of which she had spoken, and had become ashamed of her friendship.

"That, too, must be borne," he said, with a sigh. "I cannot explain why I should cease to see her; and yet we must never meet again after we return to England. If it were not for Dove, I should look out for some appointment abroad, and so get an excuse; for it is hard to think that I must wound the self-respect of so gentle a creature by appearing to refuse her proffered friendship without a cause."

Then he sat down and wrote a long letter to Dove; and for the first time he felt a great constraint upon him in so doing. He was so anxious, too, that she should not notice the constraint, that he wrote in a more than usually affectionate strain, and strove to impress her with the necessity of their being married very soon.

"Once married," he said to himself, "I shall soon forget this unhappy business. In any case, we must all suffer more or less; and it is entirely owing to my carelessness in enjoying Miss Brunel's society without looking at what it might lead to. But how should a man of my years have anticipated such a thing? Have I not been intimate with as pretty and as accomplished women in all parts of the world, without ever dreaming of falling in love with them?"

But no, there was no woman so pretty and charming as *this* one, he reflected. No one at all. And so, counting up in his mind, like a miser counting his guineas, one by one, the few days he would yet have to spend in the torturing delight of being near to her, he got him to bed, and did *not* dream of St. Mary-Kirby.

The next day they reached Freiburg, and here the Count had a carriage awaiting them, with a couple of swarthy Schwarzwalders in his somewhat ostentatious livery.

"Now we are getting home," he said, with a bland laugh to Mrs. Christmas; "and you must have a very long rest after so much travelling. We shall see what the air of Schönstein will do for you, and a little of the Schönstein wine—eh, eh?"

Their entrance to the Black Forest was inauspicious. It was towards the afternoon before they left Freiburg; and the air was oppressively hot and sultry. Just as they were approaching the Hollenthal—the Valley of Hell—a strange noise attracted Will's attention; and, looking over the back of the open carriage, he saw behind them a great red cloud, that entirely shut out the landscape. Two minutes afterwards a sudden gust of wind smote them with the violence of a tornado; they were enveloped in a dense lurid pall of sand; and before they could cover over the carriage, great drops of rain began to fall. Then the far-off rumbling of thunder, and an occasional gleam of reflected lightning, told what was coming.

The Count looked much alarmed.

"The Hollenthal is a fearful place," said he, to the ladies: "overhanging rocks, dark as pitch, precipices, you know—and—and hadn't we better return to Freiburg? That is, if you think you will be afraid. For myself, I'd rather go on to-night, and save a day."

"Don't think of turning on our account," said Annie Brunel. "Mrs. Christmas and I have been together in a good many storms."

So they went on, and entered that gloomy gorge, which is here the gateway into the Black Forest. They had just got themselves closed in by the mighty masses of rock, when the storm thoroughly broke over their head. It was now quite dark, and the thin white shafts of lightning shot down through the ravine, lighting up the fantastic and rugged sides of the pass with a sudden sharpness. Then the thunder crackled overhead, and was re-echoed in hollow rumbles, as if they were in a cavern with huge waves beating outside; and the rain fell in torrents, hissing on the road, and swelling the rapid stream that foamed and dashed down its rocky channel by their side. Every flash whitened the four faces inside the carriage with a spectral glare; and sometimes they got a passing glance down the precipice, by the side of which the road wound, or up among the overhanging blocks and crags of the mountains.

Mrs. Christmas had been in many a thunderstorm, but never in the Hollenthal; and the little woman was terrified out of her life. At every rattling report of the thunder she squeezed Miss Brunel's hand the more tightly, and muttered another sentence of an incoherent prayer.

"Unless you want to kill your horses, Count," said Will, "you'll stop at the first inn we come to; that is about a mile farther on. I can tell by the sound of the wheels that the horses are dragging them through the mud and ruts by main force; and up this steep ascent that won't last long."

"Think of poor Mary and Hermann," said Annie Brunel. "Where must they be?"

"I'll answer for Hermann coming on to-night, if he's alive," said the Count. "And I hope that he and the luggage and Mary won't be found in the morning down in that tremendous hole where the stream is. Bless my life, did any mortal ever see such a place, and such a night! What a flash that was!"

It was about midnight when they reached the Stern inn; and very much astonished were the simple people, when they were woke up, to find that a party of visitors had ventured to come through the Hell Valley on such a night.

"And the hired carriage from Freiburg, Herr Graf," said the chief domestic of the little hostelry; "it won't come up the valley before the morning."

"What does the fool say?" the Count inquired of Will.

"He says that the trap with the luggage won't come up to-night."

"Bah!" said the Count, grandly. "Sie wissen nicht dass mein Förster kommt;

und er kommt durch zwanzig—durch zwanzig—zwanzig—damme, get some supper, and mind your own business."

"Yes, eef you please, my lord," said the man, who knew a little English.

The Count was right. Hermann did turn up, and Mary, and the luggage. But the hired vehicle had been a badly-fitting affair, and the rain had got in so copiously that Mary was discovered sitting with Hermann's coat wrapped round her, while the tall keeper had submitted to be drenched with the inevitable good-humour of six-feet-two. Some of the luggage also was wet; but it was carried into the great warm kitchen, and turned out and examined.

At supper, the Count, who was inclined to be merry, drank a good quantity of Affenthaler, and congratulated Mrs. Christmas on her heroic fortitude. Annie Brunel was quiet and pleasant as usual—a trifle grave, perhaps, after that passage through the Hollenthal. Will was at once so happy and so miserable—so glad to be sitting near the young Italian-looking girl, so haunted by the dread of having to separate from her in a short week or two—that he almost wished the storm had hurled the vehicle down into the bed of the stream, and that there he and Schön-Rohtraut might have been found dead together in the grey morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCHÖNSTEIN.

"Welcome to Schönstein!" cried the Count, gaily, as a turn in the road brought them in sight of a little hamlet, a small church, and beyond these—somewhat back from the village—an immense white house with green sunshades over the windows.

"Friend Anerley," said the Count to himself, "if you ever had a thought of paying your addresses to the lady opposite you, your case is rather hopeless *now*!"

Annie Brunel looked forward through the ruddy mist that the sunset was pouring over the picture before them, and thought that it was very beautiful indeed. She paid little attention to the gaunt white house. But this little village, set in a clearing of the great forest—its brown wooden houses, with their heavy projecting eaves and numerous windows; the small white church, with a large sundial painted in black on the gable; the long, sloping hill behind, covered, away even, to the horizon, with the black-green pines of the Schwarzwald—all these things, steeped in the crimson glow of the western light, were indeed most

charming and picturesque.

"Why do they project the roofs so much?" she said, looking especially at the inn of the little hamlet they were approaching. "I thought these splendid old houses only existed in Swiss lithographs."

"For the snow," said the Count, grandly, as if the intensity of the Black Forest winters belonged to him. "You should see a regular snowstorm in this country, with half the houses buried, the mail-coaches turned into sledges—why, every man who keeps a carriage here must keep it in duplicate—a wheel-carriage for the summer, a sledge for the winter."

With which they drove through the village. Hans Halm, the sturdy innkeeper, was at the door of that palace in brown wood which he called his house; and to Hermann's hurried—"Wie geht's? Wie geht's, Halm?" he returned a joyous "Danke schön, Hermann."

"But where is Grete?" said Hermann, in a bewildered way, to the English Mary who sate beside him in the second carriage. "She not here? She know I come; she is not at the door of the inn——"

"Who is Grete?" said Mary, who had made great friends with the big keeper in England.

"Why, Grete is—you know, Grete."

At that moment Margarethe Halm was in the courtyard of the Count's house, whither she had stolen away from her father's house, with her heart beating, and her ears listening for the sound of the carriage-wheels. A young, swarthy, handsome girl, with an innocent, dumb, animal-like fondness and honesty in her big, soft, black eyes, she stood there in her very best clothes—her Sunday head-dress of black velvet and gold beads; her short petticoats and dress; her elaborately embroidered boddice; her puffed white sleeves, coming down to the elbow, and there exposing her round, fat, sunburnt arms. She it was with whom Hermann had sung, on the night before he left for England, the old ballad in which the wanderer bids farewell to his native vale; and ever since, when she heard the pitiful words—

"Muss aus dem Thal jetzt scheiden,
Wo alles Lust und Klang;
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden
Mein letzter Gang.
Dich, mein stilles Thal, grüss ich tausend Mal!
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden,
Mein letzter Gang!"

—the big black eyes were wont to overflow, and her round brown cheeks grew

wet with tears. She was always very silent, this Grete Halm, and you might have thought her dull; but she was so extraordinarily sensitive to emotional impressions, and there was such a mute, appealing look in her eyes for kindness and affection, that half the young men in the neighbourhood would have given their ears to be permitted to walk about with Grete, and go to church with her, and sing with her in the evening. There was the young schoolmaster, for example—everybody knew how he came to have that ugly mark on his nose the last time he came home from Göttingen, to undertake the tuition of his neighbours' children. It was at a beer-drinking bout, and a few got tipsy; and one especially, Friedrich Schefer, disliking young Gersbach, came round to him, and said—

"I see you have Margarethe Halm written on one of your books. If that is the name of your sweetheart, my friend Seidl says she is a rogue, and not to be trusted."

"I challenge you," says Gersbach, calmly, but blinking fiercely through his spectacles.

"Further, muthiger Herr Gersbach, my friend Seidl says your Margarethe Halm has half-a-dozen sweethearts, and that you give her money to buy presents for them."

"You are a liar, Friedrich Schefer!" shouts Gersbach, starting to his feet; "and I challenge you, '*ohne, ohne,*'"[1]

So the next morning the meeting took place; and the unfortunate Gersbach, who had had little practice, and was slow of eye, suddenly received a blow which divided the under part of his nose from the upper. The wound was sewn up again on the spot; but when Gersbach came home he looked a hideous spectacle, and though he never spoke of it, it leaked out that the wound had been got in fighting about Margarethe Halm. Gersbach was a great friend of Hans Halm's, and spent every evening in the inn chatting with the keepers, or reading Greek, and drinking white wine and water; but Grete showed him no particular favour, and he seemed rather sad.

"Ach, Gott," said Margarethe to herself, as she stood in the stone courtyard; "if they should not come—and if my father should see me——"

The next moment she caught sight of the two carriages coming along through the village; and her heart waxed a little faint as she saw that Hermann was sitting with a rosy young English girl by his side.

"He never wrote to me anything about her," she thought, in those scrawled letters which always ended, "*Denke an mich, Gretchen; und mit herzlichsten Grüssen*," &c., &c.

[1]The extended phrase is, "Ich fordere Ihnen auf, *ohne Mützen, ohne Secundanten*"—"I challenge you, *without either masks or seconds*." Such a challenge being given (and it is only given in cases of extreme provocation), the duellists fight without cessation until one of them is put *hors de combat*.

It seemed part of the tall head-forester's pride that he would not permit himself to show any joyful surprise on finding that Grete was in the courtyard. On the contrary, with a curt "*'n Abend, Grete*," he passed her, and busied himself in seeing that the Count and his guests were being properly attended to by the servants, and that the luggage was being straightway carried in.

Margarethe Halm, with her heart beating worse than ever, came timidly forward, then hung about a little, and at last ventured to say, with a little quivering of the mouth:

"Thou hast never even shaken hands with me, Hermann."

"But thou seest that I am busy, Grete, and—*Donnerwetter*, idiot, look what you do with the lady's box!—and thou shouldst not have come at such a time, when the Herr Graff and his visitors have just arrived, and expect—"

He proceeded to give some more orders; for the head-forester was an important man in Schönstein, and looked upon the Count's domestics as he looked upon his own keepers. But happening to turn, he caught a glimpse of what suddenly smote down his gruff pride—Margarethe Halm was standing by, with her soft black eyes brimming over with tears. Of course his stalwart arms were round her shoulders in a moment, and he was talking pettingly and caressingly to her, as if she were an infant, with ever so many *du's*, and *klein's*, and *chen's*.

The Count's big mansion, though it looked like a whitewashed cotton-factory outside, was inside very prettily furnished; and the long, low-roofed rooms, with their polished wooden floors and gaily-decorated walls, were very cool and pleasant. There was little garden about the house; the ground behind was laid out in formal walks between avenues of acacias and limes; there was a little pond with a plaster-boy in the centre, who spouted a thin jet of water through a pipe; and there was, at the further end of the trees, an artificial ruin which the previous proprietor had failed to complete when the Count took possession of the place.

"How lovely the village looks in that red light!" said Annie Brunel, as they all went out on the balcony of the room in which dinner had been laid for them.

"But the glory of Schönstein," said the Count, slapping Will on the shoulder—"I say, the glory of Schönstein, my boy, lies in those miles and miles of trees—the deer, my lad, the deer! Ah, Miss Brunel, when I see you take a gun upon your shoulder, and march into the forest with us—like Diana, you know—"

He looked at her with the admiring smile of an elderly Adonis. Had he not the right, now that she had seen his splendour and his wealth? Could he doubt any longer about his chance of winning that white little hand?

"You are too kind, Count," she said, laughingly. "Lady Jane will tell you that the very name of Diana has been always hateful to me."

"It's Diana Vernon she means," said Mrs. Christmas, with a pretty little laugh; "that she used to play before she became a grand lady. And play it she did, Count, take my word for it, as well as ever you could think of: and as for me, I never *could* understand how she so hated the part, which is a a very good part for a young miss that can sing. I declare the dialogue is quite beautiful."

Here she gave, with great feeling and correct, impassioned emphasis, some passages in which the Diana and Francis of that ridiculous drama talk bombastic sentiment to each other, causing Miss Brunel to laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"You may laugh as you like, Miss Annie, but it's a beautiful piece; and how many years is it since you played it for my benefit?"

"You're making me quite old, Lady Jane," protested the young actress.

"People have only to look at you, my dear," continued the bright little old woman, "and they won't make a mistake. That was the very last time I went on the stage, Count; and do you know what I played?—why, 'Miami' in the 'Green Bushes.' And Miss Annie, here, just to please me, consented to play 'Nelly O'Neil,' and, will you believe me, Mr. Anerley, I stood in the wings and cried—me, an old woman, who had heard it all a thousand times—when she began to sing the 'Green Bushes.' Have you heard it, Count?—don't you know the words of it?

"'As I was a-walking one morning in May,
To hear the birds singing, and see lambkins play,
I espied a young damsel, so sweetly sung she,
Down by the Green Bushes, where she chanced to meet me."

There was Polly Hastings—she played 'Geraldine' then—came to me after that last night, and said, solemnly, that she would give herself over to the devil if he would only make her able to sing the ballad as Miss Annie sung it that night. The people in the pit——"

"Mrs. Christmas will go on romancing all the evening, Mr. Anerley, if you don't stop her," said Miss Brunel.

"And poor Tom Mulloney—he played 'Wild Murtogh' for me—do you remember, Miss Annie, that morning at rehearsal when they came and told him that his wife and the little boy were drowned? He didn't speak a word—not a word; he only shook a little, and was like to fall; then he walked out, and he was never on the boards of a theatre again. He took to drinking as if he was mad; and he was put in an asylum at last; and they say he used to sing all his old songs at the amateur concerts in the place, you know, better nor ever he had sung them in the theatre—that was 'The Dance on the Flure,' and 'The Jug o' Punch,' and 'Savourneen Deelish,' and 'The Coulin'——"

"The Coulin!" said Will, with a sort of chill at the heart; he had forgotten all about Dove, and St. Mary-Kirby; and the remembrance of them, at that moment, seemed to reproach him somehow.

"Do you know 'The Coulin'?" asked Miss Brunel, wondering at his sudden gravity.

"Yes," said he, with an affectation of carelessness. "It is one of Dove's favourite airs. But she won't accept the modern words as representing the song; she will have it that the melody describes the parting of two friends——"

"Come, then," said the Count, briskly, "dinner is ready. Miss Brunel, you shall play us the—the what, did you say?—to-morrow, after the man has come from Donaueschingen to tune the piano. Not a bad piano, either, as you'll see; and now I don't grudge having bought it along with the rest of the furniture, when I find that *you* will charm us with an occasional song. Four hundred florins, I think it was; but I don't know."

As they retired into the long dining-saloon, where a sufficiently good dinner was placed on the table, Hermann came out into the courtyard, surrounded by a lot of yelping little beagles, with short stumpy legs, long ears, long noses, and sagacious eyes. Further, there was a huge brown mastiff, with long lithe limbs, and tremendous jaws, at sight of which Grete shrank back, for the brute was the terror of the village.

"Go down, then, thou stupid dog, thou worthless follow! seest thou not the young lady is afraid? Ah, du guter Hund, du Rudolph, and so thou knowest me again? Come along, Grete, he won't touch you; and we'll go to see your father."

"You won't tell him I was waiting for you, Hermann?" said the girl, shyly.

Hans Halm stood at the door of his *châlet*-looking hostelry, in a thin white coat and a broad straw hat, with a complacent, benevolent smile on his stout visage and shrewd blue eyes. Sometimes he looked up and down the road, wondering what had become of Grete, who, Frau Halm being dead, had taken her mother's place in the management of the inn. Perhaps Hans suspected where his tender-hearted, black-eyed daughter had gone; at least, he was in nowise surprised to see her coming back with Hermann, Rudolph joyously barking by their side. The two men shook hands heartily, and kissed each other; for had they not, some years before, pledged themselves solemnly to call each other "du," and sworn eternal friendship, and drank a prodigious quantity of Affenthaler over that ceremony?

"Gretchen, get you indoors; the house is quite full, and you can't expect your grandmother to do everything."

Hermann looked into the passage. On the pegs along the wall were hung a number of guns—nearly all of them double-barrelled breechloaders; with white barrels, and broad green straps for the slinging of them over the shoulder.

"My men are within, *nicht wahr*?" he said.

"Listen, and you will hear," said Hans Halm.

From the door by which Grete had disappeared, there issued a faint murmur of voices and a strong odour of tobacco-smoke. Hermann went forward and opened this door, meeting there a picture with which he was quite familiar, but which it is wholly impossible to describe. The chief room of the inn, monopolising all the ground-floor, and lighted by ten or twelve small windows, was almost filled with a cloud of pale-blue smoke, in which picturesque groups of men were seen seated round the long narrow tables. Brown-faced, bearded men, they wore the foresters' dress of green and grey, with a tall beaver hat in which were stuck some capercailzie feathers, with a large cartridge-pouch of roe-skin slung over their shoulder by a green strap, with a horn slung round their neck by means of a twisted green cord with tattered tassels, and with a long killing-knife lying on the table before them, with which they from time to time cut a lump off the brown loaf. All round the low-roofed room, forming a sort of cornice, ran a row of deers' horns, tastefully mounted, each marked with the date on which the animal had been shot. These were, for the most part, the product of Hans Halm's personal skill; though the finest pair had been presented to him by Hermann. Besides the under-keepers, there were one or two villagers, and in a corner sat young Gersbach, his spectacles firmly fixed on the book before him, except when Margarethe Halm happened to pass before him, as she brought in fresh chopins of white wine to the swarthy, sinewy, picturesque foresters.

Of course Hermann's entrance was the signal for a general uproar, all the keepers starting from the benches and crowding round him to bid him welcome. At last he managed to get clear of them, and then he sat down on one of the benches.

"Listen, friends!" he said, in a loud voice, bringing down his hand with a bang on the table.

There was instant silence.

"The Herr Graf and his friend go shooting to-morrow morning. Every man will be here by four o'clock—four o'clock, do you understand? In placing the guns, you will take care that the Herr Graf, and the other Englander, have the *Haupt-platz*[2] alternately. Four o'clock, every one of you, remember. And now, in God's name, Hans Halm, let us have some of your white wine, that I haven't tasted for many a day!"

There was a new life in the big forester, now that he had sniffed the resinous odour of his native woods, and was once more among his own people. He lan-

[2]The Haupt-platz is the point at which the deer are most likely to break cover, and therefore the best position for the sportsman. There are generally one or two of those good places, which are invariably given, as a compliment, to strangers.

guished in the dull solitude of Kent; here he knew his business, he was respected of men, and he speedily showed that there was none of the old swing and vigour gone out of him.

He had scarcely spoken of the wine, when Grete came up with it in a tall white measure, a modest and pleased smile on her face.

"She does not smile like that to the young Mr. Schoolmaster," whispered one keeper to another. "Our Gretchen has her favourites."

"God give her courage if she marries Hermann!" said the other. "He will drive her as we drive the roe."

"Nonsense! Hermann Löwe is an infant with women. You should see how his sister-in-law in Donaueschingen manages him."

At this moment the schoolmaster, whom nobody had noticed, came forward and said to his rival—

"How do you find yourself, Hermann Löwe?"

"Ah, right well, Herr Schulmeister," replied the other, giving him a hearty grasp of the hand. "And I'll tell you what I've got for you in my box. I looked for all the beetles, and creeping things, and butterflies I could in England, and all the strange ones I have brought for you, with a fine big pin run through their body."

"You are very kind, Hermann Löwe."

"No, I'm not. You did a good turn to my sister-in-law's child when he was nearly dead with eating those berries—that's all. And do you still read as much, and gather beetles yourself? Now, look here—I must have all the lads in the neighbourhood to drive for me in the morning, and they'll have to work hard, for the Herr Graf is not a patient man, and he gets angry if there are not plenty of bucks; and so, if the boys are too tired to go to the evening school—you understand?"

Gersbach nodded.

"And the Herr Graf will be pleased if you come with us yourself, Gersbach," added Hermann.

Later in the evening the Count's party came round to visit the inn. By this time Hermann had gone; but there still remained a few of the keepers, who, on seeing the Count, politely rose from their seats.

"Nein," said the Count, in a lordly way, "eh—ah—sitzen sie, gute freundin—eh, freunde—und wie sind Sie, Herr Halm und sein Tochter?"

Halm, with admirable gravity, replied to the Count as if his highness's manner and grammar had quite impressed the poor innkeeper.

"Very well indeed, Herr Graf; and Grete, she will be here this moment. I understand you are going to shoot to-morrow morning, Herr Graf; I hope you will have much sport."

"He says the deer are very plentiful," observed the Count, oracularly, to

Annie Brunel. "So you really must come with us to-morrow and see our luck."

"Are these roe-deers' horns?" the young lady asked. "Pray ask him how he came to have so many. Did he shoot them all himself?"

The Count turned, with rather an uncomfortable expression, towards the innkeeper, and said (in German)—

"The lady loves to know if—you have—everything shot."

Halm looked aghast. Was the Count going to impeach him with having thinned the neighbouring woods during the owner's absence? He immediately broke into a long explanation and description of all the drives they had had that season, and told how the deer were so plentiful that the people were complaining bitterly of having their fields and gardens eaten up, and so forth, and so forth. But the embarrassment of the Count's face only deepened, and still further deepened, until, in a querulous tone, he cried out—

"I say, Anerley, I think you'd better come and listen to what he says about the sport you're likely to get to-morrow, rather than waste time in showing Mrs. Christmas things she doesn't care about!"—this with a hot face and an excited air.

"If you listen, isn't that enough?" said Anerley.

"But, damme, I can't understand a word he says—he talks like an engine, and all in that horrid *patois*—Herr Halm, I comprehend; but do you know, the lady loves to drink your white wine." (This in German.)

"Some white wine, Herr Graf?"

"Yes. Not many. We wish to drink all—four glasses, you understand."

"It is so difficult," continued the Count, addressing Miss Brunel, "to get these people to understand German, if you don't speak their barbarous form of it. However, I have told him we all wished to taste the white wine they drink here—not a bad wine, and remarkably cheap."

"Let me introduce you, Miss Brunel," said Will, "to Miss Grete Halm, who says she speaks French, and will be delighted to escort you to-morrow at any time you may wish to join us. Grete says she once shot a deer herself; but I suspect somebody else pulled the trigger while she held the gun."

Gretchen came forward with a warm blush on her brown cheek; and then it was arranged (she speaking French fluently enough, but with a Schwarzwald accent) that she and Annie Brunel would seek out the shooting party towards the

forenoon of the following day.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE COUNT DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

In the dusk of the early morning the keepers, drivers, and dogs had assembled in the large room of Hans Halm's inn. Hermann was there too, with the great-jawed Rudolph; and Margarethe, with a shadowy reminiscence of recent dreams in her soft black eyes, stood quietly on one side, or brought some beer to this or that gruff forester, who had perhaps walked a dozen miles that morning to the place of rendezvous. The dogs lay under the chairs, the guns and deerskin pouches of the men were on the table before them, by the side of their tall feathered beavers; and if the whole scene did not look as if it had been cut out of an opera, it was because the picturesque trappings of the keepers had been sobered in colour by the rain and sun of many years, and because there dwelt over the party an austere silence. The excitement of the day had not commenced.

When the Count and Will arrived at the place of meeting, a faint flush of rose-colour was beginning to steal along the dark violet of the dawn; and as the whole party set out, in straggling twos and threes along the grey road, daylight began to show itself over the fields and the mist-covered woods.

Hermann, who led the way, was accompanied by a little old man with a prodigious black moustache, twinkling eyes, and comical gravity of face, who was captain over the drivers, and named Spiegelmann. The venerable Spiegelmann, with his tall hat and slung horn, was a man of importance; and he had already, with much seriousness, pronounced his opinion on the direction of the wind, and on the necessity for beginning the driving some considerable distance further on.

Then came Will Anerley, who had made friends with the young schoolmaster, Gersbach, and was very anxious to know how life was to be made tolerable if one lived at Schönstein all the year round. Indeed, Anerley's having travelled so much, and among so many different people, combined with a certain natural breadth of sympathy, gave him a peculiar interest in trying to imagine himself in the position of almost every man whom he met. How did those men regard the rest of the world? What had they to look forward to? What was their immediate aim—their immediate pleasure? Anerley would take as much interest in

the affairs of an applewoman, and talk as gravely and freely to her about them, as he would in the more ambitious projects of an artist or a man of letters. The gratifying of this merely intellectual curiosity was a constant habit and source of satisfaction to him; and while it offended some people by the frankness of speech, and charmed others by the immediate generosity and self-denial which were its natural results, it promised to leave him, sooner or later, in the attitude of negative criticism and social isolation which his father exhibited. Fortunately, he had inherited from his mother a certain warmth of heart and impulse, which corrected his transmitted tendency to theorize: it was this side of his temperament which had brought upon him his present misfortune, while he had been engaged, out of pure curiosity, in studying Annie Brunel's character, and endeavouring to enter into her views of the people and things around her. In fact, the pursuit of which I speak, though extremely enticing and pleasant, should never be attempted by an unmarried man who has not passed his fortieth year.

In the present case the young Herr Schulmeister took an instant liking for the grave, cheerful, plain-spoken man beside him, who seemed to concern himself about other people, and was so ready with excuses for them.

"I should not take you to be an Englishman," said Gersbach.

"Why?"

"You have none of the English character. Count Schönstein is an Englishman—a typical Englishman—conceited, bigoted in his own opinions, generous when it is permitted to him to be ostentatious, dull and stupid, and jealous of people who are not so——"

"My friend," said Will, "why didn't you leave your dolls behind you in the nursery? Or is this typical Englishman one of your university puppets? You know there is no such thing as a typical Englishman, or typical Frenchman, or typical German; and I have almost come to believe that there is no such thing as national character. The most reckless prodigals I have met have been Scotchmen; the keenest business-men I have met have been Irishmen; the dullest and most melancholy, Frenchmen——"

"And the Germans?" asked Gersbach, with a laugh.

"The Germans are like anybody else, so far as disposition goes, although they happen to be educationally and intellectually a little ahead of other nations. And as for the poor Graf, I don't think you, for example, would make half as good a man as he is if you were in his position."

"Perhaps not; but why?"

"I can't exactly explain it to you in German; but doctrinairism is not the first requisite in a landlord; and if you were the Graf, you would be for coercing the people under you and about you, into being logical, and you would withdraw yourself from people who opposed you, and you would gradually weaken your

influence and destroy your chances of doing good. Why are our Tory country gentlemen always better liked by the people than the Radical proprietors? Why are Tories, as a rule, pleasanter companions than Radicals? I am a Radical; but I always prefer dining with a Tory?"

"Is the Count a Tory?" asked the Schulmeister.

"Yes. Men who have been in business and earned, or gained, a lot of money, almost invariably become fierce Tories. It is their first passport to respectability; and there is no step one can take so cheaply as that of changing one's political theories."

"What a singular social life you have in England!" cried Gersbach, blinking with a curious sort of humour behind his big spectacles. "There is the demi-monde, for example. Why, you talk of that, and your writers speak of it, as if there was an acknowledged rivalry openly carried on between the members of it and your married women."

"But our married women," said Will, "are going to form a trades-union among themselves in order to crush that institution."

At which Franz Gersbach looked puzzled: these English were capable of trying any mad expedient; and somehow their devices always worked well, except in such matters as popular education, military efficiency, music, scholarship, and so forth. As for a trades-union of any kind, it was sure to flourish in England.

They had now reached the edge of the forest, and here Hermann called the party around him, and gave his orders in a loud peremptory tone, which had the effect of considerably frightening his master; the Count hoped that he would do nothing inaccurate.

"You, Herr Schulmeister, will accompany the drivers, and Spiegelmann will give you one of the return-posts. Falz, you will go down to the new-cut road—Greef on your right, Beigel further along. Spiegelmann will sound his horn when you are all posted, and the second horn when the drive commences. Forward, then, in God's name, all of us!"

And away trooped the lads under the surveillance of the venerable Spiegelmann, who had a couple of brace of leashed beagles pulling and straining and whining to get free into the brushwood. Hermann, Will, and the Count at once dived into the twilight of the tall pines, that almost shut out the red flames of the morning over their peaks. The soft, succulent yellow moss was heavy with dew, and so were the ferns and the stoneberry bushes. A dense carpet of this low brushwood deadened the sound of their progress; and they advanced, silent as phantoms, into the dim recesses of the wood. Here and there occurred an opening or clearance, with a few felled trees lying about; then they struggled through a wilderness of younger fir and oak, and finally came into a tract of the forest where nothing was to be seen, as far as the eye could reach, but innumerable tall

trunks, coated with the yellow and grey lichens of many years, branchless almost to their summit, and rising from a level plain of damp green moss. There was not even the sound of a bird, or of a falling leaf, to break the intense silence of the place; nor was there the shadow of any living thing to be seen down those long narrow avenues between the closely-growing stems of the trees.

"Count Schönstein," said Will, in a whisper, as they drew near the Haupt-platz, "what gun is that you have with you?"

"My ordinary breech-loader."

"Carries far?"

"I should think so. Shoots hard and close as a rifle."

"Will it kill at fifty yards?"

"It might."

"Hermann," said Will, turning to the head-keeper, "I insist on being posted eighty yards distant from the Count."

"You think that is a joke," said the Count peevishly.

"I don't think it a joke at all," said Will. "Breech-loaders have a wonderful faculty of going off when nobody expects them; and though you may explain the thing satisfactorily afterwards, that won't remove a few buck-shot out of your leg."

"I am not in the habit of letting my gun go off accidentally," said the Count, grandly. "Indeed, I flatter myself that few men better understand the use of——"

"The *Haupt-platz*, Herr," said Hermann, unceremoniously breaking in upon his master. "The Herr Graf will be stationed farther down this path; you must not shoot in that direction. You may shoot in front as the deer comes to you, or after them when they have passed; not along this line, only."

"Danke schön, Hermann, and tell the same thing to the Count."

He now found himself opposite a tall tree, which had a cross in red paint traced upon the trunk. The Count and Hermann passed on, and when the three were posted, each held out his arm, and signalled that he understood his immediate neighbour's position, and would remember it.

Scarcely had they done so when a long and loud *tantara!* from Spiegelmann's horn told them that the drivers were ready. A faint echo now came from the other side of the strip of forest, showing that there the keepers were posted; and finally a return-blast from Hermann's horn proclaimed that all were waiting.

Once more a brilliant trill from Spiegelmann—this time an audacious and elaborate effort, full of noisy anticipation—came through the wood; and then were heard the faint and far-off sounds of yelping dogs, and shouting men, and sticks being beaten against the stumps of the trees. The drive had commenced. Count Schönstein began to tremble; his heart went faster and faster, as his excited brain peopled all the dim vistas of the trees with living forms. He could scarcely

breathe with absolute fear. Again and again he looked at his triggers, and the hammers, and the little spikes of brass which he hoped would strike death into the ribs of some splendid buck. He began to assure himself that he *could not* tell a buck from a doe if the animal ran quickly; that he *must* shoot at once, and trust to Providence keeping the tender feminine members of the herd out of the way. Indeed, he had already framed an excuse for having shot a doe, and he was busily picturing his assumed regret, and his inner delight at being able to shoot anything, when——

By this time a dead silence had intervened. The first joyous yelping of the dogs had quite died down; and now the broad-footed, stump-legged, big-headed little animals were wiring themselves through the brushwood, and jumping over the soft moss, with an occasional toss of their long ears or a slight whine. The only sound to be heard was the occasional rattling of sticks by the beaters, accompanied by their peculiar guttural cry.

Suddenly—and the whole empty space of the wood seemed to quiver for a moment with this instantaneous throb of life—Will caught a glimpse of a light shimmer of brown away at the end of one of the long avenues. For a moment the apparition was lost; when it reappeared, it was evident that the deer was bearing down upon Count Schönstein's position. The next second, a fine lithe, thin-limbed, supple, and handsome buck came along in a light easy canter into the grey light of the opener space. He had no thought of danger before him; he only thought of that behind; and for a brief space he stood right in front of the Count, apparently listening intently for the strange sounds from which he fled.

In despair, and rage, and amazement, Will saw him pause there, out of the range of *his* shot, and yet without an effort being made to secure the fine pair of horns which graced the animal's head. Will now saw that the Count's gun was levelled, and that he was apparently pulling at the trigger, but no puff of smoke came out of the barrel. Almost at the same moment the deer must have seen the Count; for all at once he shrank back on his limbs, as if he had been struck, shivered lightly through his entire frame, and then, with a sudden leap, he was off and away out of sight, in the direction of Hermann!

In that brief moment of time the Count had taken down his gun, looked at the hammers, found they were on half-cock, cocked them, and put up his gun again; and then, as the deer was just vanishing, bang! bang! went both the barrels. Of course the buck was quite untouched; but the next moment Will heard the sharp crack of a gun in the neighbourhood of Hermann's post; and he knew what *that* meant.

Even at that distance he could hear the Count breathing out incomprehensible curses at his own stupidity, as he put another couple of cartridges into the barrels. Doubtless, in his excitement, he had been trying so often whether the

hammers were on full-cock—pulling at them, letting them down, and so forth—that accidentally they remained at half-cock, and so spoiled for him the easiest shot he was likely to get that day.

The silence which had been broken by the report of the guns now fell again over the forest. The sun came out, too; and soon there were straggling lanes of gold running down into the blue twilight of the distance; while the heat seemed to have suddenly awakened a drowsy humming of insect life. Now and then a brightly-plumaged jay would flash through the trees, screaming hoarsely; and then again the same dead, hot stillness prevailed. It was in this perfect silence that a living thing stole out of some short bushes, and softly made its way over the golden and green moss until it caught sight of Will. Then it cocked up its head, and calmly regarded him with a cold, glassy, curious stare. The moment it lifted its head he saw that it was a fox, not reddish-brown, but blackish-grey, with extraordinarily bright eyes; and as they had been specially invited to shoot foxes—which are of no use for hunting purposes, and do much damage, in the Black Forest—he instinctively put up his gun. As instinctively, he put it down again.

"My old prejudices are too strong," he said; wherewith he contented himself with lifting a lump of dried wood and hurling it at the small animal, which now slunk away in another direction.

Then burst out the joyous howl of the beagles—here and there, as if every one of them had started his own particular game; the yelping bark rising at times sharp and clear as if in the immediate neighbourhood, at other times fading away into the distance. The fun had commenced. First there came trotting along a long-necked, thin-legged doe, with a little fawn by her side; and these, catching sight of Will, made a sharp turn to the right and bore down upon the Count. The latter, either too frightened or too savage to care for distinctions of sex or age, again blazed both barrels into the air, with what effect Will was too much occupied to see.

For at the same moment there came down the line, transversely, crossing in front of the Count, a fine buck which Hermann had taken a long shot at and missed. The deer was going at full speed, careless of anything in front, his whole energy bent on speeding from the danger behind, and every thew and muscle of his body straining its utmost. As he passed, Will fired his right barrel into the flashing streak of brown—not a hair was touched! The next moment the buck, seeing that no further enemy stood in front, wheeled round and made off to cross the path on which Will stood, at some distance farther down. Just as the shoulder of the animal appeared before the lane of trees, the other barrel was sent after him; there was a shrill scream, the buck leapt a dozen feet into the air and fell, without a parting groan in him, head-foremost on the soft moss.

"There is one pair of horns, at least, for Miss Brunel," thought Will, hastily pushing in two more cartridges.

The Count had certainly plenty of good fortune, so far as the deer were concerned. One particularly handsome buck which had been running straight at him, without seeing him, he received with a hurriedly-aimed shot which did no damage. The animal, however, got such a fright that it turned and galloped right back and through the ring of the beaters, escaping a parting shot which old Spiegelmann aimed at him. Here and there a shot had been heard round the sides of the drive; but as yet no one knew what the other had done. In a few minutes, however, the dogs and then the boys began to show themselves, approaching through the trees. That particular drive was over.

Will hastened up to the Count.

"What have you shot?"

"Nothing."

The Count looked very much vexed; and Will attributed it, of course, to his having missed so many shots.

"Why didn't you shoot sooner at the deer that came up and looked at you?"

"Why?" re-echoed the Count, with a savage laugh. "Why? Because these —— barrels were both on half-cock, and I pulled like to break my fingers over the —— things. What did you shoot?"

"I believe I've left a buck lying down there."

"Why don't you go and look after him, and get somebody to carry him home, instead of waiting here?"

The Count was evidently very uncomfortable. He bit his lip, he worked with the trigger of his gun; and finally he walked abruptly away from Will, and addressed, in a whisper, the first of the boys who came up:

"Kommen Sie hier."

The boy stared in amazement at being called "Sie." Of course he dared not think that the Count was joking.

"Ich habe geschossen—wissen Sie——?"

"Ja, Herr," said the boy, vaguely, though he did not understand what the Count meant.

"Ein kleines—ein gar kleines—d—n it, look here!"

He caught the boy by the shoulder, as if he meant to kick him, and dragged him a few yards farther on, and pointed to the ground. The boy opened his eyes: if he had seen the corpse of his first-cousin lying there, he could not have been more astonished.

"Sie sehen es," remarked the Count, hurriedly, with a fine red flush burning in his stout face.

"Ja, Herr."

There lay there a tiny, soft, pretty little animal, scarcely bigger than a King Charles' spaniel, with a glossy light-brown coat, and large meek eyes, now glazed and dull. Blood was trickling from the little thing's mouth, and also from its shoulder: the fact being that the Count, on seeing the doe and her fawn coming up, had fired both his barrels at them on chance, and had managed to destroy the helpless youngling.

If you had told the Count then, that before evening every man, woman, and child in Schönstein would have heard of what he had done, that the keepers would be sneering at him and the neighbours laughing at him, he would probably have put another cartridge into his gun and shot himself (if he were able) on the spot. His present anxiety was to get this little lad to take away the fawn under his blouse and bury it somewhere; but all he could do failed to impress the incorrigible young Schwarzwalder with his meaning.

"Verstehen Sie mir nicht?"

"Ja, Herr."

It was always "Ja, Herr;" and here were the people coming up. Fortunately, Hermann, having sent a long blast of his horn to recall any straggling beater or keeper, had walked down to the place where Will's slain buck was lying, accompanied by the rest of the keepers, who, as they came up, gravely shook hands with Will, according to custom, and wished him many more such shots. Then Spiegelmann, selecting a peculiarly-shaped branch of young fir, stuck it into Will's hat; by which all and sundry—particularly they of the village—as the shooting-party returned at night, might know that he had brought down a buck.

At this moment two of the lads dragged up the deer which Hermann had shot; and one of the keepers, with his long killing-knife in hand, proceeded to disembowel the animals, previous to their being carried home. The rest of the party seated themselves on the driest spot they could find, and somebody produced a couple of chopins of white wine, which were forthwith handed round.

But what of the Count? They had all been so eager to compliment Will on his good fortune, that no one had noticed the Graf's uneasy loitering about the fatal spot where his murdered victim lay.

Presently up came the boy.

"Hermann Löwe, the Herr Graf wants to see you. He has shot a little fawn; but he won't let me bring it."

Hermann rose up, with a flush of vexation over his face. He did not look at his companions, but he knew that they were smiling.

"Young idiot!" he said, when they were out of earshot, "why didst thou come and say so before all the people?"

"The Herr Graf——"

"Der Teufel! Hast thou no head on thy shoulders?"

The Count was mortally frightened to meet Hermann. He did not know in what manner to conduct himself: whether he should carelessly joke away the matter, or overawe his forester by the grandeur of his demeanour.

"I see," said Hermann, when he came up; "the Herr Graf will not believe me that there is always time to look—that when there is no time to look, one need not waste powder."

"Bah! stuff! nonsense! I tell you, when they are running like infernal hares, how am I to look at their size to a nicety?"

"The fawns don't run so quickly," said Hermann, respectfully, but firmly.

"Hermann Löwe," said the Count, hotly, "I suppose you're my servant?"

"I have that honour, Herr Graf."

"Then you'll please to shut up, that's all, and get that wretched little animal out of the road. Not run quickly! D—n his impudence! I'll have to teach these German thieves some better manners."

With which, and many more muttered grumblings, the Count walked off, leaving Hermann to cover up the dead body of the fawn, and mark the place, so that it could be afterwards taken away and securely buried.

When the Count came up to the rest of the party, he was smiling urbanely.

"Stolen a march upon me, eh?" he said to Will. "On my own ground, too. 'Gad, I'll show you something before we've done. I hadn't the ghost of a chance either time I shot; and it was lucky I missed the second time, because I saw immediately afterwards that it was a doe."

"She had a fawn with her, hadn't she?" said Will.

"Yes," replied the Count, with a sharp glance all round the circle of faces.

Hermann now came up, and chose two of the strongest lads to carry home the two deer. Each lad had one of the animals slung round his shoulders, while he grasped two of its thin legs in either hand, and allowed the neck, head, and horns of the buck to hang down in a picturesque fashion behind him. Will went privately up to one of the boys:

"You know Grete Halm?"

"Yes."

"When you go down to the village, tell Grete to ask the English lady to come back with you; because, if she remains till midday, we may be gone too far from Schönstein. You understand?"

"Yes."

"And you may go up to the Herr Graf's house, and tell any one you may see to send up luncheon an hour earlier than was arranged. You understand?"

"Ja, Herr."

And so the two lads went on their way; and Hermann began to sketch out

to his keepers the plan of the next drive.

CHAPTER XVIII.
ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE.

It was, however, midday before Grete Halm and Annie Brunel arrived; and as they entered the forest at the point where the shooting-party was now stationed, they found that the drive had already commenced. Will happening to be at the corner post, it devolved upon him to enjoin strict silence upon the newcomers—a command which Miss Brunel obeyed by sitting down on the trunk of a felled tree, and beginning to ask Will a series of questions about his morning's adventures.

They were now in a clearance in the forest some forty yards broad, and on the other side of this strip of open ground ran a long dense mass of brushwood, lying still and silent in the luminous quivering heat. Will, Grete, and Annie Brunel were in the shadow of a patch of young firs, and between them and the dense brushwood extended the forty yards of clearance, with the strong sunlight beating down on the crimson and golden moss, and on the yellow stumps of the felled trees. The air was hot and moist, filled with the pungent resinous odour of the pine—a languid, delicious scented atmosphere, which made one prone to day-dreaming or sleep.

Suddenly, without the rustle of a leaf, and long before any of the dogs had given tongue, there leapt out from the close brushwood into the open sunlight a fine young buck, with his head and horns high in air. The warm light fell on his ruddy light-brown coat, and showed his shapely throat, his sinewy form, and tall thin legs, as he stood irresolute and afraid, sniffing the air with his black nostrils, and watching with his full large eyes. He saw nothing, however, of the people before him in the shadow of the firs; and for several seconds he remained motionless, apparently the only living thing in the dead silence of the place. Then the bark of a dog was heard behind him; he cantered a few steps farther on, caught sight of the little party as he passed, and then, doubly nerved, was off like a bolt into the heart of the forest.

"But, really——" said Will.

"Now, don't make me angry with you," said Annie, releasing his right arm, which she had tightly held for three minutes. "I should never have forgiven you if you had shot that poor creature, who looked so timid and handsome——"

"I should have given him the chance of running."

"But you would have killed him. Didn't I see the two you sent home, and their pitiful glazed eyes?"

"Then you have come out to stop our shooting altogether, I suppose?" said Will, with a laugh, though he was much more vexed than he chose to show.

But he had his revenge. He had scarcely spoken when a buck, followed by two does, came out of the brushwood some distance farther down, the buck springing lightly and buoyantly over the soft moss, the does running more warily in his wake. Before Annie Brunel could do anything beyond utter a short cry, the contents of Will's right barrel had caught the buck on his shoulder. He rolled over, struggled to his feet again, and then, with a last effort, made a few stumbling steps, and sank unseen among the ferns. Will turned, with a smile, to Miss Brunel. She had covered her face with her hands. Grete, on the other hand, was in a wonderful state of delight.

"You killed him, Herr, I know you did. I saw him fall; and how handsome he was—and his horns, too, they are large; how pleased you will be to have them! My father will get them mounted for you, if you like; and if you would have the deer's feet for pegs, that can be done. Oh, I wish the drive was over, that I might go to see him!"

The drive was very nearly over, for the dogs were heard in the immediate neighbourhood—particularly the low sonorous baying of Rudolph, who had escaped from the leash, and was tearing backwards and forwards through the wood, with foam-flakes lying along his glistening brown coat. But all at once the baying of Rudolph was turned into a terrific yell, subsiding into a howl; and at the same moment the report of a gun was heard at some distance farther along. Immediately afterwards Will caught sight of a doe disappearing through the trees behind him, and from the way it ran he judged that it had a broken leg; while down in front of them came Rudolph, going at full speed, with his tail between his legs, and the front of his mouth covered with blood. The next thing seen was Count Schönstein, who came running to Will in a wonderful state of excitement.

"I've shot him!—I've shot him!" he cried, "but we must go after him!"

"Is it Rudolph you mean?" said Will.

"A buck—a splendid buck——"

"Well, don't point your gun in my face."

"It's on half-cock."

"It isn't; and I don't like the muzzle of a gun staring at me."

"Will that do?" cried the Count, in vexation, dropping the gun on the ferns. "*Do* come and help me to catch him——"

"Catch a deer! Listen, Miss Brunel——"

But the Count was off in the direction the wounded doe had taken.

The beaters now made their appearance through the brushwood, and Hermann's horn soon brought the keepers to the rendezvous. Will explained to Hermann that the Graf had gone in pursuit of a doe with a broken leg.

"Has he Rudolph with him?"

"No; I believe he shot Rudolph at the same time that he broke the hind-leg of the doe."

"Shot Rudolph!" said Hermann, and then he turned to the keepers: "Where is Rudolph? Who has seen Rudolph? Who allowed Rudolph to escape?"

The only answer he could get was from a messenger, who came up to say that luncheon had arrived, and wished to know where the Herr Graf wanted it placed. This messenger gave Hermann a graphic description of his having seen Rudolph flying in the direction of Schönstein in a state of utter demoralization. Wherewith Hermann sat himself down on the stump of a tree, and said resignedly—

"Spiegelmann, take one of the dogs after the wounded doe, and send back the Herr Graf. As for you, Fritz, ask the lady where luncheon is to be placed."

By the time Count Schönstein and Spiegelmann returned, the latter carrying on his shoulder the doe that the Count had shot, luncheon had been laid out by the servants; and round the large white cloth were placed a series of travelling rugs and other appliances for smoothing down the roughnesses of fern, and stoneberry, and moss. The keepers, Hermann, and the young schoolmaster were seated some little distance off, in picturesque groups, surrounding the dead game, which consisted of two bucks, the Count's doe, a fox shot by Gersbach, and a hare shot by some one else. The men had also their luncheon with them—apples, brown bread, a piece of smoked ham, and a bottle or two of white wine. All the incidents of the drive had now to be recapitulated; and there ensued a perfect Babel of guttural Schwarzwald German.

The Count had ordered out a very nice luncheon indeed; and so pleased was he with his success in having shot something, that he called one of the boys and gave him two bottles of champagne, a drinking-cup, and a lump of ice to take over to the keepers. Indeed, he would have given Hermann and the schoolmaster an invitation to sit down at the white cloth, only he wished to postpone that explanation about Rudolph until Annie Brunel and Will were out of the way. As for Grete Halm, she equally dreaded the thought of sitting with the Count's party, and of having to go alone among the men and boys opposite; and it was only by much coaxing and ordering that she was made to sit down by Miss Brunel, and submit to have the Count himself carve for her, and offer her wine in a beautiful little silver cup.

"Süsse an die Süssen," said he, gallantly, as he poured out the champagne; and Grete's soft black eyes looked puzzled.

"Look at the boy in the red blouse," said Annie Brunel, "lying beside the two deer. I believe the Count has got the whole scene made up in imitation of a hunting-picture, and that the boy knows well enough how fine his brown face and red smock-frock are in the sunlight. Then see how that deer's head lies back, precisely as if it were in a lithograph; and the streaks of sunlight falling across the green dress of the keepers and the stretched-out dogs—and Hermann, there, cutting an apple with a dagger, his hair all matted with perspiration—the schoolmaster sitting on the trunk of the tree, looking vaguely at the fox before him——"

"Wondering," observed Will, "what sort of chemical change has occurred within the last half-hour, or why life should go out of an organism when lead goes in."

"That is a German picture, and here are we making a French picture—only that Grete is such a thorough Black Forester, with her bodice, and white sleeves, and head-dress."

The Count was intensely flattered and pleased by her admiration of the impromptu pictures. He had been striving hard to interest and amuse her—most of all had he tried to charm her with the delights which he held at his own command; and here were the very sunlight, and the colours of the forest, and the shape of deers' necks aiding him!

"You don't see the like of that in England, do you?" he said, with his mouth full of cold chicken. "I hope, Miss Brunel, you and Mrs. Christmas will make your stay with us as long as ever you can."

"I should be very glad," she said; "but I must see what Lady Jane says in a day or two—whether she finds herself getting better. If she should prefer the cooler air of mountain scenery, we may go on to Switzerland."

"But don't you dread the idea of travelling alone—looking after your own luggage, and what not?" asked the Count, with his mouth this time full of some other animal's tongue.

"It was not entirely on a pleasure excursion we came," she said, quietly.

"And then," said Will, "you can get plenty of cool mountain air in the Black Forest. You can go and live comfortably on the top of the Feldberg, about 5000 feet high, with a dozen mountains all round you over 4000 feet. In the meantime, don't trouble yourself with thoughts of change; but let me give you some of this jelly. You are very fond of sweets, I know."

"I am. You have been watching me."

He had been watching her too much, he thought. The intense curiosity with which he had regarded the singular change in the girl's nature so soon as she left the stage, with the study of her pretty superficial carelessness, her frank audacious manner, and her quaint, maternal, matter-of-fact attitude towards himself,

had wrought its inevitable work; and at the very moment when she was thinking that Mr. Anerley took a friendly pleasure in her society, he was longing to get away from it as from a torture too heavy to be borne—longing to get away, and unable to go. He might easily have avoided her on this very day, for example, by pleading business occupations; instead, he had looked with impatience for her arrival all the morning and forenoon.

And if he had any intellectual pleasure in studying the curious shades of the young actress's character, it was well that he improved his time; for this was the last day on which she should ever appear to him that enigmatical compound of a childlike gaiety and mimicry, with a matronly air which was quite as amusingly unnatural. From this period henceforth, the reader who takes the trouble to follow Annie Brunel's history will find her a changed woman—drawing nearer to that beautiful ideal which one who knew her mother would have expected to find in Annie Napier's only child.

At present she was chiefly concerned with the various sweets which Count Schönstein's cook had sent, and also in trying the effect of squeezing the juice of different kinds of fruit into the iced champagne which she sipped from time to time. She came to the conclusion that sliced apple added to champagne and iced water greatly improved its flavour; and she appealed to Grete Halm, who had tried all her different specifics, the two drinking out of the same glass. Grete began to fancy that English ladies, though they were very beautiful and had magnificent hair, were little better than children, to amuse themselves with such nonsense.

"I see that Hermann is getting dreadfully impatient," said Miss Brunel, at last; "let us go."

"Pardon, mademoiselle," said Will. "Let us have an understanding first."

She laughed a bright and merry laugh that puzzled the Count extremely.

"Was gibt's, Grete?" said he.

Grete began to explain, with a demure smile, how the Fräulein had held the Herr's arm when a buck was going past; but the Count soon lost the thread of the story, and had to beg Will for a translation.

"I really can't bear to see any one else shoot when I am looking on," said Miss Brunel. "But if I were myself shooting, I dare say I shouldn't care."

"Come, then," said Will, "will you take my gun during the next drive? I will teach you how to hold it and fire——"

"I know that already," she said. It was not the first time she had fired a gun—on the stage.

"And I will fix the gun so that you need have no trouble."

"Agreed," she said; while Grete, who was about to remain behind to assist in packing up the luncheon things, assured her that the holding of the gun was

quite easy, and that she would be sure to kill a splendid deer.

They had to walk nearly half a mile before they came to the next beat; and by that time they had arrived at a sort of broad ravine or hollow, the hill leading down to which was covered with tall, branchless pines. Down in the valley commenced a tract of young trees and brushwood, which was supposed to be full of deer. While the beaters were drawing a circle round this tract of brushwood, Hermann posted the guns and courteously gave Will the Hauptplatz, understanding that the young lady was about to try her luck. At this point there was a mass of earth and roots which had been torn up by the falling of a pine—a little embankment some five feet high, over which one could easily command the whole line of brushwood lying in front. This was the spot where Will posted Annie Brunel. He placed the barrel of the gun on the edge of this natural rampart, and then showed her how, whenever she saw a deer spring out into the sunlight down below in the valley, she was noiselessly to point the gun, keep the stock well against her shoulder, and fire.

"Only take care," said he, "that it isn't a clog or a boy that comes out of the bushes."

"What if I shoot you?" she said.

"You can't shoot me, any more than you can shoot yourself. I shall go up the hill a bit to overlook you, and if it should be a dog, I'll shout out before you murder him."

Here the long, low, steady call of Spiegelmann's horn was heard, with Hermann's reply.

"When the next horn calls, you may begin to look out. Hold out your hand."

She held out her right hand, wonderingly, and showed him the small white fingers.

"It is quite steady; but your heart beats."

"It generally does," she said, with a smile. "It is a weakness, I know, but——"

Here the fine anticipatory flourish of the keeper's bugle again came echoing through the trees. Will gave over the gun to her, told her to take time and not be afraid, and then retired somewhat farther up the hill. He ensconced himself behind a tall grey pine, whence, without being seen, he could command a view of the entire length of brushwood, and of Miss Brunel in her place of concealment.

"If she only remains cool," he thought, "she is certain to be successful."

Once only she looked round and up the hill towards him, and there was a sort of constrained smile about her lips.

"I am afraid she is getting frightened," he thought now.

The intense sultry silence of the place certainly heightened her nervous expectation, for she could distinctly hear her heart thumping against her side. Expectancy became a positive pain—an agony that seemed to be choking her;

but never for a moment did she think of abandoning her post.

Meanwhile Will's experienced eye failed to detect the least motion among the bushes, nor could he hear the faintest noise from the dogs. Yet Hermann had told him that this was one of the best beats in the neighbourhood; and so he patiently waited, knowing that it was only a matter of time.

At length one of the dogs was heard to bellow forth his joyous discovery. Will's breath began to come and go more quickly, in his intense anxiety that his pupil should distinguish herself at the approaching crisis. Then it seemed to him that at some distance off he saw one or two of the young firs tremble, when there was not a breath of wind to stir them.

He watched these trees and the bushes adjoining intently, but they were again quite motionless; the dog, too, only barked at intervals. All at once, however, he saw, coming down a lane in the brushwood, two branched yellow tips, which paused and remained stationary, with only a single bush between them and the open space fronting Miss Brunel. They were the horns of a deer which now stood there, uncertain by which way to fly from the dogs behind him.

"If she could only catch sight of these horns," he said to himself, "and understand to fire through the bush, she would kill him to a certainty."

Evidently, however, she did not see the horns; perhaps her position prevented her. So, with his own heart beating rapidly now, Will waited for the moment when the dogs would drive the deer out into the clear sunlight, immediately underneath the muzzle of her gun.

A sharp bark from one of the beagles did it. Will saw the light spring of the deer out into the open, and the same glance told him that Annie Brunel had shrunk back with a light cry, and that the gun, balanced for a moment on the edge of the mass of roots, was about to fall on the ground.

At the same moment he received an astounding blow on the side that nearly knocked him over; and his first instinct was that of an Englishman—to utter an oath, clench his fist, and turn round to find a face to strike at. But before the instinct had shaped itself into either thought or action, the sudden spasm passed into a sort of giddiness; he fancied the pine-tree before him wavered, put out his hand to guard himself, and then fell, with a loud noise in his ears.

When Miss Brunel saw the gun tumble on the ground and heard the report, she clasped her hands over her eyes in a vague instantaneous horror of any possible result. The next moment she looked up, and there was a black mass lying on the ground behind the tall tree. Her only thought was that he lay dead there as she ran to him, and knelt down by him, and caught him round the neck. White-lipped, trembling in every limb, and quite unconscious of what she did, she put her head down to his, and spoke to him. There were three words that she uttered in that moment of delirious pity, and self-reproach, and agony, which it

was as well he did not hear; but uttered they were, never to be recalled.

When he came to himself, he saw a white face bending over him, and had but a confused notion of what had occurred. With a vigorous effort, however, mental and physical, he pulled himself together and got into a sitting posture.

"I must have given you such a fright through my stupidity," he said; but all the time he wondered to see a strange look in her eyes—a look he had never seen there before *off the stage*—as she knelt by him and held his hand in hers. She did not speak; she only looked at him, with a vague absent delight, as if she were listening to music.

"Poor creature!" he thought, "she does not know how to say that she is sorry for having hurt me."

So he managed to get up a quite confident smile, and struggled to his feet, giving her his hand to raise her also.

"I suppose you thought you had killed me," he said, with a laugh, "but it was only the fright knocked me over. I am not hurt at all. Look here, the charge has lodged in the tree."

He showed her a splinter or two knocked off the bark of the tree, and a few round holes where the buck-shot had lodged; but at the same time he was conscious of a warm and moist sensation creeping down his side, and down his arm likewise. Further, he pretended not to see that there was a line of red blood trickling gently over his hand, and that her dress had already caught a couple of stains from the same source.

"What's that?" she said, with a terrified look, looking from her own hand, which was likewise stained, to his. "It is blood—you have been hurt, and you won't tell me. Don't be so cruel," she added, piteously; "but tell me what I am to do, for I know you are hurt. What shall I do? Shall I run to Hermann? Shall I go for the Count? There is no water about here——"

"Sit down on those ferns—that's what you must do," said Will, "and don't distress yourself. I suppose one of the spent shot has scratched me, or something like that; but it is of no importance, and you mustn't say anything about it. When the drive is over, I shall walk home. If I had only a little—a little——"

By this time he had sate down, and as he uttered the words, another giddiness came over him, and ha would have fallen back had she not hastily caught him and supported him.

"It is the blood," he said, angrily; "one would think I couldn't afford to lose as much as the scratch of a penknife would let. Will you allow me to take off my coat?—and if you could tie a handkerchief tightly round my arm——"

"Oh, why did you not ask me to do so before?" she said, as she helped to uncover the limb that was by this time drenched in blood.

"Think of what the deer would have suffered, if you had hit him instead of

me," said Will, with a ghastly smile. "He was a dozen yards nearer you. You seem to like long shots."

But there was a mute pleading look in her eyes that seemed to appeal against his banter. She seemed to say to him by that dumb expression, "You wrong me. You try to make us strangers by that assumed fun. You do it to cheer me; but you make me a stranger to you, for you are not honest with me."

And somehow he read the meaning of her face; and said to her, in a low voice—

"Shall I be frank with you? This accident is likely to make us too close friends; and it is better I should return to England, if you remain here."

For a moment their eyes met—on his side revealing a secret which she inwardly shuddered to read there—on hers repeating only that mystic, unfathomable expression which he remembered to have seen when he awakened out of his dream.

That was all of explanation that passed between them. She knew now his secret, and by the sudden light of the revelation she looked swiftly back over some recent occurrences, and saw the purport of them written in words of fire. Her eyes fell; her own secret was safe; but this new burden of consciousness was almost as difficult to bear.

At this moment the Count and Hermann came up, followed by the nearest keepers and beaters.

"There has been a slight accident," said Will, briefly. "Get some one to carry my gun; and I'll walk back to Schönstein."

"If you would like to ride," said Hermann—who, with the others, was quite deceived by Will's manner—"you can get Hans Halm's *wagen*, that was waiting for the baskets and things. Spiegelmann will show you the way. You are not badly hurt?"

"Not at all; not at all. Miss Brunel, will you continue with the party?"

"No," she said, firmly; "I am going back to Schönstein."

"And I," said the Count. "I can't allow you to go unattended. I don't care about any more shooting——"

"Nonsense," said Will (with an inward conviction that two minutes' more talking would find him stretched on the ground); "go on with your sport; and I'll come out to meet you in the evening."

Fortunately, when they reached the shaky old travelling-carriage outside the forest, they found some wine, a good draught of which somewhat revived the wounded man. The hampers and other things were speedily thrown out, and, Spiegelmann having returned to the shooting-party, Will and Miss Brunel got into the vehicle and were driven homewards.

Neither spoke a single word all the way. Once, and quite inadvertently, her

hand touched his; and she drew it away. The next moment she looked into his face, and perhaps saw some slight shade of vexation there, for she immediately covered his stained fingers with her own. It was as though she said, "I know your sad secret, but we may at least continue friends."

CHAPTER XIX.

FLIGHT.

It was a change indeed! Life all at once became solemn and full of mystery to her—full of trouble, too, and perplexity. So soon as a messenger had been despatched to Donaueschingen, for a surgeon who was skilled in the extraction of buck-shot, Annie Brunel went up to her own room, and sat down there alone. And she felt as if the air had grown thick around her, and was pressing on her; she felt that the old audacious cheerfulness had gone from her; and that the passion, and glow, and terrible earnestness of her stage-life were invading this other life, which used to be full of a frivolous, careless happiness.

Do the other animals become frightened and nervous when the love-making season comes suddenly upon them? Does the lark, when her lover comes down from the sky and sings, "My dear soft-breasted little thing, will you be my wife; will you come and build a nest with me, and let me bring you scraps of food when you are tired?"—does she get into a state of great tremor, and fancy that the world has suddenly shifted its axis? We know how the least impressionable of men are overawed by this strange natural phenomenon. The old ridiculousness of love—its silliness and comic aspects—are immediately blotted out from their mind by the contemplation of the awful truth—the awful change that lies before them. They shrink from physiology as a species of blasphemy. They will not accept scientific explanation of their idealisms; nor will they believe that any man has ever experienced the sensation they now experience.

But the ordinary awakening of a man or woman to the consciousness of being in love was a very different thing from the sudden revelation which confronted the young actress, as she sat there and pondered, in a bewildered way, over the events of the past hour. To love this man was a crime—and its fatal consequences seemed to stretch on and on, and interweave themselves with her whole future life. How had she fallen into the snare? And he was equally guilty; for his eyes, more fully than his words, had in that supreme moment told her his

tragic story.

She thought of the violet-eyed Dove down in that Kentish vale. She thought of her, and mentally prayed for forgiveness.

She had but one sad consolation in the matter—her secret was her own. There now remained for her but to leave Schönstein at once, and the morning's events had paved the way for her decision. So she sent for Mrs. Christmas, and said to her—

"Don't you think a cooler air than what we have here would suit you better?"

The old woman scrutinized her face curiously.

"What's the matter with you, Miss Annie? You look as if you had just come off the stage, and were half-bewildered by the part you had been playing!"

"I want an answer, Mrs. Christmas. But I may tell you that I ask because I wish to leave this place at once. You needn't ask why; but if it will not incommode you to travel, I should like to go away now. There is Switzerland, not a day's journey from here; and there are some mountainous districts in this neighbourhood—you may choose which you please——"

"Only I must choose to go," said the old woman, patting her cheek. "That's yourself all over as you used to be in the days when you tyrannized over me, and would always have your own way about arranging your parts. Well, Miss Annie, I'm ready to go now, if you like—only Hermann promised to give me two of the most beautiful deer-skins to be got in the Black Forest——"

"They can be sent after us."

The evening was drawing towards dusk when the Count returned. He was greatly shocked on discovering that the accident Will had met with was much more serious than had been fancied, and that the surgeon only stared in astonishment when asked if his patient could come downstairs to dinner.

"A man who has lost so much blood," said he, significantly, and speaking slowly, that the Count might understand him, "and who suffers from four or five gunshot wounds, is not likely to sit at table for a day or two."

Annie Brunel did not hear this conversation, and as she still believed that Will had only been slightly hurt, and would be able to go about as usual, she informed the Count at dinner of her intended departure. The Herr Graf looked from one to the other of his guests, without being able to utter a syllable. He had been congratulating himself on the brilliant success of this excursion—on the evident gratification experienced by Miss Brunel, on her expressed admiration for Schönstein and all its surroundings. This decision of hers quashed his dearest hopes.

"You surely do not intend to leave us so soon?" he said. "Mrs. Christmas, are you the traitor in the camp?"

Mrs. Christmas prudently forbore to reply.

"Think of leaving Mr. Anerley, after having knocked him over in that sportsmanlike fashion!" exclaimed the Count. "He will think it very ungenerous of you."

"I am extremely sorry," she said, with a look of pained embarrassment on her dark beautiful face; "but I hope he will forgive our going."

"He may, but I shan't," said the Count. "However, if you will, you will. In any case, I hope I may be allowed to escort you towards your new resting-place."

"We should be more cruel still," said the young girl, "if we took you away from your friend. Believe me, we shall want no assistance."

The tone with which she uttered the words was decisive. It said, "You are very kind; but we mean to go alone."

The Count did not enjoy his dinner that evening. He fancied there was something wrong in the arrangement of things—something incomprehensible, provoking, beyond the reach of his alteration. When he persuaded Annie Brunel and her guardian to accept his escort as far as Schönstein, he fancied his skilful calculations had delivered her into his hand. Was there a creature on earth—especially a woman—who could fail to be smitten with a covetous desire for the possession of Schönstein? During that moody meal, while he sate almost angrily silent, two suggestions occurred to him.

Could she have failed to perceive that she might be mistress of Schönstein if she liked? The Count confessed that he had not made any demonstration of affection to her, simply because he wished the natural effect of living at Schönstein to influence her first, and predispose her towards accepting his more openly-avowed attentions.

Or was it possible that she had discovered her true position, and learned for herself the wealth and rank to which she was entitled? But if she had made this discovery, he argued with himself, she would not have allowed herself to be the guest of a parvenu Count; while he knew that she had received no letters since his arrival.

Seizing the more probable alternative, he bitterly regretted his not having made it more clear to her that a handsome fortune awaited her acceptance. In the meantime these regrets had the effect of making the dinner a somewhat dull affair; and it was rather gruffly that he consented, after dinner, to go round to the inn in order to inquire of Hans Halm the various routes to Switzerland.

As they were going out, she said—

"Will you send word to Mr. Anerley that we shall only be absent for a short time, and that I hope he may be able to come down and see us when we return?"

"The surgeon is still with him," said the Count. "I shall go up and see him myself when we come back."

It was a clear starlight night; the waning moon had not yet risen. As they neared the few houses of Schönstein, and saw the orange lights gleaming through the dusk, Mrs. Christmas caught her companion's arm.

They were by the side of the garden adjoining the inn, and from a summer-house which was half hid among apple and plum trees, there came the sweet and tender singing of two young girls—a clear and high but somewhat undeveloped soprano, and a rich, full, mellow contralto. The three stood for a moment to listen, and the singers in the darkness proceeded to another song—the old *Volksweise* that Grete and Hermann had been wont to sing:

"Im sohönsten Wiesen-grunde
Ist meiner Heimath Haus,
Da zog ich manche Stunde,
In's Thal hinaus:
Dich, mein stilles Thal, grüss ich tausend Mal!
Da zog ich manche Stunde, in's Thal hinaus."

"It is Grete who sings, and I want to see her," said Annie Brunel, stepping softly into the garden, and advancing to the summer-house.

Grete was quite alone with her companion—a young girl who, Miss Brunel could see even in that partial darkness, was very pretty, and of a type much more common in the north of Baden and Bavaria than in the Schwarzwald. She was not over twelve years of age; but she had the soft grave eyes, the high forehead, the flaxen hair, and general calm of demeanour which characterize the intellectual South German. She was Grete's confidante and companion; and together, whenever they got a chance, they were accustomed to steal away to this summer-house, and sing those concerted melodies which the children of the Black Forest drink in with their mothers' milk.

Grete gave a little cry of surprise when she saw the dark form of the young English lady appear; and then her thought was that something had gone wrong with the gentleman who was wounded.

"I want you, Grete, for a moment," said Annie Brunel in French to her.

"Ah, mademoiselle," she said, dislocating her French in sudden compassion; "ce n'est pas que Monsieur Anerley se sent encore malade? L'homme qui mon père envoyait chercher le médecin me dit qu'il ya meilleur——"

"Don't disquiet yourself, Grete," said Miss Brunel. "Mr. Anerley is not severely hurt. I wanted to ask you if you would come with me to Switzerland——

"To Switzerland!" said Grete; and her companion's soft eyes looked up with a mystic wonder in them.

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, very much; but I have promised to go to see my cousin Aenchen Baumer, at the Feldberg, in a day or two."

"Come indoors, and let us hear what your father says. Your friend will forgive me for a few minutes."

They all then left the garden and went round to the front of the inn. They found the Count and Mrs. Christmas standing outside, and listening to the prodigious singing-bout which was being held within by the keepers and the beaters; the chorus following each verse of the various hunting-songs being accompanied by the measured beating of hands and feet on the tables and wooden floor.

"If mademoiselle goes forward to the window," said the little grave German girl with the yellow hair, "she will hear better, and Herr Spiegelmann is about to sing 'Der Weisse Hirsch.'"

They all went forward to one of the many small windows, and looked in. The men were sitting in a picturesque undress round the table, their long-bowled china pipes in their fingers or mouth, and chopins of pale-yellow wine before them. Grete's father was standing by, laughing and joking with them; the old grandmother from time to time replenishing the tall transparent bottles. They had all been singing the elaborate chorus to the hunting-song, "Im Wald und auf der Haide"—all except the ancient Spiegelmann, who sat solemnly over his pipe-tube, and winked his small black eyes occasionally, as if trying to shut in the internal pleasure the rattling melody gave him. His large black moustache caught the tobacco-smoke that issued from his lips; and his wrinkled weather-tanned face, like the other sunburnt faces around, caught a bronzed glow from the solitary candle before him.

"The Spiegelmann missed a buck in the second drive," said one. "He will pay the forfeit of a song."

"I was driving, not shooting, the roe," growled the Spiegelmann, though he was not displeased to be asked to sing.

All at once, before any of his comrades were prepared, the venerable keeper, blinking fiercely, began to sing, in a low, querulous, plaintive voice, the first stanza of a well-known ballad, which ran somewhat in this fashion—

"'Twas into the forest three sportsmen went,
On shooting the white deer they were bent."

Suddenly, and while Miss Brunel fancied that the old man was singing a pathetic song of his youth, there rang out a great hoarse chorus from a dozen bass voices—the time struck by a couple of dozen horny hands on the table—

"Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!"

Then Spiegelmann, gravely and plaintively as before, took up the thread of the wondrous story—

"They laid themselves down beneath a fir-tree,
And a wonderful dream then dreamed the three,
(*All.*) Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!"

Here a tall Italian-looking keeper, who hailed from the Tyrol, and who was sitting next to Spiegelmann, sang forth the experiences of the first dreamer—

"I dreamt that as I went beating the bush,
There ran out before me the deer—husch, husch!"

His neighbour, Bagel, who had once been complimented by Kaiser Francis of Austria, and was never done with the story, personated the second dreamer—

"And as from the yelp of the beagle he sprang,
I riddled his bide for him there—bang, bang!"

The third from Spiegelmann, a short stout little man, called Falz, who had once been a clockmaker in Whitechapel, was the next dreamer—

"So soon as the deer on the ground I saw,
I merrily sounded my horn—trara!"

The burden of the tale now returned to Spiegelmann, who thus finished it, and pointed the moral—

"Lo! as they lay there and chatted, these three,
Swiftly the wild deer ran past the tree:
And ere the three huntsmen had seen him aright,
O'er hill and o'er valley he'd vanished from sight!
(*All.*) Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!
Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!"

"I declare," said little Mrs. Christmas, standing on tiptoe, to peep in at the window on the bronzed faces, and the dim candle, and the long narrow tables in

the low-roofed room, "it is quite like a scene in a play, though they don't sing very well."

"They keep capital time," said the Count, who looked upon them as so many performing animals, belonging to himself.

"Voulez-vous entrer, mademoiselle?" said Grete, hesitatingly. "La fumée—j'en suis bien fâchée——"

She went into the inn, nevertheless; and Hans Halm was summoned to give his opinion about the various roads leading down to Basle or Schaff hausen. Meanwhile, the keepers had sent a polite message, through Margarethe, to the young English lady, hoping that she enjoyed the day's sport; that her companion's accident had not been serious; and that she would not be annoyed to hear one or two of the old Schwarzwald songs.

It was now for the first time that Annie learned the true extent of the injury which Will had suffered; and this had the effect of immediately altering her resolutions. It was with a dangerous throb of the heart that she was told how he might not leave his bed for days, or even weeks, so prostrated was he by loss of blood; and anxious—terribly anxious, as she was to get free from the place, she could not bear the thought of stealing away, and leaving him to the unknown chances of the future.

The Count had almost begun to fancy that it was the horror of the accident that she had caused which was driving her away from the too painful witnessing of its results; but she now said that she would not leave until Will was entirely out of danger. He could not understand her, or her motives; above all, he was puzzled by the unwonted earnestness of her expression—its new life and intensity. He knew nothing of the fire at the heart which kept that slumbering light in the dark eyes.

"And in a few days, Grete, you go to the Feldberg?" she asked.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Is there an inn there at which one can stay?"

"There is, mademoiselle—right on the top of the mountain, if you choose to go so high. My cousin Aenchen lives down in the valley."

"I hope, Miss Brunel," said the Count, anxiously, "you won't think of leaving Schönstein so long as you remain in this district. The accident which has happened, I know, may rob the neighbourhood of some of its attractions; but what better will the Feldberg be?"

She paid no attention to him. She was only determined not to see Will Anerley again; and yet there was in her heart a vague desire to be near him—to be under the same daylight—to look on the same scenes, and hear the same quaint strange talk that he listened to.

"When must you go to see your cousin?" she asked.

"Very shortly," said Grete. "Aenchen Baumer goes to a convent in Freiburg, where she will learn English, and fine needlework, and many things. She is a good friend of mine, and a companion once; and I want to see her before she goes."

"If you wait a few days, we shall go to the Feldberg together."

Grete clasped her hands with delight.

"And will madame, your mamma, go also?" she asked, rejoiced to think she had not the journey to make alone.

"Yes; but the lady is not my mamma, Grete. *She* died when I was scarcely your age; and this is my second mother, who has been with me ever since."

All the next day she waited, lingering about, and unable to do anything in her feverish anxiety and impatience. She was not afraid to see him. She had suddenly been awakened to a sweet and new consciousness of strength—a fulness of life and will which she knew would sustain her in any emergency. She had no fear whatever, so far as she herself was concerned. But she dreaded the possible effect of their meeting again in these too seductive circumstances; she dreaded it, while she thought of Dove. Already there lay over her the shadow of the wrong done to the bright young English girl whose pretty ways and violet eyes she so well remembered—a wrong inscrutable, not to be condoned or forgotten. Whose was the fault? She only knew that she dared no longer stay there after having once read Will's secret in that quick mutual glance in the forest.

Another day passed, and yet another: the torment was becoming unbearable. She could not leave the place while danger yet hung over him: on the other hand, her delay was provoking the chances of that very meeting which she had resolved should not take place. Many a time she thought she could go away happy and content if only she might shake hands with him and look once in his eyes; then there came a misty remembrance of Dove's face floating before her, and the young girl seemed to regard her reproachfully.

She began to think that a little far-off glimpse of him would do: moderating her desires, she grew to long for that as the one supreme boon, bearing which with her she could go away with a glad heart. Only a glimpse of him to see how he looked, to bid a mute farewell to him, herself unseen.

"Our patient is much better this morning," said the Count to her, on the fourth day. "Won't you come upstairs, and see him?"

"No," she said, softly, looking down.

She was more incomprehensible to him than ever. Formerly she seemed to be quite familiar with him; she was happy and careless in his presence; she responded to his nonsense with nonsense of her own. Now she seemed to have been translated to another sphere. He was no longer jovial and jocular with her. He watched and studied the Madonna-like calm of the clear dark face, until he

felt a sort of awe stealing over him; the intense dark life of her eyes was a mystery to him.

In these few days she began to wonder if she were not rapidly growing old: it seemed to her that everything around her was becoming so serious and so sad.

"And if I do look old, who will care?" she said to herself, bitterly.

The Count, on the other hand, fancied she had never been so beautiful; and, as he looked on her, he tried to gladden his heart by the thought that he was not a mercenary man. To prove to her and himself that he was not, he swore a mental oath that he would be rejoiced to see her a beggar, that so he might lift her up to his high estate. Indeed, so mad was the man at the time—so much beside himself was he—that he was ready to forswear the only aim of his life, and would have married Annie Brunel only too willingly, had it been proved to him that she was the daughter of a gipsy.

"Another day's rest is all that the doctor has prescribed," said the Count. "I hope to see our friend down to breakfast to-morrow morning."

"Is he so much better?" she asked.

She inquired in so earnest a tone that he fancied her anxiety was to know if the damage she had done was nearly mended—and so he said:

"Better? He is quite better now. I think he might come down and see us this morning, unless you would prefer paying him a visit."

Immediately after breakfast Miss Brunel went over to the inn, and there she found Hans Halm and his daughter.

"Grete," she said, "could you go to the Feldberg to-day?"

"Yes," said Grete.

"Could you be ready to start by twelve o'clock?"

"My father's *wagen* has gone to Donaueschingen, mademoiselle," she said.

"The Count will lend us a carriage, and you must come with me."

The matter having been arranged, she returned to the Count, and told him of her intention, firmly and quietly. A week previous he would have laughed, and pooh-poohed the notion; now he was excessively courteous, and, though he regretted her decision, he would do everything in his power, &c.

"Will you let Hermann come with us as far as the Feldberg?"

"I devote Hermann entirely to your service for a week—a month—as long as you choose," said the Count.

English Polly was got up from the kitchen—where she had established a species of freemasonry between herself and the German servants—to assist in the packing; and while she and Mrs. Christmas were so engaged, Annie Brunel sate down, and wrote these lines on a slip of paper:

"I am glad to hear you are letter. You wished us not to meet again, and as it is easier for me to go than you, I leave here in an hour. You will forgive me for having caused you so much pain. Good-bye.

A.B. "

She put the paper in an envelope, and took it down to the Count.

"I have written a note to Mr. Anerley, explaining our going away so abruptly. Will you please send it to him?"

"I will take it to him myself," said the Count, and he took it.

A few minutes afterwards, when the Count returned, she was seated at the window, looking out with vague absent eyes on the great undulations of the black-green forest, on the soft sunlight that lay upon the hills along the horizon, and on the little nook of Schönstein with the brown houses, the white church, and the large inn. She started slightly as he entered. He held another envelope in his hand.

"I have brought a reply," he said, "but a man does not write much with his left hand, in bed."

On a corner of the sheet of paper she had sent, there were written these words, *"I thank you heartily. God bless you!—W.A."* And her only thought as she read them was, "Not even in England—not even in England."

Grete appeared, blushing in her elaborate finery. Her violet bodice was resplendent, with its broad velvet collar embroidered with gold; her snow-white sleeves were full-blown and crimp; and her hair was braided, and hung down in two long tails from underneath the imposing black head-dress, with its ornamentation of gold beads. Grete had manufactured another of those embroidered miracles, which she was now carrying in her trunk to Aenchen Baumer. It was with a little sob of half-hysteric delight that she drove out of the stone courtyard, and realised the stupendous fact that Hermann Löwe was to accompany them to the Feldberg.

Mrs. Christmas, studying the strange expression of her adopted daughter's face, thought she was becoming remarkably like the Annie Napier whom she knew long ago.

"May she have a very different fate!" said the old woman to herself, as she thought of the weary and solitary life-struggle, the self-denial, the heroic

fortitude of those bygone and bitter days.

CHAPTER XX.
HOMEWARDS.

"If mademoiselle chooses," said Grete, "we can walk along the side of the Titi See, and allow the carriage to go on by itself. The road is very pretty from the lake onwards to the Feldberg."

Mademoiselle was in that frame of mind when any change involving action was a delicious relief, and she gladly embraced the proposal.

"If the old lady prefers to drive all the way," said Grete, with a touch of maidenly pride, "Hermann ought to accompany her. I can find the way for us two, mademoiselle."

That also was agreed to, the distance being too great for Mrs. Christmas to walk. And so Annie Brunel and Grete Halm set out upon the winding path, or rather track, which runs along the shore of the beautiful Titi See—here skirting the edge of the rocky promontories which jut out into the still blue lake, there cutting through the dense coppices lying in the sunshine along the foot of the hills, or again passing some deep-roofed and sleepy farmhouse, with its small stone chapel standing in the yard. Grete reverentially crossed herself every time they passed one of these numerous private chapels; and her companion, peeping in through the wooden bars, generally saw within the sanctuary a large framed lithograph of the Virgin Mary in red and blue, with a vast number of little gilt trinkets and other pious offerings lying on the altar. Some of these chapels had forms within capable of accommodating a congregation of from twelve to twenty persons. One or two people had built no chapel at all, but had hollowed out a niche in the wall surrounding their garden, and had placed therein a wooden crucifix, more or less painted, exhibiting the details of the Crucifixion with mediæval exactitude. And Grete, being a good girl, crossed herself as she saw these humble memorials of a devout faith.

"Why did you send Hermann away, Grete?" said Annie Brunel, as they walked along.

"Because, mademoiselle, I wished him to know that I could do without him," said Grete Halm.

"You are very fond of him, are you not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, but——"

"And he of you?"

"He is very fond of me, I know," said Grete, simply.

"I don't wonder at it; but have you ever asked yourself why he is fond of you?"

"Why, mademoiselle? Because—because I am a girl and he is a man, and he wants to be married."

Annie Brunel laughed; it was the first smile her companion had seen on her face for some days.

"But suppose he did not want to be married—suppose he could not be married to you—would he be fond of you? Or suppose you knew, Grete, that he was to marry some one else, what would you do?"

"I should do nothing, mademoiselle; I should be miserable."

"You would not cease to love him?"

"If I could, yes; if not,——"

"If not, you would only be miserable."

The tone in which the words were uttered caused Grete to look up suddenly in her companion's face. She saw nothing there but the inwardly-reflecting eyes, the beautiful, pale, dark complexion, and the placid sweetness of the unkissed lips.

"In England, Grete, I am an actress. They say that an actress must never reflect, that she lives for immediate gratification, that she educates impulses, and that she cannot pause, and regard her position, and criticise herself. If I cease to feel any pleasure in immediate gratifications, if I feel ill at ease and dissatisfied with myself, and fancy that the stage would no longer give me any pleasure—must I cease to be an actress?"

"Is mademoiselle in earnest?"

Grete Halm could not believe that her companion was an actress. Had she ever seen, even in Carlsruhe itself, an actress with such a noble air, with such a face, and such a manner?

"I am in earnest, Grete. I have been an actress all my life; I feel as if I were one no longer."

"What has changed you, mademoiselle, may I be permitted to ask?"

"I do not know myself, Grete. But I have turned an old woman since I came to the Black Forest; and I shall go back to England with a sort of fear, as if I had never been there before."

Since she came to the Black Forest. For a moment a suspicion crossed Grete's mind that she must be miserable through loving some one; but so completely had she been imbued with the idea of her companion being some mysteriously beautiful and noble creature, who could not be moved by the meaner loves and

thoughts of a girl like herself, that she at once dismissed the supposition. Perhaps, she thought, the shock of severely injuring her friend still affected her, and had induced a temporary despondency. Grete therefore resolved, in her direct way, to be as amusing as possible; and she never tired of directing her companion's attention to the beautiful and wonderful things they saw on their way—the scarlet grasshoppers which rattled their wings among the warm grass, the brilliantly-coloured beetles, the picturesque crucifixes by the wayside, or the simultaneous splash of a lot of tiny fish among the reeds as some savage pike made a rush at them from the deeper water.

In process of time they left the soft blue breadth of the lake behind them, and found themselves in the valley leading up to the Feldberg. Grete struck an independent zigzag course up the hill's side, clambering up rocky slopes, cutting through patches of forest, and so on, until they found themselves on the high mountain-road loading to their destination. Nothing was to be seen of the carriage; and so they went on alone, into the silence of the tall pines, while the valley beneath them gradually grew wider, and the horizon beyond grew more and more distant. Now they were really in the Black Forest of the old romances—not the low-lying districts, where the trees are of modern growth, but up in the rocky wilderness, where the magnificent trunks were encrusted and coated with lichens of immemorial age—where the spongy yellow-green moss, here and there of a dull crimson, would let a man sink to the waist—where the wild profusion of underwood was rank and strong with the heat of the sun and the moisture of innumerable streams trickling down their rocky channels in the hillside—where the yellow light, falling between the splendid stems of the trees, glimmered away down the narrow avenues, and seemed to conjure up strange forms and faces out of the still brushwood and the fantastic grey lichens which hung everywhere around. Several times a cock capercailzie, with two or three hens under his protection, would rise with a prodigious noise and disappear in the green darkness overhead; occasionally a mountain-hare flew past; and Grete, with an inherited interest, pointed out to her friend the tiny footmarks of the deer on the sand of the rough and winding road.

"See, mademoiselle, there is Aenchen Baumer's house."

They had come to an opening in the pines which revealed the broad yellow valley beneath, with its sunlit road running like a thread of silk through it. Grete's friend's house was a little white building, with green casements, and a few vines growing up one of the gables; it was separated from the road by a paling which interrupted the long line of rough stone posts which a paternal government had stuck in the ground to prevent carriages tumbling still farther down into the bed of the hollow.

"You have come a long way out of your road, Grete," said Miss Brunel.

"I came to accompany you, mademoiselle. I can easily go back to Aenchen's house before the evening."

The upward road now grew more and more jagged, rough, and full of mud-holes, until, at last, they left the forest region altogether, and got into the high pasture districts of the mountain. Finally, as the path became a track, grass-grown and rocky, they arrived at a square grey building, with a small garden attached, which stood on the summit of the shoulder of the hill.

"It is the Feldberg Inn," said Grete.

"Is it pleasant to live on the top of the mountain?" asked her companion.

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle; only it is a little cold. And when you look out at night—in the moonlight—it frightens one; for all the house seems surrounded by a yellow mist, which floats about and makes figures, and then it sweeps away, and you see the garden sharp and clear. It is the clouds, you know. Franz Gersbach has told me of his having been on the top of the Niessen one morning before sunrise, and while all the great mountains opposite—the Jungfrau, and the Mönch, and the Eiger, and all these—were still cold and dark, he saw Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc, away down in the south, with a pale pink flame on their peaks in the midst of the green sky. Here we have no snow on our mountains, except in the winter-time; and then sometimes the people up here have their supplies cut off for a long time."

There was a tall, fair-faced, sleepy-looking man standing at the door of the inn, with whom Grete shook hands. The giant blushed slightly, answered her questions in laconic monosyllables, and then led the way into the house, apparently relieved to be out of the observation of the two girls.

"It is the landlord's brother," said Grete, "and a friend of mine."

"You have a number of friends," said Annie Brunel, with a smile; "and they seem to be all big men. If you were as small as I am, one might account for your liking big men."

Grete Halm looked at her companion. There could be no doubt about the German girl being the taller and certainly the stouter of the two; and yet until that moment she had fancied that Miss Brunel was ever so much taller than she.

"It is the manner of your walk, mademoiselle, and your figure—and perhaps the expression of your face—that make me think you tall. No, I see you are not tall."

For a moment Margarethe's soft brown eyes dwelt on her companion—perhaps with a touch of wistful, puzzled longing to know why grace of form should so touch our sympathies; then she turned to the large Heinrich Holzmann—whose big shoulders should have been more attractive to a girl's eye than another girl's waist—and said that the young English lady wished the best apartments in the house. Margarethe further gave him to understand that his

guests would be very particular about their cookery; and, above all, that they would not submit to have but one fork and knife to attend them through four or five courses. Heinrich said "Yaw" in a grave manner to all her directions, and begged her to tell the English lady that his brother, who spoke French, would be home next day.

"But the lady and her friend—who will be here presently—must not starve till to-morrow," said the practical Grete.

"Nein," said Heinrich, absently.

"I mean they must have dinner here, and you must look after it, Heinrich Holzmann."

"Ja, ja."

"You have plenty in the house?"

"Ja."

"The lady says that after the carriage arrives, you can have dinner prepared: that is, the lady and her friend at one table, and Hermann Löwe, the coachman, and I at another. Do you understand?"

"Freilich.",

"If the girls want help, ask me."

"Danke schön, Grete."

"And as you don't seem to have anybody here, shall I take the lady upstairs and pick out what rooms she wants?"

"Yes, if that pleases you," said the fair-haired giant; and therewith he opened the door for Miss Brunel, and made her a grave bow as she went with Grete into the passage, and so up to the rooms above.

It was nearly half an hour afterwards that the carriage arrived, and Mrs. Christmas, with much excitement, caught Annie in her arms and kissed her, declaring she had never expected to see her again. The road they had come!—the precipices they had skirted, with the three horses slipping on the smooth rocks at the very brink!—the vehicle leaning over as if it were about to topple headlong down!—the jolting into deep ruts and over blocks of stone!

"I screamed," she said, "and insisted on being helped out of the carriage; for they would have me sit still, declaring there was no danger. Danger!——"

And the little woman shivered.

"So you walked all the way?"

"Until we got down into the valley."

Grete and Hermann were invited to dine with the two ladies; and, in the evening, they all convoyed the young German girl down to the house of her friend.

For several days they remained on the Feldberg, beguiling the time as best they might. Mrs. Christmas had now quite recovered her normal condition of

health and spirits, and laboured hard to discover why her companion was so preoccupied, restless, and absent in manner. Why, too, was this journey down through Switzerland being indefinitely postponed? Every morning it was——

"Miss Annie, do we start to-day?"

"Not to-day, mother. Let us have another day's quiet."

"You will kill yourself with dulness, Miss Annie. There is nothing for you to do."

"Let us climb to the top of the peak, and see the tower——"

"I have tried twice, and failed. And if you persist in going up there alone, you will tumble down into that horrible lake you told me of."

"Then let us descend to the lake to-day, if you please."

She could not leave the neighbourhood. She lingered there, day after day, that she might have tidings from Schönstein. Two letters she had received from the Count told her nothing definite; they were very polite, grave, respectful communications, in which he hoped she would visit Schönstein again on her return. Hermann, on going back to his master, had written to Grete Halm, and merely mentioned that the English gentleman was still in his room, and that the surgeon did not speak very confidently of the case.

This day, also, she prevailed on Mrs. Christmas to stay; and together, after breakfast, they set out in quest of the Feldsee, the small lake that lies deep down in the heart of the mountain. They were furnished with a few directions from Heinrich Holzmann's brother; but as neither time nor direction was of much consequence to them, they plunged carelessly into the forest, and proceeded slowly to descend the side of the mountain. At last, they came upon a path which led down through the jumbled and picturesque confusion of shattered rock, smooth boulder, moss, fern, and herbage, that lay around the foot of the tall, resinous-smelling pines; and this track they leisurely followed until, from the twilight of the trees, it led them out into the obscure daylight which dwelt over the gloomy tarn they sought.

Nothing could well be more lonely or melancholy than this dark and silent lake lying in its circular bed—evidently an extinct volcanic crater—overshadowed by tall and perpendicular crags hemming it in on every side, and scarcely ever having a breath of wind to stir its leaden-like surface. The tall thinly-clad rocks, rising to the circular breadth of white sky above, were faintly mirrored in the black water underneath; and the gloomy stillness of the quiet motionless picture was not relieved by the least stir or sound of any living thing. This hideous hole, its surface nearly four thousand feet above the level of the sea, is of unknown depth: no wonder that the superstitious Schwarzwalders have legends about it, and that the children tell you of the demon-deer that was wont to spring over the tall precipices above, and so lure on the unwary huntsman and his horse to

destruction.

There was a boat lying moored in a creek at one corner of the lake, and of this Annie Brunel at once took possession. She insisted on Mrs. Christmas getting into it; and then, with a few strokes of the oars, she pulled out to the centre of the lake. Mrs. Christmas did not at all like the aspect of the place; and, if she had known that she was floating over an extinct volcano, she would probably have liked it less.

"It looks like a place for murders to be committed," she said.

When they had reached the centre of the dark water, Annie laid aside the oars, and seated herself in the stern of the boat with her companion. There was no wind, no current: the boat remained almost motionless.

The old woman took the young girl's hand, and said to her—

"Come now, Miss Annie, you must tell me what has been the matter with you lately—what has vexed you—or what troubles you?"

"I have been thinking of returning to England," she said, absently.

"Why should that trouble you?"

"I am afraid of going back."

"Bah! I have no patience with you. You are as much a child as ever—as when you used to whimper in a makebelieve way, and cause your mother to laugh and cry together over your natural turn for acting."

"My natural turn for acting is going—is nearly gone," said she, with a smile; "and that is what I am afraid about. I am beginning to fear a lot of faces."

"Then *why* will you remain in such a dreadfully lonely place as this mountain inn? That it is which breeds strange fancies in you, my girl, don't doubt of it. Afraid of faces! Didn't you use to tell me that you were never conscious of seeing a face at all when you were on the stage?"

"I may have said so," she replied, musingly. "I don't think I ever did see faces—except as vague orange-coloured lamps in a sort of ruddy darkness—over the blaze of the footlights, you know. Certainly I never thought of them, nor heeded them. When I went off, and heard the noise of their hands and feet, it seemed like the sound of some machine with which I had no concern. I don't think I ever feared an audience in my life. My mother used to be my audience, as she stood in the wings and looked at me with the half-smile and kindly eyes I remember so well; and then I used to try to please you, you know, and never succeeded, as you also know, Lady Jane; and lately I have not thought of pleasing anybody, but of satisfying a sort of delirium that came over me."

"You never pleased me! You wicked creature! If I were blind and came into a theatre where I heard you playing your 'Juliet,' my eyes would open of their own accord."

"That time has passed over, Lady Jane. I am afraid of going to England.

I should see all the faces now, and wonder what the people were saying of my hands outstretched, or of my kneeling posture, or of my elocution. I feel that if I were to get up just now, in this boat, and speak two sentences——"

"You would have us both laughing. But did you ever try before, my dear, to act to a scene? You might as well try to speak to an empty theatre as to that horrible loneliness over there. It was Mr. Bridges, the stage-manager at N——, if you remember, Miss Annie, who used to rehearse in the morning his speech before the curtain—used to wave his hand and smile to the empty benches, and then bow himself out backward. But at night, when the people were there, he always forgot the smile and the wave of the hand, and mumbled like a schoolboy. And as for your not being able to act when you hear the stir of a crowded house on the other side of the curtain, and know there are a dozen bouquets waiting for you in the boxes, why it's nonsense, my dear."

"I am afraid of it none the less, mother, and I shall dread putting myself to the test."

"All the result of this living out of the world," said Mrs. Christmas, dogmatically. "Say, shall we start to-morrow morning, Miss Annie?"

"Yes."

When they returned to the inn there was a letter from Schönstein awaiting Miss Brunel. She knew from the peculiar handwriting who had sent it, and opened it joyfully, knowing that he was at least well enough to write. These were the words:—

"Schönstein, Thursday.

"MY DEAR MISS BRUNEL,—Ever since you left I have bitterly reproached myself for having given you so much annoyance and trouble. I hear that you are living, without amusement or companions, in the Feldberg Inn. May I beg of you to return here, adding the assurance that you will not be troubled by my presence in any way whatever? Whether you do or not, I cannot permit you to leave without bidding you good-bye—especially as we may not see each other in England—and so, if you will forgive me this once, I propose to cross over to the Feldberg to-morrow and visit you," &c., &c.

She read no more; the cramped left-hand writing had told her enough. She hurriedly wrote a reply, peremptorily forbidding him to be at the trouble and danger of such an expedition; and added that, before he could possibly be at the Feldberg, she would be on her way to Freiburg and Basle. Then she called the elder Holzmann, desired him to get a messenger to take over this letter to

Schönstein that day, and informed him that on the next morning she and her companion would set out for the south.

It was a point of maidenly honour with her that she should go away with her sad secret her own; and who could tell what disclosure might happen, were she to see him suffering from the effects of the wound, entreating her to stay, and with his own love for her speaking in his eyes? He was a man, and it did not matter; as for her, she closed this fatal tenderness in her heart, and would fain have deceived herself into denying its existence. Truth to say, she felt a touch of shame at her own weakness; was dimly conscious that her virginal purity of soul was tainted by a passion which she dreamed was a guilty one; and knew that her punishment lay in the loss of that innocent gaiety and thoughtlessness which had hitherto made her life so pleasant.

"We may not see each other in England," she said to herself, gazing at the crooked and trembling lines on the paper. "Not in England, nor elsewhere, will be my constant prayer so long as I live."

So they left the gloomy mountain, and passing through the Hollenthal once more, reached Freiburg; and from thence, by easy stages, they made the round of the Swiss lakes until, as fate would have it, they came to Thun. There they rested for a day or two, preparatory to their undertaking the voyage to England.

Here a strange incident befel Annie Brunel. Their first walk lay along the shore of the lake; and no sooner had they left the side of the rapid bright-green Aar, than Mrs. Christmas noticed a strange intense look of wonder settling over her companion's face. Wistfully, and yet curiously, the dark-grey eyes dwelt on the expanding lake, on the long curving bays, on the sunlit mountains opposite, and on the far-off snow-peaks of the Bernese Alps.

"I have seen all this in a dream," she said.

"Or in a picture," suggested Mrs. Christmas.

"It is more than a dream or a picture," she continued, in a half-frightened way, as they walked along. "I know the place—I know it—the shore over there—the village down yonder at the point, and the smoke hanging over the trees;—I am getting quite giddy with—remembering——"

"My dear!" said Mrs. Christmas.

Her companion was now quite pale, and stood fixed to the spot, looking over the long scene in front of her with a wild stare. Then she turned round, as if almost in fear, and no sooner had she done so than she uttered a slight cry, and seemed ready to sink to the ground.

"I knew it!—I knew it!" she said. "I knew the house was there before I turned my head."

She looked up at the handsome building on the plateau above, as if it were some horrible thing come to torture her. It was only the house in which Harry Ormond had bidden her mother farewell.

CHAPTER XXI.
IN ENGLAND.

Mr. Melton was overjoyed to see Annie Brunel in London again. He had spent half his fortune in beautifying his theatre, in getting up elaborate scenery for the new piece with which he was to welcome the return to town of his patrons, and in providing costly properties. So long as the heroine of the piece was wandering among the mountains of the Schwarzwald, it was impossible that the manager's mind could be well at ease.

"You shall come round now, and see what we have done for you, and give us your opinion," said he, politely.

Indeed, he would like to have kissed her just then, in a fatherly way, to show how delighted he was to have her back again. He saw pictures of overflowing audiences before his mind as he looked on the quiet little figure before him, on the dark face, and the large grave eyes.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. A tolerably clear light fell upon the stage, a duskier twilight hung over the rows of empty benches in the pit, and the gloomy darkness behind the galleries was here and there lit up by a solitary lamp. One or two gilders were still at work on the front of the dress-circle; overhead an echoing clang of hammer and nail told that carpenters were busy; and a vague shouting from the dusky region of the "flies" revealed the presence of human beings in those dim Olympian heights. Everywhere, as usual, the smell of escaped gas; here and there an odour of size or paint.

As they descended from the dark corridor behind the dress-circle into the wings, a mass of millinery ran full-tilt against Mr. Melton, and then started back with a slight cry and a giggle.

"God bless my soul!" said the manager, piously, although that was not the part of his body which had suffered.

The next moment Miss Featherstone had thrown her arms around Annie Brunel's neck, and was kissing her and calling her "My dear" with that profusion of sentiment which most actresses love to scatter over the object, *pro tem.*,

of their affection. Miss Featherstone was attired in a green silk dress—in many a love-scene had *that* rather dingy piece of costume figured, on the stage and elsewhere—a blue cloth jacket, a white hat with a scarlet feather, and yellow gloves. During this outburst of emotion, Mr. Melton had caught sight of a young gentleman—to whom he gave thirty shillings a week in order that he might dress as a gentleman should, and always have a good hat to keep on his head while walking about in a drawing-room—who had been in pursuit of Miss Featherstone, and who now sneaked away in another direction.

"And so you've come back, my dear, and none of the German princes have run away with you! And how well you look! I declare I'm quite ashamed of myself when I see the colour in your cheeks; but what with rehearsals, you know, my dear, and other troubles——"

She heaved a pretty and touching sigh. She intimated that these quarrels with the young gentleman who escorted her to and from the stage-door—quarrels which came off at a rate of about seven per week—were disturbing the serenity of her mind so far as to compel her to assist nature with violet-powder and rouge.

"Do you know, my dear," she said, in a whisper that sent Mr. Melton away on his own business, "he swears he will forsake me for ever if I accept a part in which I must wear tights. How can I help it, my dear? What is a poor girl to do?"

"Wear trousers," said Annie Brunel, with a smile.

"Nothing will please him. He would have all my comic parts played in a train half a mile long. At last I told him he had better go and help my mother to cut my skirts and petticoats of a proper length; and he pretended to be deeply hurt, and I haven't seen him since."

Then she tossed her wilful little head with an air of defiance.

"He will write to me before I write to him."

"It is too cruel of you," said her companion.

"Yes, my dear, you may laugh; but you have no burlesque parts to play. And you have nobody sitting in the stalls watching your every movement, and keeping you in a fright about what he is thinking of you."

"No," said Annie Brunel, rather absently, "I have nobody to watch me like that. If I had, I should not be able to go upon the stage, I think."

"And the bitter things he says about the profession—and particularly about Mr. Gannet, and Mr. Marks, and Mr. Jobson—all because they are young men, and he fancies they may be so polite as to lift a glove for me if I let it fall. You know, my dear, that *I* don't encourage them. If there's any fun at rehearsal, you know that *I* don't begin it."

"When we met you just now——"

"That was only some of Mr. Murphy's nonsense. Oh, I declare to you, no one knows what I have suffered. The other evening, when he and I got into a cab,

he glared at the man who opened the door for us. And the fuss he makes about cosmetique and bismuth is something dreadful."

"He must be a monster."

There now ensued a little fragment of thorough comedy. For a moment the elderly young lady, who had been assuming throughout the tone of a spoiled child, stood irresolute. There was a petulance on her face, and she had half a mind to go away in high dudgeon from one who was evidently laughing at her. Then through this petulance there broke a sort of knowing smile, while a glimmer of mischievous intelligence appeared in her eyes; and then, with an unaffected comical giggle, she once more threw her arms round Annie Brunel's neck and kissed her.

"I'm very wicked, I know," she said, with a shrug of the shoulders, "but I can't help it. What's bred in the bone, you know. And it's all the men's fault, for they keep teasing one so. As for *him*, if he writes to me, and makes an apology, and promises to be a good boy, I'll make friends with him. And I'll be very good myself—for a week."

It was with a cold inward shiver that Annie Brunel stepped out upon the stage and looked round the empty theatre. She tried to imagine it full of people, and yellow light, and stir, and she knew within herself she dared not venture before them. Even without that solitary pair of eyes watching her movements, and without the consciousness that she might be producing a strong impression, for good or evil, on one particular person whose estimation she desired, she trembled to think of the full house, and the rows of faces, and her own individual weakness.

"What do you think of the decorations, Miss Brunel?" said Mr. Melton, coming up.

"They are very pretty," she said, mechanically.

"With your 'Rosalind,' the theatre should draw all London to it."

"It is 'Rosalind' you mean to play?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Certainly," replied the manager, with astonishment. "Don't you remember our agreement? If you turn round, you will see the new forest-scene Mr. Gannet has painted; perhaps it may remind you of something in the Black Forest."

For a moment or two she glanced over the great breadth of canvas, covered with gnarled oaks, impossible brushwood, and a broad, smooth stream. With a short "No, it is not like the Black Forest," she turned away again.

"Miss Featherstone will play 'Celia;' and you know there is not a 'Touchstone' in the world to come near Bromley's. Mrs. Wilkes refuses to play 'Audrey,' luckily, and Miss Alford will play it a deal better. I have had several rehearsals, everybody is declared letter-perfect; and we only you to put the keystone to the

arch, as one might say."

She turned quickly round and said to him—

"If I were at the last moment prevented from playing in the piece, could Miss Featherstone take 'Rosalind,' and some one else play 'Celia?'"

"What do you mean, my dear Miss Brunel?" said the manager, aghast. "You frighten me, I assure you. I calculated upon you; and after all this expense, and your agreement, and——"

"Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Melton," she said, quietly. "I mean to play the part so as to give every satisfaction both to you and myself, if I can. I only asked in the event of any accident."

"Come," said he, kindly, "I can't have you talk in that strain, with such a prospect before us. Why, we are going to set all London, as well as the Thames, on fire, and have the prices of the stalls going at a hundred per cent. premium. An accident! Bah! I wish Count Schönstein were here to laugh the notion out of your head."

So it was, therefore, that the play was put in full rehearsal for several days, and Mr. Melton looked forward hopefully to the success of his new venture. Sometimes he was a little disquieted by the remembrance of Miss Brunel's singular question; but he strove to banish it from his mind. He relied upon his new scenery and decorations, and upon Annie Brunel; the former were safe, and he would take care to secure the latter.

The gentlemen of the press had been good enough to mention the proposed revival in terms of generous anticipation. Altogether, Mr. Melton had every reason to hope for the best.

Occasionally he observed an unusual constraint in the manner of his chief favourite, and sometimes a listless indifference to what was going on around her. One or twice he had caught her standing idly behind the foot-lights, gazing into the empty theatre with a vague earnestness which revealed some inward purpose. He still trusted that all would go well; and yet he confessed to himself that there was something about the young actress's manner that he had never noticed before, and which he could not at all understand.

Mrs. Christmas seemed to share with him this uneasy feeling. He knew that the old lady was now in the habit of lecturing her pupil in a derisive way, as if trying to banish some absurd notion from her mind; and whenever he approached, Mrs. Christmas became silent.

For the first time during their long companionship Mrs. Christmas found her young friend incomprehensibly obstinate, not to say intractable. Night and day she strove to convince her that in anticipating nervousness and failure, she was rendering both inevitable; and yet she could not, by all her arguments and entreaties, remove this gloomy apprehension.

"I cannot explain the feeling," was the constant reply. "I only know it is there."

"But you, of all people, Miss Annie! Girls who have suddenly come to try the stage get fits of stage-fright naturally: but people who are born and bred to it, who have been on the stage since their childhood——"

"Why should you vex yourself, mother? I have no dread of stage-fright. I shall be as cool as I am now. Don't expect that I shall blunder in my part, or make mistakes otherwise—that is not what I mean. What I fear is, that the moment I go upon the stage, and see the men and women all around me, I shall feel that I am just like one of them, only a little lower in having to amuse them. I shall feel as if I ought to be ashamed of myself in imitating the real emotions of life."

"You never had any of those fantastic notions before. Didn't you use to pride yourself on your indifference to the people?"

"I *used* to."

"What has changed you?"

"My growing older," she replied, with a sad smile. "I begin to feel as if those things that make up acting had become part of my own life now, and that I had no business to burlesque them any more on the stage. I begin to wonder what the people will think of my lending myself to a series of tricks."

And here she fell into a reverie, which Mrs. Christmas saw it was useless to interrupt. The worthy old woman was sorely puzzled and grieved by the apostacy of her most promising pupil, and ceased not to speculate on what subtle poison had been allowed to creep into her mind.

Meanwhile the opening night had arrived. People had come back from the moors and Mont Blanc, and every place in the theatre had been taken. Mr. Melton already enjoyed his triumph by anticipation, and tried every means of keeping up Annie Brunel's spirits. She was bound to achieve the most brilliant of all her successes, as he confidently told her.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROSALIND.

"*Ah, mon bon petit public*, be kind to my leetel child!" says Achille Talma Dufard, when his daughter is about to go on the stage for the first time. The words were in the heart, if not on the lips, of Mrs. Christmas, as the kindly old woman

busied herself in Annie Brunel's dressing-room, and prepared her favourite for the coming crisis. She had a vague presentiment that it was to be a crisis, though she did not know why.

By the time the inevitable farce was over, the house was full. Miss Featherstone, rushing downstairs to change her costume of a barmaid for that of 'Celia,' brought word that all the critics were present, that Royalty was expected, and that her own particular young gentleman had laughed so heartily at the farce that she was sure he was in a good humour, and inclined to let bygones be bygones.

"So you must cheer up," said Mrs. Christmas, blithely, when Nelly had gone; "you must cheer up, and do great things, my dear."

"Am I not sufficiently cheerful, Lady Jane?"

"Cheerful? Cheerful? Yes, perhaps cheerful. But you must forget all you have been saying about the people, and mind only your character, and put fire and spirit into it. Make them forget who *you* are, my dear, and then you'll only think of yourself as 'Rosalind.' Isn't your first cue '*Be merry*'?"

"Then I will be merry, mother, or anything else you wish. So don't vex your poor little head about me. I shall add a grey hair to it if you bother yourself so much."

"You would find it hard to change it now, unless you changed it to black," said Lady Jane.

When 'Rosalind' and 'Celia' together appeared on the stage, a long and hearty welcome was given forth from every part of the house. Mr. Melton was standing in the wings with Mrs. Christmas, and his dry grey face brightened up with pleasure.

"They have not forgotten her, have they?" he said, triumphantly.

"How could they?" was the natural response.

From that moment the old woman's eyes never left the form of her scholar during the progress of the play. Keenly and narrowly she watched the expression of her face, her manner of acting, the subtle harmony of word and gesture which, in careful keeping, make the part of 'Rosalind' an artistic wonder. And the more narrowly she studied her pupil's performance, the more she convinced herself that there was nothing to be found fault with. The timid pleasantries, the tender sadness, the coy love advances, tempered and beautified by that unconscious halo of modesty and virgin grace which surrounds the gentlest of all Shakspeare's heroines, were there before her eyes, and she was forced to say to herself that no 'Rosalind' could be more charming than this 'Rosalind.' She did not reflect that never before had she been constrained so to convince herself, and that never before had she been so anxious to know the effect on the audience.

That, so far as was yet appreciable, was satisfactory. The mere charm of admirably artistic acting, combined with a graceful figure and a pretty face, was

enough to captivate any body of spectators. Mrs. Christmas, however, dared not confess to herself that they seemed to want that electric thrill of sympathy which had been wont to bring them and the young actress immediately *en rapport.* Once only did they in the first act catch that swift contagion of delight which flashes through an audience bound by the master-spell of genius. It was where 'Rosalind,' having graced the victorious wrestler with a chain from her own neck, is about to go away with 'Celia,' and yet is loth to go without having had speech of the young man who has so awakened her interest. The half-interpreted longing, the hesitating glance, and maiden bashfulness with which she turned to him and said:

"Did you call, sir?—
Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies,"

—her eyes first seeking his face, and then being cast down, as the words became almost inaudible—provoked the house into a sudden tempest of applause which covered her disappearance from the scene, Mrs. Christmas caught her as she came off, and kissed her, with nervous tears in her eyes.

At the end of the first act she was called before the curtain. Any one calmly observing the house would have seen that it was not very enthusiastic, and that it fell to talking almost before she had passed behind the curtain at the opposite side. Then she went down to her dressing-room.

Mrs. Christmas welcomed her and complimented her with an emphasis which was a little forced and unnecessary. Annie Brunel said nothing, but stood and contemplated, with her straight-looking honest eyes, the poor little woman who was courageously trying to act her part naturally. Then she sate down.

"Do you think I did my best, mother?" she said. And again she fixed her large eyes, with a kind conciliation in them, on her aged friend.

"Of course——"

"And you were watching me, I think?"

"Yes."

"And the house?"

"A little," said Mrs. Christmas, rather nervously.

"Then you know," she said, calmly, "that I have made a total failure, that the people think so, and that to-morrow every one, including the papers, will say so."

"My dear!——"

"Why should we not speak frankly, mother? I felt it within myself, and I saw it in their faces. *And I knew it before I went on the stage.*"

"That is it! That has done it all!" exclaimed the old woman, inclined to

wring her hands in despair and grief. "You convinced yourself that you were going to fail, and then, when you went on the stage, you lost command over yourself."

"Had I not command over myself?" the young girl asked, with a smile. "I had so great command of myself that I knew and was conscious of everything I did—the tiniest thing—and kept continually asking myself how it would impress the people. I was never in the least excited; had I been—but there is no use talking, Lady Jane. Help me to change my dress; I suppose I must go through with it."

So Mrs. Christmas officiated in place of Sarah, whom she always ordered out of the way on grand occasions; and, as she did so, she still administered counsel and reproof, not having quite given up hope.

Two of the most distinguished of the critics met in the lobby leading to the stalls.

"A pity, is it not?" said one.

The other merely shrugged his shoulders.

The general run of the critics fancied that Annie Brunel had added another to her list of brilliant successes, and were already shaping in their brain elaborate sentences overflowing with adjectives.

Lord Weyminster, whom people considered to have a share in the proprietary of the theatre, went behind the scenes and met Mr. Melton.

"This won't do, my boy," he said.

"Do you think not?" said the manager, anxiously. "They received her very warmly."

"They received Miss Brunel warmly, but not her 'Rosalind.'"

"What's to be done?"

"Change the piece."

"I can't. Perhaps it was only a temporary indisposition."

"Perhaps," said his lordship, carelessly. "I never saw such a difference in the acting of any woman. Formerly she was full of fire; to-night she was wooden—pretty enough, and proper enough, but wooden."

Further consolation or advice Mr. Melton could not get out of his patron. In despair, he said that his lordship was exaggerating a temporary constraint on the part of the young actress, and that the succeeding scenes would bring her out in full force.

The wood scene was of course charming. Miss Featherstone's young gentleman, sitting in the stalls, surrendered himself to the delicious intoxication of the moment ('Celia,' it will be remembered, wears long petticoats), and wondered whether he could write a poem on the forest of Ardennes. He was in that fond period of existence when the odour of escaped gas, anywhere, at once awoke for him visions of greenwood scenery and romantic love-affairs; and when the per-

fume of cold cream conjured up the warm touch of a certain tender cheek—for Miss Featherstone, when in a hurry to get home from the theatre, occasionally left her face unwashed.

The people never lost interest in the play. Indeed, being Londoners, they were sufficiently glad to see any character played with careful artistic propriety, and it was only as an afterthought that they missed the old thrill of Annie Brunel's acting. It could always be said of the part that it was gracefully and tenderly done, void of coarse comedy and of clap-trap effects. It struck a certain low and chastened key of sweetness and harmony that partially atoned for the absence of more daring and thrilling chords.

And yet Annie Brunel went home sick at heart. The loss of popular favour did not trouble her; for had not the people been remarkably kind, and even enthusiastic, in their final call? It was the certain consciousness that the old power had passed away from her for ever—or rather, that the intensity and emotional abandonment of her artistic nature had been sucked into her own personal nature, and was never more to be separately exhibited as a beautiful and wonderful human product.

"Mother, I am tired of acting," she said. "It has been weighing upon me ever so long; but I thought I ought to give myself one more chance, and see if the presence of a big audience would not remove my sickness. No; it has not. Everything I had anticipated occurred. I was not frightened: but I knew that all the people were there, and that I could not command them. I was not 'Rosalind' either to them or to myself; and it was not 'Rosalind' whom they applauded. The noise they made seemed to me to have a tone of pity in it, as if they were trying to deceive me into thinking well of the part."

All this she said quietly and frankly; and Mrs. Christmas sate stunned and silent. It seemed to the old woman that some terrible calamity had occurred. She could not follow the subtle sympathies and distinctions of which the young actress spoke: she knew only that something had happened to destroy the old familiar compact between them, and that the future was full of a gloomy uncertainty.

"I don't know what to say, Miss Annie. You know best what your feelings are. I know there's something wrong somewhere——"

"Don't talk so mournfully," said she. "If I don't act any more we shall find something else to keep us out of starvation."

"If you don't act any more!" said the old woman, in a bewildered way. "If you don't act any more! Tell me, Miss Annie, what you mean. You're not serious? You don't mean that because your 'Rosalind' mayn't have gone off pretty well, you intend to give up the stage altogether—at your time of life—with your prospects—my darling, tell me what you mean?"

She went over and took her companion's two hands in her own.

"Why, mother, you tremble as if you expected some terrible misfortune to happen to us. You will make me as nervous as yourself if you don't collect yourself. You have not been prepared for it as I have been. I have known for some time that I should not be able to act when I returned to London——"

With a slight scream, she started up and caught her friend, who was tottering and like to fall in her arms. The old woman had been unable to receive this intelligence all at once. It was too appalling and too sudden; and when at last some intimation of it came home to her mind, she reeled under the shock. She uttered some incoherent words—"*my charge of you*," "*your mother*," "*the future*"—and then she sank quite insensible upon the sofa to which Annie Brunel had half-carried her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOME AGAIN.

Count Schönstein was in love. His ponderous hilarity had quite gone out of him. After Miss Brunel's departure, he moved about the house alone and disconsolate; he was querulous about his meals; he forgot to tell lies about the price of his wines. He ceased to joke about marriage; he became wonderfully polite to the people about him, and above all to Will Anerley; and every evening after dinner he was accustomed to sit and smoke silently in his chair, going over in his mind all the incidents of Annie Brunel's visit, and hoping that nothing had occurred to offend her.

Sometimes, in a fit of passionate longing, he wished he was again a tea-dealer and she the daughter of one of his clerks. He grew sick of his ambitious schemes; inwardly cursed the aristocracy of this and every other country; and prayed for some humble cottage, with Annie Brunel for his wife, and with nothing for himself to do but sit and smoke, and watch the grape-clusters over the verandah.

Twenty years before he had been afflicted by the same visions. They did not alter much his course of life then; nor did he permit them to move him much now—except after dinner, when most people become generously impulsive and talkative. In one of these moods he confessed to Will the passion which disturbed his repose.

Will stared at him, for the mere thought of such a thing seemed to him a sort of sacrilege; but the next moment he asked himself what right he had to resent the Count's affection for Annie Brunel as an insult, and then he was silent.

"Tell me, have I a chance?" said the Count.

"How can I tell you?" he replied.

"You were very friendly with her. You do not imagine there is anybody else in the young lady's graces?"

"I don't know of any one whom Miss Brunel is likely to marry; but, as I say, how can I tell?"

"You imagine I have a fair field?" asked the Count, rather timidly.

"Oh, yes!" said Will, with a laugh, in which there was just a touch of bitterness. "But that is not the way you used to talk about women, and marriage, and so forth. Do you remember how you gloated over the saying of that newspaper man who was at the 'Juliet' supper—about being 'sewn up in a theological sack with a partner for life?' I suppose you were only whistling in the dark, to scare the ghosts away, and now——"

There was no need to complete the sentence. The doleful look on the Count's rubicund face told its own tale. He shook his head, rather sadly, and contemplatively stirred his Moselle with a bit of biscuit.

"It's time a man like me was married. I have plenty of money to give my wife her own way: we shan't quarrel. There's that big house standing empty; you can't expect people to come and visit you, if you've nobody to receive them. Look how perfectly Miss Brunel could do that. Look at the grace of her demeanour, and her courtesy, and all that: why, though she's ever so little a thing, she looks like an empress when she comes into a room. I never could get elsewhere such a wife as she would make."

"Doubtless not; but the point is to get her," said Will, almost defiantly—he did not know whether to laugh at or be indignant with the Count's cool assumption.

"I tell you I would marry her if she was nothing but what she is——" the Count said, vehemently, and then he suddenly paused, with a look of frightened embarrassment on his face.

"How could she be anything else than what she is?" asked Will, carelessly: he had not observed the Count's trepidation.

"Oh—well—ah—if she were nothing more than an ordinary actress, without the manners of a lady, I should be inclined to marry her, on account of her—her sweetness of disposition, you know."

"What magnanimity!" said Will.

"Laugh as you please," said the Count, with a touch of offended dignity, "there are few men in my position who would marry an actress. If I *should* marry

Miss Brunel, I should consider that while she did me a favour I paid her quite as great a compliment. Look at the estimation in which actresses are held. Look at those women of the —— theatre; at Miss ——, and Miss ——, and Miss ——. Don't the public know all about them? And the public won't stop to pick out one respectable actress from the lot, and be just to her. They all suffer for the sins of the majority; and any actress, whatever may be her personal character, ought to know that she lies under the ban of social suspicion, and——"

"Excuse my interrupting you. But you needn't seek to lower Miss Brunel in *my* opinion: I am not going to marry her. And I should advise you not to attempt to lower her in her own opinion, if you mean to remain friends with her. You can't humble a woman into accepting you; you may flatter her into accepting you. If a woman does not think she is conferring a favour in marrying you, she won't at all—that is, if she is the sort of a woman any man would care to marry."

"Leave that to me, my boy, leave that to me," said the Count, with a superb smile. "I rather fancy, if flattery is to win the day, that I shall not be far behind."

"And yet I heard you one evening say to Nelly Featherstone that 'all pretty women were idiots.' How could any woman help being offended by such a remark?"

"Why, don't you see, you greenhorn, that Nelly isn't pretty——"

"And you as good as told her so," said Will. "Besides, Nelly, like every other woman, fancies she is pretty in a certain way, and would rather that you had informed her of her idiotcy than of her plainness."

The Count blushed deeply. In making the remark to Miss Featherstone, he had imagined he was exhibiting a most remarkable and subtle knowledge of human weakness; and hoped to console her for the shape of her nose by sneering at the stupidity of prettier women. But the Count was a rich man, and a great favourite of Mr. Melton; and Nelly, being a prudent young woman, pocketed the affront.

A variety of circumstances now transpired to hasten the return of both Will and the Count to England. The former could do scarcely anything to the business for which he had come, through his inability to use his right arm. There were, besides, certain growing symptoms of irritation in the wounds which he had fancied were slowly healing, which made him anxious to consult some experienced English surgeon. Such were *his* ostensible reasons.

Under these circumstances, what pleasure could the Count have in remaining in Schönstein alone? He preferred to have Will's company on the homeward journey; and besides, he was personally interested in learning whether the injuries his friend had suffered were likely to become more dangerous. Such were *his* ostensible reasons.

But the crowning thought of both of them, as they turned their back upon

Schönstein, was—"I shall soon see Annie Brunel."

As they passed through the village, Margarethe Halm came out from under her father's door, and the driver stopped the carriage.

"You will see the young English lady when you return home?" said Grete to Will, with a blush on her pretty brown face.

"And if I do?"

"Will you give her this little parcel? it is my work."

With that she slipped the parcel into his hand. At this moment Hans Halm came forward and bade both the gentlemen good-bye; and in that moment Grete, unnoticed, timidly handed up to Hermann, who was seated beside the driver, another little parcel. There was a slight quivering of the lips as she did so; and then she turned away, and went up to her own room, and threw herself, sobbing, on the bed in quite a passion of grief, not daring to look after the carriage as it rolled away into the forest.

Hermann stealthily opened the packet, and found therein a little gilt *Gebet-buch*, with coloured pictures of the saints throughout it, and a little inscription in front in Grete's handwriting. Franz Gersbach, having been over at Donaueschingen, had secretly bought the tiny prayer-book for her; and he knew all the time for whom it was intended.

"She is a good girl," said Hermann, "and a good girl makes a good wife. I will go once more to England, but never after that—no, not if I had seven hundred Counts for my master."

They stopped a day at Strasbourg, and there they found a lot of English newspapers of recent date.

"Look what the people are saying of Miss Brunel!" said Will, utterly confounded by the tone in which the journals spoke of 'Rosalind.'

The Count took up paper after paper, and eagerly scanned such notices of the pieces as he could find.

"They are not very enthusiastic," said he; "but they are really most complimentary——"

"Complimentary? Yes; but only to Miss Brunel, not to 'Rosalind.' Don't you see in every one of them how the writer, wishing to speak as highly as possible of her, scarcely knows how to throw cold water on the play? And yet cold water is thrown abundantly. The unanimity of these critiques simply says this—that Miss Brunel's 'Rosalind' is a failure."

"How will she bear it?" said the Count.

"She will bear it with the self-possession and sweetness that always cling to her."

For a moment he thought of an old simile of his of her being like an Æolian harp, which struck harshly or softly, by the north wind or the gentle south, could

only breathe harmony in return. Would that fine perfection of composure still remain with her, now that her generous artistic aspirations seemed to have been crushed in some way? He knew himself—for the divine light of her face in certain moments had taught him—that there is no joy upon earth to be compared with the joy of artistic creation. He could imagine, then, that the greatest possible misery is that which results from strong desire and impotent faculty.

"It is 'Rosalind' that is wrong, not she," he said. "Or she may be suffering from some indisposition—at any rate they may spare their half-concealed compassion. Let her get a part to suit her—and then!"

He was not quite satisfied. How was it that none of the critics—and some of them were men of the true critical, sensitive temperament, quick to discern the subtle personal relations existing between an artist and his art—dwelt upon the point that the part was obviously unsuited to her? Indeed, did not every one who had seen her in divers parts know that there were few parts which were so obviously suited to her?

"I know what it is!" said the Count. "There aren't enough people returned to town to fill the theatre, and she has been disheartened." And he already had some recklessly extravagant idea of filling the house with "paper" at his own expense.

"But there you read that the theatre was crammed," said Will.

"True," said the Count, gravely. "I hope there's nobody whom she has refused to see, or something like that, has been bribing all the papers out of spite?"

"They do that only in French plays," said Will. "I should think it more likely that the girl has been put out of sorts by some private affliction. We shall see when we get home."

Then he reflected with a bitter pang that now he was debarred from ever approaching that too dear friend of his and asking about her welfare. Whatever she might be suffering, through private sorrow or public neglect, he could no longer go forward and offer a comforting hand and a comforting word. When he thought that this privilege was now monopolised by the big, well-meaning, blundering Count, he was like to break his own resolve and vow to go straight to her the moment his feet touched English soil.

They crossed the Channel during the day; when they arrived in London, towards the evening, Will drove straight to his chambers, and the Count went home.

"You won't go down to St. Mary-Kirby," the latter had said, "to see that charming little Dove? what a devilish fine woman she'll make!—you ought to consider yourself a happy fellow."

"It is too late," said Will, "to go down to-night. Besides, they don't expect me until to-morrow."

So he went to his lodgings; and there, having changed his dress, he found himself with the evening before him. He walked round to his club, read one or two letters that awaited him, went up to the smoking-room and found not a human being in the place—nothing but empty easy-chairs, chess-board tables, dishevelled magazines, and a prevailing odour of stale cigars—and then he went out and proceeded in the direction of the theatre in which Annie Brunel was at that moment playing. That goal had been uppermost in his thoughts ever since he left Calais pier in the morning.

The tall, pale, muscular man—and people noticed that he had his right arm in a sling—who now paid his four or five shillings, walked upstairs, and slunk into the back seat of the dress-circle, was as nervous and as much afraid of being seen as a schoolboy thieving fruit. Perhaps it was the dread of seeing, as much as the fear of being seen, that made his heart beat; perhaps it was only expectation; but he bethought himself that in the twilight of the back seats of the circle his figure would be too dusky to be recognised, especially by one who had to look—if she looked at all—over the strong glare of the footlights.

The act drop was down when he entered—the orchestra playing the last instalment of Offenbach's confectionery music. The whole house was in the act of regarding two young ladies, dressed as little as possible in white silk, with wonderful complexions, towers of golden hair on their heads, and on their faces an assumed unconsciousness of being stared at, who occupied a box by themselves. The elder of them had really beautiful features of an old French type—the forehead low and narrow, the eyelids heavy, the eyes large, languid, melancholy, the nose thin and a little *retroussée*, the mouth small, the lips thin and rather sad, the cheeks blanched and a trifle sunken, the line of the chin and neck magnificent. The beautiful, sad woman sate and stared wistfully at the glare of the gas; sometimes smiling, in a cold way, to her companion, a plump, commonplace beauty of a coarse English type, who had far too much white on her forehead and neck. Together, however, they seemed to make a sufficiently pretty picture to provoke that stolid British gaze which has something of the idiot but more of the animal in it.

When the curtain rose again the spectators found themselves in Arden forest, with the Duke and his lords before them; and they listened to the talk of these poor actors as though they heard some creatures out of the other world converse. But from Will Anerley all the possibility of this generous delusion had fled. He shrank back, lest some of the men might have recognised him, and might carry the intelligence of his presence to Annie Brunel. Perhaps the Duke had just spoken to her; perhaps she was then looking on the scene from the wings. It was no longer Arden forest to him. The perspective of the stream and of the avenues of the trees vanished, and he saw only a stained breadth of canvas that hid *her* from

his sight. Was she walking behind that screen? Could the actors on the stage see her in one of the entrances? And was it not a monstrous and inconceivable thing that these poor, wretched, unambitious, and not very clean-shaven men were breathing the same atmosphere with her, that they sometimes touched her dress in passing, that her soft dark eyes regarded them?

You know that 'Rosalind' comes into this forest of Arden weary, dispirited, almost broken-hearted, in company with the gentle 'Celia' and the friendly 'Touchstone.' As the moment approached for her entrance, Anerley's breath came and went all the quicker. Was she not now just behind that board or screen? What was the expression of her face; and how had she borne up against the dull welcome that awaited her in England? He thought he should see only 'Rosalind' when she came upon the stage—that Annie Brunel might now be standing in the wings, but that 'Rosalind' only would appear before him.

He never saw 'Rosalind' at all. He suddenly became conscious that Annie Brunel—the intimate companion who had sate beside him in long railway-journeys, who had taken breakfast with him, and played cards with him in the evening—had come out before all these people to amuse or interest them; and that the coarse, and stupid, and vicious, and offensive faces that had been staring a few minutes ago at the two creatures in white silk were now staring in the same manner at her—at her who was his near friend. A wonderful new throb went through his heart at that thought—a throb that reddened his pale cheek. He saw no more of 'Rosalind,' nor of Annie Brunel either. He watched only the people's faces—watched them with eyes that had no pleasant light in them. Who were these people, that they dared to examine her critically, that they presumed to look on her with interest, that they had the unfathomable audacity to look at all? He could not see the costermongers in the gallery; but he saw the dress-coated publicans and grocers around him, and he regarded their stupidly delighted features with a savage scorn. This spasm of ungovernable hatred for the stolid, good-hearted, incomprehensible British tradesman was not the result of intellectual pride; but the consequence of a far more powerful passion. How many years was it since Harry Ormond had sate in his box, and glared with a bitter fury upon the people who dared to admire and applaud Annie Brunel's mother?

In especial there were two men, occupying a box by themselves, against whom he was particularly vengeful. As he afterwards learned from Mr. Melton, they were the promoters of a company which sold the best port, sherry, champagne, hock, burgundy, and claret at a uniform rate of ten shillings a dozen; and, in respect of their long advertisements, occasionally got a box for nothing through this or that newspaper. They were never known to drink their own wines; but they were partial to the gin of the refreshment-room; and, after hav-

ing drunk a sufficient quantity of that delicious and cooling beverage, they grew rather demonstrative. Your honest cad watches a play attentively; the histrionic cad assumes the part of those florid-faced gentlemen—mostly officers—who come down to a theatre after dinner and laugh and joke during the progress of the piece, with their backs turned on the performers. A gentleman who has little brains, much loquacity, and an extra bottle of claret, is bad enough; but the half-tipsy cad who imitates him is immeasurably worse. The two men in question, wishing to be considered "d—d aristocratic," talked so as to be heard across the theatre, ogled the women with their borrowed opera-glasses instead of looking at the play, and burst forth with laughter at the "sentimental" parts. It was altogether an inspiriting exhibition, which one never sees out of England.

And the gentle 'Rosalind,' too, was conscious that these men were looking at her. How could it be Arden forest to her—how could she be 'Rosalind' at all—if she was aware of the presence of such people, if she feared their inattention, and shrank from their laugh?

"What the papers have said about her is right," said Will to himself. "Something must have happened to dispirit her or upset her, and she seems not to care much about the part."

The charm of her acting was there—one could sit and watch with an extreme delight the artistic manipulation of those means which are obviously at the actor's hand—but there was a subtle something wanting in the play. It was pretty and interesting while it lasted; but one could have permitted it to drop at any moment without regret.

There is, as everybody knows, a charming scene in the drama, in which 'Rosalind,' disguised as a youth, coaxes 'Orlando' to reveal all his love for her. There is in it every variety of coy bashfulness, and wayward fun, and half-suggested tenderness which an author could conceive or the most accomplished actress desire to represent. When 'Orlando' wishes he could convince this untoward page of his extreme love for 'Rosalind,' the disguised 'Rosalind' says merrily, "Me believe it? You may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do, than to confess she does: that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth," she adds, suddenly changing her tone into tender, trustful entreaty, "are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein 'Rosalind' is so admired?" And then again she asks, "But *are* you so much in love as your rhymes speak?"

'Rosalind' turned the side of her face to her lover, as if her ear wished to drink in the sweet assurance; and her eyes, which fronted the audience, stared vacantly before her, as if they too were only interested in listening; while a light, happy smile dawned upon her lips. Suddenly the eyes, vacantly gazing into the deep theatre, seemed to start into a faint surprise, and a deadly pallor overspread

her face. She tried to collect herself—'Orlando' had already answered—she stumbled, looked half-wildly at him for a moment, and then burst into tears. The house was astonished, and then struck with a fit of admiration which expressed itself in rounds of applause. To them it was no hysterical climax to a long series of sad and solitary reveries, but a transcendant piece of stage effect. It was the over-excited 'Rosalind' who had just then burst into tears of joy on learning how much her lover loved her.

'Orlando' was for the moment taken aback; but the applause of the people gave him time to recover himself, and he took her hand, and went on with the part as if nothing had happened. He and the people in the stage-boxes saw that her tears were real, and that she could scarcely continue the part for a sort of half-hysterical sobbing; but the majority of those in the theatre were convinced that Annie Brunel was the greatest actress they had ever seen, and wondered why the newspapers had spoken so coldly of her performance.

Will knew that she had seen him; he had caught that swift, electric glance. But, not knowing any reason why the seeing him should produce such profound emotion, he, too, fancied that her bursting into tears was a novel and pretty piece of acting. However, for his own sake, he did not wish to sit longer there; and so he rose and left.

But the streets outside were so cold and dark compared with Arden! The chill night air, the gloomy shadows of the broad thoroughfare, the glare of gas-lamps on the pavement, and the chatter of cabmen, were altogether too great a change from 'Rosalind' and the poetry-haunted forest. Nor could he bear the thought of leaving her there among those happy faces, in the warm and joyous atmosphere of romance, while he walked solitarily home to his solitary chambers. He craved for her society, and was content to share it with hundreds of strangers. Merely to look upon her face was such a delight to him that he yielded himself to it irrespective of consequences. So he walked round to another entrance, and stole into a corner of the pit.

Was the delight or the torture the greater? He was now within view of the rows of well-dressed men and women in the stalls, who seemed so pleased with 'Rosalind.' It is one of the profound paradoxes of lore, that while making selfish men unselfish and generous to a degree, it begets in the most unselfish of men an unreasoning and brutal self-regard. He hated them for their admiration. He hated them the more especially that their admiration was worth having. He hated them because their admiration was likely to please Annie Brunel.

It might have been imagined that his anger would have been directed chiefly against those idiotic drapers' assistants and clerks who sate and burlesqued the piece, and sneered at the actress. But no; it was the admiration of the intelligent and accomplished part of the audience he feared; was it not suffi-

cient to interpose between him and her a subtle barrier? He could have wished that the whole theatre was hissing her, that so his homage and tenderness and respect might be accounted as of some worth. He fancied she was in love with the theatre, and he hated all those attractions of the theatre which caused her love with a profound and jealous hatred.

At length the play came to an end, and there was no longer an excuse for his remaining, as Annie Brunel, of course, did not play in the short piece which followed. So he went outside, and in getting into the street he found himself behind the two wine-merchants who had been in the box.

"Why not?" said the one to the other, gaily.

"If she gets into a rage, so much the better fun. 'Rosalind' must be d—d pretty in a fury."

"All right," said the other, with a hiccup.

Will had heard the words distinctly; and the mere suspicion they suggested caused his blood to boil. When the two men turned into the narrow lane leading round to the stage-door of the theatre, he followed them with his mouth hard and firm, and his eyes not looking particularly amiable.

At the entrance to the lane stood Miss Brunel's cab. He recognised the face of the venerable jarvie who was accustomed to wait for her every evening.

He passed up the lane; the two men had paused in front of the small wooden door, and were trying to decipher, by the aid of the lamp overhead, the features of whomsoever passed in or out.

"She won't be here for an hour," said one of them.

"Shouldn't wonder if she went home in Rosalind's dress," said the other, with another hiccup.

"She'll 'it you, 'Arry, if you speak to her."

"Let her. I'd rather like it, 'pon my soul."

The stage-door was continually being swung to and fro by some one passing in or out, but as yet there was no sign of Annie Brunel. At length, however, some of the people who had been engaged in the play came out, and Will knew that she would soon follow.

"Was she likely to be alone? Would they dare to speak to her?" He glanced down at the sling which supported his right arm. Deprive an Englishman of the use of his right arm, and he feels himself utterly helpless. There was one happy thought, however: even if she were alone she would be closely veiled; and how were these half-tipsy cads to recognise her?

She came out; she was alone, and veiled, but Will knew the graceful figure, and the carriage of the queenly head.

By some demoniac inspiration the two men seemed also to take it for granted that the veiled face was that of Annie Brunel. The less tipsy of the two

went forward, overtook her as she was going down the lane, and said to her—

"I beg your pardon, Miss—Miss Brunel——"

She turned her head, and in the gaslight Anerley saw that there was a quick, frightened look of interrogation in her eyes. She turned away again, and had hurried on almost to the open street, when the man caught her arm with his hand.

"Not so fast, my dear. Won't you look at my card——"

"Out of the way, idiot!" was the next thing she heard, in a voice that made her heart beat; and in a moment the man had been sent reeling against the opposite wall.

That was the work of an instant. Inflamed with rage and fury, he recovered himself, and was about to aim a blow at his assailant's face, when Anerley's left arm so successfully did duty without the aid of the wounded right one, that the man went down like a log, and lay there. His companion, stupefied, neither stirred nor spoke.

"Get into the cab, Miss Brunel," said Will, abruptly.

He accompanied her across the pavement: an utter stranger could not have been more calm and cold. For a second she looked into his face, with pain, and wonder, and entreaty in her eyes; and then she took his hand, which had been outstretched to bid her good-bye, and said—

"Won't you come with me? I—I am afraid——"

He got into the cab; the driver mounted his box and drove off; and so it was that Will, scarcely knowing how it had come about, found himself sitting once more beside Annie Brunel, with her hand still closed upon his.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LAST WORD.

Every one knows Noel Paton's 'Dante and Beatrice'—the picture of the two lovers caught together in a supreme moment of passion—their faces irradiated with the magical halo of a glowing twilight. His, tender, entreating, wistful, worshipful; hers, full of the unconscious sweetness and superb repose of a rare and exalted beauty. His eyes are upturned to hers; but hers dwell vaguely on the western glow of colour. And there is in the picture more than one thing which suggests the strange dissociation and the sadness, as well as the intercommunion and fel-

lowship, of the closest love.

Why, asks the impatient reader, should not a romance be always full of this glow, and colour, and passion? The warm light that touches the oval outline of a tender woman's face is a beautiful thing, and even the sadness of love is beautiful: why should not a romance be full of these supreme elements? Why should not the romancist cut out the long prose passages of a man's life, and give us only those wonderful moments in which being glows with a sort of transformation?

The obvious reason is, that a romance written in such an exalted key would be insufferably unreal and monotonous: even in the 'Venetianisches Grondellied,' full of pure melody as it is, one finds jarring chords, which are only introduced to heighten the keen delight of the harmony which is to follow. Add to this the difficulty of setting down in words any tolerable representation of one of those passionate joyous moments of love-delight which are the familiar theme of the musician and the painter.

That moment, however, in which Will Anerley met Annie Brunel's eyes, and took her hand, and sat down beside her, was one of these. For many past days and weeks his life had been so unbearably dull, stagnant, prosaic, that the mere glad fact of this meeting drove from his mind all consideration of consequences. He looked in her eyes—the beautiful eyes that could not conceal their pleasure—and forgot everything else. For a time, neither of them spoke—the delight of being near to each other was enough; and when they began to recall themselves to the necessity of making some excuse to each other for having broken a solemn promise, they were driving along Piccadilly; and, away down in the darkness, they could see the luminous string of orange points that encircle the Green Park.

"I only returned to London to-day," he said, and there was a smile on his face, for he half-pitied his own weakness; "and I could not help going to see you. That was how I kept my promise. But you are not very angry?"

"No," she said, looking down.

There was no smile upon her face. The events of the last few weeks had been for her too tragic to admit of humorous lights.

"You ought not to have come," she said the next minute, hurriedly. "You ought to have stayed away. You yourself spoke of what might happen; and the surprise and the pain of seeing you—I had no thought of your being there—and I was sufficiently miserable at the time not to need any other thing to disturb me—and now—and now you are here, and you and I are the friends we have been——"

The passionate earnestness of this speech, to say nothing of its words, surprised and astounded him: why should she have reason to be disturbed?

"Why should we not be friends?" he said.

She looked at him, with her big, tender, frank eyes, with a strange expression.

"You force me to speak. Because we cannot continue friends," she said, in a voice which was almost harsh in its distinctness. "After what you said to me, you have no right to see me. I cannot forget your warning; and I know where you ought to be this evening—not here, but down in St. Mary-Kirby."

"That is true enough," said Will, gloomily. "I couldn't have gone down to St. Mary-Kirby to-night: but, as you say, I have no business to be near you—none whatever. I should not have gone to the theatre; I ought to have stayed at home, and spent the time in thinking of you—why shouldn't I say it, now that you have been so frank with me? You and I know each other pretty well, do we not? There is no reason, surely, why we may not regard each other as friends, whatever may happen. And why should I not tell you that I fear to go down to St. Mary-Kirby, and meet that poor Dove who has given me her heart?"

She said nothing: what could she say? It was not for her to blame him.

"And when I went to the theatre, I said, 'It is the last time!' I could not help going. I did not intend to meet you when you came out."

"You did not?" she said.

There was, despite herself, a touch of disappointment in her tone. The strange joyous light that had passed over her face on seeing him was the result of a sudden thought that he loved her so well that he was forced to come to her.

"No," he answered, "I did not intend to meet you; but the sudden pleasure of seeing you was so great that I had not the heart to refuse to come into the cab. And, now you know my secret, you may blame me as you please. I suppose I am weaker than other men; but I did not err wilfully. And now the thing is done, it is Dove whom I most consider. How can I go to her with a lie in every word, and look, and action? Or how could I tell her the truth? Whichever way one turns, there is nothing but sadness and misery."

And still there was no word from the young girl opposite.

"I have not even the resource of blaming destiny," he continued. "I must blame my own blindness. Only you, looking at these things in your friendly and kindly way, will not blame me further for having indulged myself a last time in going to see you to-night. You will never have to complain again—never; and, indeed, I went to-night in a manner to bid you good-bye—so you won't be hard on me——"

He was surprised to see, by the gleam of the lamp they passed, that the girl was covertly sobbing, and that the large soft eyes were full of tears. At the same moment, however, the cabman pulled up at the corner of the little square in which Annie Brunel lived; and so they both got out. When Will turned from paying the cabman, she had walked on a bit in advance, and had not entered the square. He overtook her, and offered her his arm. The night was fine and still; a large lambent planet lay like a golden bell-flower in the soft purple before them,

and a large harvest-moon, bronzed and discoloured, glimmered through the tall elms on the other side of the way, as it slowly rose up from the horizon.

"I have something to say to you," he heard the soft low voice say, "which I had hoped never to have said. It is better it should be said."

"If you have cause to blame me, or if you wish to prevent my seeing you again, by upbraiding me for having spoken honestly to you, I beg of you to say nothing that way. It is not needed. You will run no danger whatever of being annoyed again. I blame myself more than you can; and since we must part, let us part friends, with a kindly recollection of each other——"

"Don't speak like that!" she said, imploringly, with another convulsive sob, "or you will break my heart. Is it not enough that—that—oh! I cannot, cannot tell you, and yet I must tell you!"

"What have you to tell me?" he said, with a cold feeling creeping over him. He began to suspect what her emotion meant; and he shrank from the suggestion, as from some great evil he had himself committed.

"You will think me shameless; I cannot help it. You say this is our last meeting; and I cannot bear to have you go away from me with the thought that you have to suffer alone. You think I ought to give you my sympathy, because I am your friend, and you will not be happy. But—but I will suffer too; and I am a woman—and alone—and whom have I to look to——?"

He stopped her, and looked down into her face.

"Annie, is this true?" he said, sadly and gravely.

He got no answer beyond the sight of her streaming eyes and quivering lips.

"Then are we the two wretchedest of God's creatures," he said.

"Ah, don't say that," she murmured, venturing to look up at him through her tears. "Should we not be glad to know that we can think kindly of each other, without shame? Unhappy, yes!—but surely not the very wretchedest of all. And you won't misunderstand me? You won't think, afterwards, that it was because I was an actress that I confessed this to you——?"

Even in such a moment a touch of Bohemianism!—a fear that her mother's profession should suffer by her weakness.

"Dearest!" he said, tenderly—"for you are, God help me! my very, very dearest—we now know each other too well to have to make excuses for our confidence in each other."

They walked on now quite silently; there was too much for both of them to think about to admit of speech. As they walked southward, down the long and sombre thoroughfares, the large moon on their left slowly rose, and still rose, at every minute losing its ruddy hues, and gaining in clear, full light. They knew not whither they were going. There was no passer-by to stare at them; they were

alone in the world, with the solitary houses, and the great moon.

"You have not told me a minute too soon," he said, suddenly, with a strange exultation in his tone.

"What do you mean?"

"You and I, Annie, love each other. If the future is to be taken from us, let us recompense ourselves *now*. When you walk back to your house to-night and the door closes, you and I see each other no more. To-morrow, and all the to-morrows after that, we are only strangers. But for the next half-hour—my dearest, my dearest! show me your face, and let me see what your eyes say!—why should we not forget all these coming days, and live that half-hour for ourselves? It is but a little time; the sweetness of it will be a memory to us. Let us be lovers, Annie!—only for this little time we shall be together, my dearest! Let us try to imagine that you and I are to be married to-morrow—that all the coming years we are to be together—that now we have nothing to do but to yield ourselves up to our love——"

"I am afraid," she said, in a low voice, trembling.

"Why afraid, then?"

"That afterwards the recollection will be too bitter."

"Darling, nothing that you can imagine is likely to be more bitter than what you and I must bear. Just now, we have a little time our own; let us forget what is to come, and——"

"Whisper, then," she said.

He bent down his head to her, and she came close to his ear:

"*Will, I love you, and if I could I would be your wife to-morrow.*"

"And you will kiss me, too," he said.

He felt a slight, warm touch on his lips; and when he raised his head his face was quite white, and his eyes were wild.

"Why, we *are* to be married to-morrow!" he said. "It will be about eleven when I reach the church, and I shall walk up and down between the empty pews until you come. I see the whole thing now—you walking in at the door with your friends, your dear eyes a little frightened, looking at me as if you wanted me to take you away at once from among the people. Then we shall be off, dearest, sharp and fast, up to your house; you will hurry to change your things, and then, with a good-bye to everybody, we are off—we two, you and I, Annie, away anywhere, so that we may be alone together. And I wish to God, Annie, that you and I were lying down there beneath that water, dead and drowned!"

They had come to the river—the broad smooth river, with the wonderful breadths of soft light upon it, and the dark olive-green shadows of the sombre wharves and buildings on the other side.

"Will, Will, you frighten me so!" she said, clinging to his arm.

"You needn't be frightened," he said, sadly. "I am only telling you what might happen. Can't you see all these things when you try to see them? For many a night past—ever since the evening we spent overlooking the Rhine—I have seen that marriage-scene before my eyes, and it is always you who are there. You remember that evening when you sate up in the balcony, among the vine-leaves, with the moon hanging up over the river? There's a German song I once heard that warns you never to go near the Rhine, because life is too sweet there; and we have been there, and have received the curse of this discontent and undying regret."

Then he broke out into a bitter laugh.

"We were to be lovers; and this is pretty lovers' talk."

"You really do frighten me, Will," she said. "I never saw you look so before. Oh, my dear, don't be so very, very sad and despairing, for I have nothing to comfort you with—not even one poor word; and it seems so wretched that we two should not be able to comfort each other."

He was fighting with the bonds of circumstance; and his impotence embittered him. The spectacle of these two wretched creatures—despairing, rebellious, and driven almost beyond the bounds of reason by their perplexity—walking along the side of the still and peaceful stream, was one to have awakened the compassion, or at least the sympathetic merriment, of the most careless of the gods. What a beautiful night it was! The deep olive shadows of the moonlight hid away the ragged and tawdry buildings that overhung the river; and the flood of yellow-tinged light touched only here and there on the edge of a bank or the stem of a tree, and then fell gently on the broad bosom of the stream. The gas-lamps of the nearest bridge glimmered palely in that white light; but deep in the shadows along the river, the lamps burned strong and red, and sent long quivering lines of fire down into the dark water beneath. Farther up the stream lay broad swathes of moonlight, vague and indeterminate as the grey continents visible in the world of silver overhead. In all this universe of peace, and quiet, and harmony, there seemed to be only these two beings restless—embittered, and hopeless.

"Let us go home," he said, with an effort. "I can do nothing but frighten you, and myself too. I tell you there are other things pass before my eyes as well as the marriage-scene, and I don't want to see any more of them. It will be time enough to think of what may happen when it does happen."

"And whatever happens, Will, shall we not at least know that we sometimes—occasionally—think tenderly of each other?"

"So you wish us to be lovers still!" he said. "The delusion is too difficult to keep up. Have you reflected that when once I am married, neither of us may think of each other at all?"

"Will! Will! don't talk like that! You speak as if somebody had cruelly injured you, and you were angry and revengeful. Nobody has done it. It is only our misfortune. It cannot be helped. If I am not to think of you—and I shall pray God to help me to forget you—so much the better."

"My poor darling!" he said, "I am so selfish that I think less of what your future may be than of my own. You dare not confide your secret to any one; and I, who know it, must not see you nor try to comfort you. Is not the very confidence that prompted you to tell me, a proof that we are—that we might have been happy as husband and wife?"

"Husband and wife," she repeated, musingly, as they once more drew near home. "You will be a husband, but I shall never be a wife."

"And yet, so long as you and I live," he said, quite calmly, "you will have my whole love. It cannot be otherwise: we need not seek to conceal it. Whatever happens, and wherever we may be, my love goes with you."

"And if mine," she whispered, "could go with you, and watch over you, and teach your heart to do right, it would lead your love back to the poor girl whom you are going to marry, and make her happy."

At parting he kissed her tenderly, almost solemnly. Then she quickly undid from her neck a little brooch, and put it in his hand with these words:

"Give that to her, with my love, *and with yours*."

CHAPTER XXV.

EVIL TIDINGS.

Very early did Dove get up that cool September morning. Away down the valley there lay a faintly yellow haze, which made one feel that the sun was behind it, and would soon drink it up. In the meantime the grass was wet. A birch-tree that almost touched her bedroom window had its drooping branches of shivering leaves glistening with moisture. The willows along the riverside were almost hid. The withered and red chestnut-leaves which floated on the pond had a cold autumn look about them. Then old Thwaites, the keeper, appeared, with a pointer and a curly black retriever; and when the old man went into the meadow, to knock down some walnuts from the trees, his breath was visible in the damp thick atmosphere. She saw these things vaguely; she only knew with certainty that the sunlight and Will were coming.

A hundred times she made up her mind as to the mood in which she ought to receive him. Indeed, for weeks back she had done nothing but mentally rehearse that meeting; and every scene that she described to herself was immediately afterwards abandoned.

She was hurt, she knew; and in her secret heart she longed to—— No! he had been very neglectful about letters, and she would—— But in the meantime it was important, whatever *rôle* she might assume, that she should look as pretty as possible.

This was all her immediate care—a care that had awoke her an hour too soon. But if she had changed her mind about the manner in which she should receive him, how much more about the costume which was to add effect to the scene? Every detail—every little ornament, and bit of ribbon, and dexterous fold—she studied, and altered, and studied and altered again, until she was very nearly losing temper, and wishing that people had been born to look their best without the necessity of clothing themselves.

Perhaps one might be allowed to make a remark about those ladies who, dressing for a ball or the theatre, imagine that the less they clothe themselves the better they look. It is merely a question of the relative artistic value of certain surfaces. And, as a general rule, it may be accepted that the natural complexion of women's shoulders is inferior in fineness of hue and texture to the same extent of white satin or dove-coloured silk.

Downstairs she went. Mr. Anerley was engaged in turning in the edge of his cartridges, and had succeeded in vigorously scratching the marble mantelpiece with the machine he was using.

"Good morning, papa."

She was very much embarrassed, she did not know why. She hoped he would not look at her; but he did, and kissed her, and returned to his work.

"Dear me!" he said, "that I, an old man, should have received such a compliment! A young lady getting up at a prodigiously early hour, and dressing herself in her very smartest way, in order to come down and make my breakfast!"

"Shall I pour out your coffee now, papa?" she said, with a great blush.

"Yes, you may, my dear. But don't put anchovy into it instead of cream. I make the suggestion because I see you are a little disturbed. It is the early rising; or the chill of the autumn; or the remembrance of last Sunday's sermon, I daresay."

She did not speak a word, but placed the coffee at his end of the table, and returned to her seat. When he had finished his cartridge-making, he sate down, and, as a preliminary to breakfast, swallowed a mouthful of the coffee. The next moment there was an exclamation of horror—he ran to the sideboard, seized a bottle of hock that had been left from yesterday's dinner, hurriedly filled

a coffee-cup with the wine, and drank off the contents—his face all the while in contortions. Dove sat silent and wilful, with a smile on her lips, and a hot flush on her cheeks. She would neither look at him nor speak to him.

"Cayenne pepper!" he gasped, taking another gulp of the cold Rhine wine.

She only played with her teaspoon.

"You might have killed me, you malicious creature!" he cried, amid intervals of coughing. "Cayenne! Well, don't suppose that *you* would have got much out of my life-insurance!"

At this she rose and walked to the door—proud, spiteful, half laughing, and half crying.

"You had no business to tease me," she said.

"Come here, Dove," he said, taking her by the arm and leading her back; "do you know what the effect of cayenne is on the human throat?"

"I don't care."

"I say you might have killed me."

"I don't care."

"Now, if I were a young man, I should probably be proud of such a mark of your favour, but——"

"It served you right. I can't bear people to talk to me like that, and you always do it, papa—you know you do."

"But, as I am an old man, I mean to have my revenge. Firstly, there shall be no dogcart or other vehicle leave this house this day for Horton Station. Secondly, should any guest arrive, he will be asked to follow me over to the East Meadows, where I shall be shooting. Thirdly, should that guest dine with us, he will be confined to the dining-room during the entire evening, and any persons waiting in the drawing-room may play 'The Coulin,' or such music as they prefer, for their own benefit. Fourthly——"

"Fourthly, none of these things will happen," said Dove, with a touch of contempt in her tone.

And Dove was right. For she herself was driven in the dogcart over to Horton Station, and she took care to make the man start half an hour before the proper time. The station-master, then and now one of the civillest of men, endeavoured to relieve the tedium of waiting by chatting to her; but she only half listened to him, and talked nonsense in reply.

She walked about the station, stared up the long perspective of narrowing lines, then walked in again to the small waiting-room, and wondered why the people about did not bestir themselves to receive the coming train. Then, with a flutter of the heart, she saw the signals changed, and presently there was a far-off noise which told of Will's approach: for he had written from Paris to say, that unless they got other notice from him, he would be down by this particular train.

A railway-station is not the proper place for a piece of acting. Scenes of the most tender and tragic kind—never to be forgotten—have been witnessed there; but the gentle drawing-room comedies with which lovers amuse themselves do not harmonize with the rough-and-ready accessories of a railway line. Dove resolved to leave her proper reception of Will until they should be in the house together; at present it was to be nothing but a hurried delicious kissing, scrambling after luggage, and swift getting home.

There was no head thrust out from one of the approaching carriages—no handkerchief waved. She did not know which of the dull, dark, and heavy carriages might not have him inside; but she was sure he could not escape her at the station.

The train stopped, the guard bustled about, the people descended from the carriages, the porters looked out for luggage and sixpences. With a half-realised fear—a dread of some vague evil—Dove glanced quickly along the people, then more narrowly; finally she turned to the carriages. The doors were again shut; the guard blew his whistle, and leisurely stepped into his box; and the train moved slowly out of the station. There was no Will Anerley there.

Sick at heart she turned away, it was a cruel disappointment. For weeks she had been planning the whole scene; she had dreamt of the meeting, had thought of it during the drowsy hush of the Sunday-morning sermon, had looked forward to it as the crowning compensation for the microscopic troubles of her daily life. There was not even a letter to say that he was in England; perhaps he was still in France.

So she went home, vexed, and disappointed, and sad. Mr. Anerley was out shooting; Mrs. Anerley soothingly said that doubtless Will would be down by a later train; and then Dove went away into a corner of the drawing-room, and plunged herself into a volume of old music, turning over the leaves and supping a surfeit of sad memories.

Before going to the train that morning, Will had found it necessary to call upon a doctor. From him he learned, firstly, that the original dressing of the wounds in his arm had been far from satisfactory; and secondly, that owing to some disturbant cause renewed inflammation had set in. Indeed, the doctor gave him to understand that only prompt attention and great care could prevent the wounds assuming a very serious aspect.

"Your arm must have suffered some violence quite recently," said the doctor.

"Well, last night," said Will, "I knocked a man down with my left arm, and very likely I instinctively twitched up the right to guard myself."

"These are little amusements which a man in your condition had better forego," said the other, quietly. "The best thing you can do is go home and get to bed, give your arm perfect rest, and I will call in the afternoon and see what is to

be done."

"I can't do that," said Will, "I'm going down to the country."

"You will do so at your peril."

"All the same, I must go. Nothing is likely to happen between to-day and Monday. If you had seen the leg I had in Turkey!—without any doctor but a servant who could not even infuse our tea—constant rain—walking every day—our tent letting in water at night——"

"I don't know about your leg in Turkey," said the doctor, tartly; "but I see the condition in which your arm is now. If you think it will get well by exposing it to rain, well and good——"

"Can you do anything to it *now*?"

"No, unless you give the limb perfect rest."

"Very well. If it gets very bad, I shall come up to town to-morrow. If not, I shall visit you on Monday, and do everything you tell me then."

He got into a cab and drove back to his chambers. The man had already taken his portmanteau downstairs, when Count Schönstein's brougham drove up, and the Count jumped out.

"Where are you going?"

"To St. Mary-Kirby."

"Not now. Come inside; I have something to tell you."

They stepped inside: never before had Will observed the Count to be so disturbed.

"Miall & Welling," he said, hurriedly, "I have just heard—not ten minutes ago—have collapsed—the announcement will be made to-day—the directors were in the place till twelve last night. It will be the most fearful crash, they say; for the bank has lately been making the wildest efforts to save itself——"

"I thought Miall & Welling's was as safe as the Bank of England," said Will—just a trifle pale.

Every farthing of his father's money was in this bank, which had never even been suspected in the most general crises.

"It may be only a rumour," continued the Count. "But you may as well wait, to see if the evening papers have anything about it."

"It will be a pretty story to carry down with me to Kent," said Will.

"That's what I was thinking of," said the Count, kindly—indeed he was not wholly a selfish man; "and I thought I might go down with you, if you liked, and try to help your father over the first shock. It will be a terrible blow to him—a man who has lived a quiet and easy life, with a little hunting, and shooting, and so on. I shouldn't wonder if it entirely upset him and did some harm——"

"You don't know my father," said Will.

They had not to wait for the evening papers. By twelve o'clock the news

was current in the city. Miall & Welling had sent out their circular: the bank had suspended payment.

This was the cause of Will's missing the train. When he took his seat in the next train going down, it was with a feeling that now ill-fortune had done its worst, and there was nothing more to encounter. He thought of that wild scene of last night by the banks of the river,—of the strange, sad, unfathomable look of the young actress's eyes,—of their bitter parting, and the tender words she spoke as he left. Then he looked forward to meeting Dove with a cold fear at his heart: and he was almost glad that the more immediate and terrible business he had on hand would distract his attention.

He left his portmanteau at the station, and walked round to the brow of the hill. Before him lay the well-known valley, still and silent under the yellow autumn sunlight; and down there by the river he saw a tall spare man—accompanied by another man and a couple of dogs—whose figure he easily recognised. He walked in that direction, crossing the low-lying meadows and the river, and rounding a bit of coppice which skirted a turnip-field.

As he turned the corner, a covey of birds rose just in front of him, with a prodigious whirr of wings.

"Mark!" he called, instinctively, though he was quite unaware of the proximity of anybody with a gun.

The next second there was a double report; two of the birds came tumbling down, scattering their feathers in the air, and there was a muttered admonition to the pointer. A few steps further brought him into view of Mr. Anerley and old Thwaites, both of whom were marking down the remaining birds of the covey, as the low, swift, sailing flight seemed to near the ground.

"Why did you come round that way?" said Mr. Anerley when he saw his son. "I might have shot you."

"I shouldn't have minded, sir," said Will. "I'm getting used to it."

"You have your arm in a sling yet? I thought it was all right."

"The doctor pulls long faces over it. I fancy the man in the Black Forest bungled it."

"If the Black Foresters don't know how to cure men shot by mistake, they ought to," said Mr. Anerley, with a thoroughly English contempt for any kind of shooting but his own. "Such a set of sparrow-shooting shoemakers I never saw. I suppose I needn't offer you my gun?"

"No, thank you. I'll walk down the turnips with you, on my way to the house."

There was little left in the turnips, however. A solitary bird got up, almost out of shot, and Mr. Anerley knocked him over very cleverly. There was no smile of triumph, however, on the firm-set lips of the tall, keen-faced, grey-

haired sportsman. He quietly put another cartridge into the barrel and walked on, occasionally growling at the dog, which was continually making false points. Almost at the end of the turnips the dog made a very decided point.

"Ware lark! gr-r-r-r!" cried old Thwaites; and at the same instant a fine covey of birds, startled by the cry, got up out of shot. The dog had really been on the scent of the partridges.

Mr. Anerley said nothing, but he did not look particularly pleased.

"If that had not been old Thwaites," muttered Will, "I should have said it was an old fool."

So Will walked on to Chesnut Bank. He had not the heart to tear the old man away from his favourite sport in order to give him this bad news. After dinner, he now thought, would be time enough; and he himself seemed to have gained a respite until then.

But if he was in the meanwhile relieved from the necessity of bearing the evil tidings to his father, there remained his meeting with Dove, which he had for long looked forward to with a half-conscious fear. As he drew near the house, he began to think this the greater trial of the two.

Dove, still sitting in the drawing-room, heard footsteps on the gravelled pathway leading down through the garden. The music almost dropped from her hands as she listened intently for a moment—then a flush of joyous colour stole over her face. But, all the same, she opened the book again, and sate obstinately looking at pages which she did not see.

"Dove," said Will, tapping at the French window, "open and let me in."

No answer—Dove still intently regarding the music.

So he had to go on to the hall-door, ring the bell, and enter the drawing-room from the passage.

"Oh, you are come back again!" said Dove, with mimic surprise, and with admirably simulated carelessness.

She held out her hand to him. She fancied he would be dreadfully astonished and perturbed by this cold reception—that they would have a nice little quarrel, and an explanation, and all the divine joys of making-up, before Mrs. Anerley could come down from the apple-closet, in which she had been engaged since breakfast-time. But, on the contrary, Will was neither surprised nor disturbed. He looked quite grave, perhaps a little sad, and took her hand, saying kindly—

"Yes, back again. I hope you have been well while I was away, Dove; and that you amused yourself."

Dove was alarmed; he had not even offered to kiss her.

"What is the matter with you, Will?" she said, with a vague fear in her pretty violet eyes.

"Why, nothing much."

"Is it I, then? Are you vexed with me, that you should be so cold with me after being away so long a time?"

There she stood, with her eyes downcast, a troubled look on her face, and both her hands pulling to pieces a little engraving she held.

"Why should I be vexed with you, Dove?" he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. He dared not kiss her: there dwelt on his lips yet the memory of that sad leave-taking of the night before.

"Then why are you and I standing here like strangers?" she said, stamping her little foot.

She could not tell how things had all gone wrong; but they had gone wrong; and the meeting she had looked forward to with such pleasurable anticipation was an embarrassing failure.

At this moment Mrs. Anerley entered, and the girl saw her receive the kiss which had been denied to herself.

"You are not looking well, Will," said the observant mother. "Is your arm healing rightly?"

"Oh, yes, well enough."

"You are fatigued, then? Let me bring you some sherry."

She left the room, and then Dove—looking hesitatingly for a moment—ran forward to him, and buried her face in his bosom, and burst into tears.

"It was all my fault, dear," she sobbed. "I wanted to be angry with you, for not coming down by the first train—and—and I thought you would pet me, and make it up, you know—and I even forgot to ask about your arm; but it wasn't, dear, because I didn't think of it——"

"There, it's all right," he said. "I didn't notice you were vexed with me, or I should have made friends with you at once. There, now, you're only ruffling all your pretty hair, and such a delicate little collar you've got!"

"Oh!" she said, with smiles breaking through her tears, "you don't know what I have been making for you."

"Tell me."

"Twenty times I was near telling you in my letters; but I stopped. I tried to get it done, to give it you to-day, but I couldn't; and—and perhaps it was that made me vexed with you."

"Very likely," said Will, who thoroughly understood the charming byways of Dove's logic.

"It is a worsted waistcoat," she said, in a solemn whisper, "all knitted by myself. And I've put in some of my hair, so that you never could see it unless I showed it to you. They say that to give any one some of your hair is so unlucky—that it always means parting; but I couldn't help putting in just a little."

"To represent a little parting—from Saturday to Monday, for example."

"Are you going up to town again to-morrow?" she said, with fresh alarm.

"The doctor says I ought; but we shall see when to-morrow comes."

So peace was established between them. It was only as an afterthought she remembered that he had never once kissed her.

During dinner, Will was almost silent. They supposed he was tired with the journey home. When Mrs. Anerley and Dove had left the room, he knew the time was come.

"I have bad news for you, father," he said.

"Out with it, then," said Mr. Anerley. "Everybody in the house is well in health; anything else does not much matter."

"Miall & Welling are down."

The old man put back his wineglass on the table.

"Miall & Welling's bank is down?" he said, slowly.

"Yes."

"Are you sure of it?"

"There is their circular."

He read the paper carefully, and laid it down.

"They say," said Will, "that their affairs are in a terrible plight—quite hopeless."

"That means that I have not a farthing of money beyond what is in the house."

He remained silent for several minutes, his eyes fixed on the table before him. Then he said—

"Very well. There are four of us. If we two men cannot support ourselves and these two women, should not every one have a right to laugh at us?"

"But that you, at your age——"

"My age? I am in the prime of life. Indeed, it is time I did something to show that I could have earned my own bread all along."

"I'm glad you look at it in that way," said Will, rather sadly. "Here am I, unable to earn a penny until my arm gets better. You know nothing specially of any business——"

"It is not too late to learn, my lad. There are plenty of things to which I could turn my hand. Imagine what a capital keeper I should be; and how I should overawe the trembling Cockneys invited down to a grand battue into giving me monstrous tips! Now let us look at the thing in another light."

He straightened himself up, as if throwing some weight off his shoulders. Then he relapsed into his old manner, and there was a sort of sad smile on his face.

"Edmond About," he said, "declares that all men are producers, and have

therefore a right to the property they possess, except robbers, beggars, and gamblers. Doubtless the money I possessed was very valuable to the people to whom I lent it, and they paid me for putting its working powers at their disposal. You understand?"

"Yes."

"I was, in that sense, a producer, and had a right to the money on which I lived. M. About tells me that I had. But, in spite of that, I was always bothered by an uneasy conviction that the ancestor of mine who brought the money into the family could not have made it by his own hands. Indeed, I am convinced that my rich progenitor—who, let us say, came over with William—was nothing else than a prodigious thief, who either stole money in the shape of taxes, or the means of making money in the shape of land, from the people who then owned it. I therefore, you see, have no right to the possession of money acquired by robbery."

"You only discover that when the money is gone," said Will, accustomed to his father's philosophic and easy way of taking things.

"Not at all. I have for some time back been proud to class myself amongst the richest and oldest families of England, in regard to the moral shadiness of our right to live on the produce of gigantic thievery. You see——"

"I see, sir, that the moment you lose your money, you become a philosophic Radical."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Anerley, sending a sigh after his vanished riches, "I don't think the misfortune has touched us much, when we can transfer it into the region of first principles. Perhaps I had better go up to town with you to-morrow, and see what practical issues it must lead to."

"And in the meantime," said Will, "don't tell either of the women."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COUNT'S CHANCE.

"Where is Mr. Melton?" asked the Count.

"Up in the 'flies,' sir, I believe," said the prompter. "Shall I send for him?"

"No, I shall go up to him," said the Count.

It was on the evening of the day on which he had told Will of Miall & Welling's downfall. After having ascertained the truth of the report, he had gone

to spend the remainder of the day at his club, in talking, reading, and dining; and when he did think of going round to the theatre, he found that the piece in which Annie Brunel played would be over, and she gone home. This was as he wished.

So he made his way up the well-worn wooden steps until he reached the "flies," where he found Mr. Melton, seated on the drum which rolled up the drop-scene, in earnest talk with a carpenter. On seeing the Count, the man walked away, and Mr. Melton rose.

"Welcome back to England!" said the manager, rather nervously. "I have been most anxious to see you."

"Ah," said the Count.

"Indeed, the strangest thing has happened—completely floored me—never heard the like," continued Mr. Melton, hurriedly. "Have you seen Miss Brunel?"

"No," said the Count.

"Not since you returned?"

"No."

"You are not acquainted with her resolution?"

"No."

"Then let me tell you what happened not half an hour ago in this very theatre. You see that scenery? It's all new. The dresses are new—new music, new decorations, a new theatre, and—d——n it all!—it's enough to make a man mad!"

"But what is it?" asked the Count of the abnormally excited manager.

"A few minutes ago Miss Brunel comes to me and says, 'Mr. Melton, a word with you.'

"'Certainly,' said I.

"Then she turned a little pale; and had that curious look in her eyes that she used to wear on the stage, you know; and said, clearly, 'I am not going to act any more.'

"When I had recovered breath, I said:

"'Pardon me, Miss Brunel; you must. Look at the expense I have been put to in getting up this revival——'

"And then she grew excited, as if she were half-mad, and implored me not to compel her to fulfil her engagement. She said her acting was a failure; that everybody knew it was a failure; that she had an invincible repugnance to going on the stage again; and that nothing would tempt her to begin a new piece, either with me or with anybody else. I can assure you, Count Schönstein, now that I think over it, there never was a finer scene in any play than she acted then—with her despair, and her appeals, and her determination. I thought at first she was bewitched; and then I declare she was so nearly on the point of bewitching me, that I was almost agreeing to everything she asked, only——"

"Only what?"

"Only I remembered that the theatre was not only my own affair, and that I had no business to compromise its interests by—you understand?"

"Quite right—quite right," said the Count, hastily. "And then——?"

"Then she left."

"But what—what is the reason of her wishing to leave the stage?"

"I don't know."

"Had she heard any—any news, for example?"

"I don't know."

"Why, Melton, what a fellow you are!" cried the Count, peevishly. "I'm sure you could easily have found out, if you cared, what she meant by it."

"I tell you I was quite dumfoundered—"

"And she said nothing about any news—or her prospects—or a change——?"

"Nothing. From what she said, I gathered that she had come to dislike acting, and that she was convinced her future career would be wretched, both for herself and the house. You have never asked me about the theatre at all. The first two or three nights the curiosity of people to see her in the new part gave us some good business; but now the papers have changed their tune, and the public——"

Mr. Melton shrugged his shoulders; but Count Schönstein was paying no attention to him.

"*If she has discovered the secret,*" he was reasoning with himself, "*she would be in no such desperate hurry to leave the stage. If she has not, now is the time for me.*"

"Melton," he said, "what would be a reasonable forfeit if she broke her engagement?"

"I don't know. I should say 200*l*. She said she could not offer me compensation in money, and that's why she begged so hard of me for the favour. God knows, if I could afford it, and were my own master, I should not make the poor creature keep to her engagement. Look at the money she used to put into the treasury every week."

"Very good. Come downstairs to your room; I want to transact some business with you."

When they had gone down to the stage and passed through the wings to Mr. Melton's private room, both men sate down in front of a table on which were writing materials.

"Take a sheet of paper, like a good fellow," said the Count, "and write to my dictation."

Melton took the pen in his hand, and the Count continued—

"*My dear Miss Brunel,—In consideration of your past services, and of the great*

success attending—should that be attendant, Melton?—*upon your previous labours in this theatre, I beg to offer you entire liberty to break your present engagement, at whatever time you please.—Yours sincerely, Charles Melton.*"

"And what do you propose to do with that, Count?" said Melton, with a smile.

"I propose to give you this bit of paper for it," said the Count.

He handed the manager an *I.O.U.* for 200*l.*; and then carefully folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DOUBTFUL.

Without taking off either bonnet or cloak, Annie Brunel, on reaching home that night, went at once to Mrs. Christmas's room, and flung herself down on the edge of the bed where the poor old woman lay, ailing and languid.

"Oh, mother, mother," cried the girl, "I can never go to the theatre any more!"

She buried her face in the bed-clothes, and only stretched out her hand for sympathy. The old woman tried to put her arm round the girl's neck, but relinquished the attempt with a sigh.

"What is to become of us, Miss Annie?"

"I don't know—I don't know," she said, almost wildly, "and why should I care any longer?"

"What new trouble is this that has fallen on us?" said Mrs. Christmas, faintly. "Why do you speak like that?"

"Because I don't know what to say, mother—because I would rather die than go to the theatre again—and he says I must. I cannot go—I cannot go—and there is no one to help me!"

The old woman turned her eyes—and they looked large in the shrivelled and weakly face—on her companion.

"Annie, you won't tell me what is the matter. Why should you hate the stage? Hasn't it been kind to you? Wasn't it kind to your mother—for many a long year, when she and you depended on it for your lives? The stage is a kind home for many a poor creature whom the world has cast out—and you, Miss Annie, who have been in a theatre all your life, what has taken you now? The

newspapers?"

The girl only shook her head.

"Because the business isn't good?"

No answer.

"Has Mr. Melton been saying anything——?"

"I tell you, mother," said the girl, passionately, "that I will not go upon the stage, because I hate it! And I hate the people—I hate them for staring at me, and making me ashamed of myself. I hate them because they are rich, and happy, and full of their own concerns—indeed, mother, I can't tell you—I only know that I will never go on the stage again, let them do what they like. Oh, to feel their eyes on me, and to know that I am only there for their amusement, and to know that I cannot compel them to—to anything but sit and compassionately admire my dress, and my efforts to please them. I can't bear it, Lady Jane—I can't bear it."

And here she broke out into a fit of hysterical sobbing.

"My poor dear, when I should be strong and ready to comfort you, here I am weaker and more helpless than yourself. But don't go back to the theatre, sweetheart, until your taste for it returns——"

"It will never return. I hate the thought of it."

"But it may. And in the meantime haven't we over 40*l.* in the house of good savings?"

"That is nothing to what I must undertake to give Mr. Melton if I break my engagement. But I don't mind that much, Lady Jane—I don't mind anything except going back there, and you must never ask me to go back. Say that you won't! We shall get along somehow——"

"My darling, how can you imagine I would seek to send you back?"

Annie Brunel did not sleep much that night; but by the morning she had recovered all her wonted courage and self-composure. Indeed, it was with a new and singular sense of freedom and cheerfulness that she rose to find the world before her, her own path through it as yet uncertain and full of risks. But she was now mistress of herself; she went to bid Mrs. Christmas good morning with a blithe air, and then, as every Englishwoman does under such circumstances, she sent for the *Times*.

She had no definite impression about her capabilities for earning her living out of the dramatic profession; but she expected to find all the requisite suggestions in the *Times*. Here was column after column of proffered employment; surely one little bit might be allotted to her. So she sate down hopefully before the big sheet, and proceeded to put a well-defined cross opposite each advertisement which she imagined offered her a fair chance.

While she was thus engaged, Count Schönstein's brougham was an-

nounced; and a few minutes thereafter, the Count, having sent up his card, was permitted to enter the room.

Outwardly his appearance was elaborate, and he wore a single deep crimson rose in the lapel of his tightly-buttoned frock-coat. His eyes, however, were a little anxious. And it was soon apparent that he had for the present relinquished his grand manner.

"I am delighted to see you looking so well," he said, "and I hope Mrs. Christmas is also the better for her holiday——"

"Poor Lady Jane is very ill," said Miss Brunel, "though she will scarcely admit it."

"Have I disturbed your political studies?" he asked, looking at the open newspaper.

"I have been reading the advertisements of situations," she said, frankly.

"Not, I hope," he remarked, "with any reference to what I heard from Mr. Melton last night about your retiring from the stage?"

"Indeed, it is from no other cause," she said, cheerfully. "I have resolved not to play any more; but we cannot live without my doing something——"

"In the meantime," said the Count, drawing a letter from his pocket, "I have much pleasure in handing you this note from Mr. Melton. You will find that it releases you from your present engagement, whenever you choose to avail yourself of the power."

The young girl's face was lit up with a sudden glow of happiness and gratitude.

"How can I ever thank him for this great kindness?" she said,—"so unexpected, so generous! Indeed, I must go and see him and thank him personally; it is the greatest kindness I have received for years."

The Count was a little puzzled.

"You understand, Miss Brunel, that—that paper, you see, was not quite Mr. Melton's notion until——"

"Until you asked him? Then I am indebted to you for many kindnesses, but for this more than all. I feel as if you had given me a pair of wings. How shall I ever thank you sufficiently——?"

"*By becoming my wife.*"

He had nearly uttered the words; but he did not. He felt that his mission that morning was too serious to be risked without the most cautious introduction. Besides, she was in far too good spirits to have such a suggestion made to her. He felt instinctively that, in her present mood, she would certainly laugh at him—the most frightful catastrophe that can happen to a man under the circumstances. And Count Schönstein had sufficient acquaintance with actresses to know, that while they have the most astonishing capacity for emotion, if their sympathies

be properly excited, there are no people who, in cold blood, can so accurately detect the ridiculous in a man's exterior. An actress in love forgets everything but her love; an actress not in love has the cruellest eye for the oddities or defects of figure and costume.

At the present moment, Count Schönstein felt sure that if he spoke of love, and marriage, and so forth, Miss Brunel would be looking at the rose in his button-hole, or scanning his stiff necktie and collar, or the unblushing corpulence of his waist. In his heart he wished he had no rose in his button-hole.

It would be very easy to make fun of this poor Count (and he was aware of the fact himself) as he stood there, irresolute, diffident, anxious. But there was something almost pathetic as well as comic in his position. Consider how many vague aspirations were now concentrated upon this visit. Consider how he had thought about it as he had dressed himself many a morning, as he had gone to bed many a night; how, with a strange sort of loyalty, he had striven to exalt his motives and persuade himself that he was quite disinterested; how the dull pursuit of his life, position and influence, had been tinged with a glow of sentiment and romance by meeting this young girl.

"She has no friends," he said to himself, many a time, "neither have I. Why should not we make common cause against the indifference and hauteur of society? I can make a good husband—I would yield in all things to her wishes. And away down in Kent together—we two—even if we should live only for each other——"

The Count tried hard to keep this view of the matter before his eyes. When sometimes his errant imagination would picture his marriage with the poor actress,—then his claim, on behalf of his wife, for the estates and title of the Marquis of Knottingley's daughter—then the surprise, the chatter of the clubs, the position in society he would assume, the money he would have at his command, the easy invitations to *battues* he could dispense like so many worthless coppers among the young lords and venerable baronets—and so forth, and so forth—he dwelt upon the prospect with an unholy and ashamed delight, and strove to banish it from his mind as a temptation of the devil.

These conflicting motives, and the long train of anticipations connected with them, only served to render his present situation the more tragic. He knew that one great crisis of his life had come; and it is not only incomparable heroes, possessed of all human graces and virtues, who meet with such crises.

"When do you propose to leave the stage?" he asked.

"I have left," she answered.

"You won't play to-night?"

"No."

"But Mr. Melton——?"

"Since he has been so kind as to give me, at your instigation, this release, must get Miss Featherstone to play 'Rosalind.' Nelly will play it very nicely, and my best wishes will go with her."

"Then I must see him instantly," said the Count, "and give him notice to get a handbill printed."

"If you would be so kind——"

But this was too bad. She intimated by her manner that she expected him to leave at once, merely for the sake of the wretched theatre. He took up the newspaper, by way of excuse, and for a minute or two glanced down its columns.

"Have you any fixed plans about what you mean to do?" he asked.

"None whatever," she replied. "Indeed I am in no hurry. You have no idea how I love this sense of freedom you have just given me, and I mean to enjoy it for a little time."

"But after then?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and smiled: he thought he had never seen her look so charming.

"You don't know what lies before you," he said, gravely, "if you think of battling single-handed against the crowds of London. You don't know the thousands who are far more eager in the fight for bread than you are; because you haven't experienced the necessity yet——"

"I have fought for my bread ever since my poor mother died," she said.

"With exceptional advantages, and these you now abandon. My dear Miss Brunel," he added, earnestly, "you don't know what you're doing. I shudder to think of the future that you seem to have chalked out for yourself. On the other hand, I see a probable future for you in which you would not have to depend upon any one for your support; you would be independent of those people whom you profess to dislike; you would be rich, happy, with plenty of amusement, nothing to trouble you, and you would also secure a pleasant home for Mrs. Christmas——"

"Have you imagined all that out of one of these advertisements?" she asked, with a smile.

"No, Miss Brunel," said the Count, whose earnestness gave him an eloquence which certainly did not often characterise his speech. "Can't you guess what I mean? I am sure you know how I esteem you—you must have seen it—and perhaps you guessed what feelings lay behind that—and—and—now you are alone, as it were, you have no friends—why not accept my home, and become my wife?"

"Your wife?" she repeated, suddenly becoming quite grave, and looking down.

"Yes," he said, delighted to find that she did not get up in a towering passion,

as he had seen so many ladies do, under similar circumstances, on the stage. "I hope you do not feel offended. I have spoken too abruptly, perhaps—but now it is out, let me beg of you to listen to me. Look at this, Miss Brunel, fairly: I don't think I have an unkind disposition—I am sincerely attached to you—you are alone, as I say, with scarcely a friend—we have many tastes in common, and as I should have nothing to do but invent amusements for you, I think we should lead an agreeable life. I am not a very young man, but on the other hand I haven't my way to make in the world. You don't like the stage. I am glad of it. It assures me that if you would only think well of my proposal, we should lead a very agreeable life. I'm sure we should have a pleasant agreeable life; for, after all,—it is absurd to mention this just now, perhaps—but one has a good deal of latitude in 30,000*l.* a year—and you don't have to trouble your mind—and if the most devoted affection can make you happy, then happy you'll be."

Annie Brunel sate quite silent, and not very much affected or put out. She had been in good spirits all the morning, had been nerving herself for a heroic and cheerful view of the future; and now here was something to engage her imagination! There is no woman in the world, whatever her training may have been, who, under such circumstances, and with such a picturesque offer held out to her, would refuse at least to regard and try to realise the prospect.

"You are very kind," she said, "to do me so much honour. But you are too kind. You wish to prevent my being subjected to the hardships of being poor and having to work for a living, and you think the easiest way to do that is to make me the mistress of all your money——"

"I declare, Miss Brunel, you wrong me," said the Count, warmly. "Money has nothing to do with it. I mentioned these things as inducements—unwisely, perhaps. Indeed it has nothing to do with it. Won't you believe me when I say that I could hope for no greater fortune and blessing in the world, if neither you nor I had a farthing of money, than to make you my wife?"

"I am afraid you would be sadly disappointed," she said, with a smile.

"Will you let me risk that?" he said, eagerly, and trying to take her hand.

She withdrew her hand, and rose.

"I can't tell you yet," she said; "I can scarcely believe that we are talking seriously. But you have been always very kind, and I'm very much obliged to you——"

"Miss Brunel," said the Count, hurriedly—he did not like to hear a lady say she was much obliged by his offer of 30,000*l.* a year—"don't make any abrupt decision, if you have not made up your mind. At any rate, you don't refuse to consider the matter? I knew you would at least do me that justice—in a week's time, perhaps——"

She gave him her hand, as he lifted his hat and cane, and he gratefully

bowed over it, and ventured to kiss it; and then he took his leave, with a radiant smile on his face as he went downstairs.

"Club. And, d—n it, be quick!" he said to his astonished coachman.

Arrived there, he ordered the waiter to take up to the smoking-room a bottle of the pale port which the Count was in the habit of drinking there. Then he countermanded the order.

"I needn't make a beast of myself because I feel happy," he said to himself, wisely, as he went into the dining-room. "Alfred, I'll have a bit of cold chicken, and a bottle of the wine that you flatter yourself is Château Yquem."

Alfred, who was a tall and stately person, with red hair and no *h*'s, was not less astonished than the Count's coachman had been. However, he brought the various dishes, and then the wine. The Count poured the beautiful amber fluid into a tumbler, and took a draught of it:

"Here's to her health, whether the wine came from Bordeaux or Biberich!"

But as a rule the Château Yquem of clubs is a cold drink, which never sparkled under the warm sun of France; and so, as the Count went upstairs to the smoking-room, he returned to his old love, and told them to send him a pint-bottle of port. He had already put twenty-two shillings' worth of wine into his capacious interior; and he had only to add a glass or two of port, and surround his face with the perfume of an old, hard, and dry cigar, in order to get into that happy mood when visions are born of the half-somnolent brain.

"... I have done it—I have broken the ice, and there is still hope. Her face was pleased, her smile was friendly, her soft clear eyes—fancy having that smile and those eyes at your breakfast-table every morning, to sweeten the morning air for you, and make you snap your fingers at the outside world. 'Gad, I could write poetry about her. I'll *live* poetry—which will be something better...."

At this moment there looked into the room a handsome and dressy young gentleman who was the funny fellow of the club. He lived by his wits, and managed to make a good income, considering the material on which he had to work.

"What a courageous man—port in the forenoon!" he said, to the Count.

The other said nothing, but inwardly devoted the newcomer to the deeps of Hades.

"And smoking to our old port!"

"A cigar doesn't make much difference to club-wines, young gentleman," said the Count, grandly.

"Heard a good thing just now. Fellow was abusing Scotchmen to a Scotch tradesman, and of course Bannockburn was mentioned. 'Why,' says the Englishman, 'plenty of my countrymen were buried at Bannockburn, and there you have rich harvests of grain. Plenty of *your* countrymen were buried at Culloden, and there you have only a barren waste. Scotchmen can't even fatten the land.'"

"Did he kill him?"

"No; the Englishman was a customer."

Once more the Count was left to his happy imaginings.

"Then the marriage," he thought to himself, "then the marriage,—the girls in white, champagne, fun, horses, and flowers, and away for France! No Trouville for me, no Etretât, no Biarritz. A quiet old Norman town, with an old inn, and an old priest; and she and I walking about like the lord and lady of the place, with all the children turning and looking at her as if she were an Italian saint come down from one of the pictures in the church. This is what I offer her—instead of what? A sempstress's garret in Camden Town, or a music-mistress's lodgings in Islington, surrounded by squalid and dingy people, glaring publichouses, smoke, foul air, wretchedness, and misery. I take her from the slums of Islington, and I lead her down into the sweet air of Kent, and I make a queen of her!"

The Count's face beamed with pleasure, and port. The very nimbleness of his own imagination tickled him—

"Look at her! In a white cool morning-dress, with her big heaps of black hair braided up, as she goes daintily down into the garden in the warm sunshine, and her little fingers are gathering a bouquet for her breast. The raw-boned wives of your country gentry, trying to cut a dash on the money they get from selling their extra fruit and potatoes, turn and look at my soft little Italian princess as she lies back in her barouche, and regards them kindly enough, God bless her! What a job I shall have to teach her her position—to let her know that now she is a lady the time for general good-humour is gone! Mrs. Anerley, yes; but none of your clergymen's wives, nor your doctors' wives, nor your cow-breeding squires' wives for her! Day after day, week after week, nothing but brightness, and pleasure, and change. All this I am going to give her in exchange for the squalor of Islington!"

The Count regarded himself as the best of men. At this moment, however, there strolled into the smoking-room a certain Colonel Tyrwhitt, who was connected by blood or marriage with half-a-dozen peerages, had a cousin in the Cabinet, and wore on his finger a ring given him by the decent and devout old King of Saxony. This colonel—"a poor devil I could buy up twenty times over," said the Count, many a time—walked up to the fireplace, and turning, proceeded to contemplate the Count, his wine, and cigar, as if these objects had no sensible existence. He stroked his grey moustache once or twice, yawned very openly, and then walked lazily out of the room again without having uttered a word.

"D—n him!" said the Count, mentally; "the wretched pauper, who lives by loo, and looks as grand as an emperor because he has some swell relations, who won't give him a farthing. These are the people who will be struck dumb with amazement and envy by-and-by. My time is coming.

"'Ah! my dear fellah!' says this colonel to me, some morning; 'I've heard the news. Congratulate you—all my heart. Lord Bockerminster tells me you've some wonderful shooting down in Berks.'

"'So I have,' says I; 'and I should be glad, Colonel, to ask you down, but you know my wife and I have to be rather select in our choice of visitors——'

"'What the devil do you mean?' says he.

"'Only that our list of invitations is closed for the present.'

"Suppose he gets furious? Let him! I don't know much about fencing or pistol-shooting, but I'd undertake to punch his head twenty times a week."

The Count took another sip of port, and pacified himself.

"Then the presentations to Her Majesty. I shouldn't wonder if the Queen took us up when she gets to learn Annie's story. It would be just like the Queen to make some sort of compensation; and once she saw her it would be all right. The *Court Circular*—'Osborne, May 1. Count Schönstein and Lady Annie Knottingley had the honour of dining with the Queen and the Royal Family.' Lord Bockerminster comes up to me, and says—

"'Schönstein, old boy, when are you going to give me a turn at your pheasants? I hear you have the best preserves in the South of England.'

"'Well, you see, my lord,' I say, carelessly, 'I have the Duke of S—— and a party of gentlemen going down on the 1st, and the Duke is so particular about the people he meets that I—you understand?'

"And why only a Duke? The Prince of Wales is as fond of pheasant-shooting as anybody else, I suppose. Why shouldn't he come down with the Princess and a party? And I'd make the papers talk of the splendid hospitality of the place, if I paid, damme, a thousand pounds for every dish. Then to see the Princess—God bless her, for she's the handsomest woman in England, bar one!—walking down on the terrace with Annie, while the Prince comes up to me and chaffs me about some blunder I made the day before. Then I say—

"'Well, your Royal Highness, if your Royal Highness was over at Schönstein and shooting with my keepers there, perhaps you might put your foot in it too.'

"'Count Schönstein,' says he, 'you're a good fellow and a trump, and you'll come with your pretty wife and see us at Marlborough House?'"

The Count broke into a loud and triumphant laugh, and had nearly demolished the glass in front of him by an unlucky sweep of the arm. Indeed, further than this interview with these celebrated persons, the imagination of the Count could not carry him. He could wish for nothing beyond these things except the perpetuity of them. The Prince of Wales should live for ever, if only to be his friend.

And if this ultimate and royal view of the future was even more pleasing than the immediate and personal one, it never occurred to him that there could

be any material change in passing from one to the other. Annie Brunel was to be grateful and loving towards him for having taken her from "the squalor of Islington" to give her a wealthy station; she was to be equally grateful and loving when she found herself the means of securing to her husband that position and respect which he had deceived her to obtain. Such trifling points were lost in the full glory which now bathed the future that lay before his eyes. Annie Brunel had shown herself not unwilling to consent, which was equivalent to consenting; and there only remained to be reaped all the gorgeous happiness which his imagination, assisted by a tolerable quantity of wine, could conceive.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MOTHER CHRISTMAS'S STORY.

Annie Brunel ran into Mrs. Christmas's room the moment Count Schönstein had left, and, sitting down by the bedside, took the old woman's lean hand in hers.

"Lady Jane, I have been looking over the advertisements in the *Times*, and do you know what I have found?"

"No."

"One offering me a marvellous lot of money, and a fine house in the country, with nice fresh air and constant attendance for you. Horses, carriages, opera-boxes, months at the seaside—everything complete. There!"

"Why don't you take it, sweetheart?" said the old woman, with a faint smile.

"Because—I don't say that I shan't take it—there is a condition attached, and such a condition! Not to puzzle you, mother, any more, Count Schönstein wants me to be his wife. Now!"

"Are you serious, Annie?" said Mrs. Christmas, her aged eyes full of astonishment.

"I can't say. I don't think the Count was. You know he is not a witty man, mother, and it *might* be a joke. But if it was a joke, he acted the part admirably—he pulled two leaves out of my photographic album, and nibbled a hole in the table-cover with his nail. He sate *so*, Lady Jane, and said, in a deep bass voice, 'Miss Brunel, I have 30,000*l.* a year; I am old; I am affectionate; and will you marry me?' Anything more romantic you could not imagine: and the sighs he heaved, and the anxiety of his face, would have been admirable, had he been

dressed as 'Orlando,' and playing to my 'Rosalind.' '*For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee.*' '*Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours!*'"

"Sweetheart, have you grown mad? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Must I describe the whole scene to you?—my lover's fearful diffidence, my gentle silence, his growing confidence, my wonder and bewilderment, finally, his half-concealed joy, and my hasty rush to you, Lady Jane, to tell you the news?"

"And a pretty return you are making for any man's confidence and affection, to go on in that way. What did you say to him?"

"Nothing."

"And what do you mean to say?"

"Nothing. What can I say, Lady Jane? I am sure he must have been joking; and, if not, he ought to have been. At the same time, I don't laugh at the Count himself, mother, but at his position a few minutes ago."

"And as you laugh at that, you laugh at the notion of becoming his wife."

The smile died away from the girl's face, and for some time she sate and gazed wistfully before her. Then she said—

"You ought to be able to say what I ought to do, mother. I did not say no, I did not say yes; I was too afraid to say either. And now, if we are to talk seriously about it, I am quite as much afraid. Tell me what to do, Lady Jane."

"Is it so entirely a matter of indifference that you can accept my advice?"

"It is quite a matter of indifference," said the girl, calmly.

"Do you love him, Annie?" said the old woman.

For one brief second the girl's thoughts flashed to the man whom she did love; but they returned with only a vague impression of pain and doubt. She had not had time to sit down and reason out her course of duty. She could only judge as yet by the feelings awakened by the Count's proposal, and the pictures which it exhibited to her mind.

"Do I love him, mother?" she said, in a low voice. "I like him very well, and I am sure he is very fond of me; I am quite sure of that."

"And what do you say yourself about it?"

"What can I say? If I marry him," she said, coldly, "it will give him pleasure, and I know he will be kind to me and to you. It is his wish—not mine. We should not be asking or receiving a favour, mother. I suppose he loves me as well as he loves any one; and I suppose I can make as good a wife as any one else."

There was in this speech the faint indication of a bitterness having its root in a far deeper bitterness, which had suggested the whole tone of this interview. When Mrs. Christmas thought the girl was laughing cruelly at a man who had paid her the highest compliment in his power, when she saw this girl exhibiting an exaggerated heartlessness in talking of the proposed marriage as a marriage

of convenience, she did not know that this indifference and heartlessness were but the expression of a deep, and hopeless, and despairing love.

"Poverty is not a nice thing, mother; and until I should have established myself as a teacher of music, we should have to be almost beggars. The Count offers us a pleasant life; and I dare say I can make his dull house a little more cheerful to him. It is a fair bargain. He did not ask me if I loved him: probably he did not see the necessity any more than I do. What he proposes will be a comfortable arrangement for all of us."

Mrs. Christmas looked at the calm, beautiful, sad face, and said nothing.

"I think the Count is an honourable, well-meaning man," continued the girl, in the same cold tone. "If he sometimes makes himself ridiculous, so do most of us; and doubtless he is open to improvement. I think he is remarkably good-natured and generous, and I am sure he will be kind to us."

Consider Mrs. Christmas's position. An old woman, almost bedridden, ailing, and requiring careful and delicate attention,—one who has seen much of the folly of love and much of the power of money,—is asked for her advice by a young girl who is either on the one hand to marry a wealthy good-natured man, willing to give both a comfortable home, or, on the other hand, to go out alone into the world of London, unprotected and friendless, to earn bread for two people. Even admitting that no grain of selfishness should colour or shape her advice, what was she likely to say?

Ninety-nine women out of a hundred, under such circumstances, would say: "My dear, be sensible, and accept the offer of a worthy and honourable gentleman, instead of exposing yourself to the wretchedness and humiliation of poverty. Romance won't keep you from starving; and besides, in your case, there is no romantic affection to compel you to choose between love and money. People who have come to my time of life know the advantages of securing a happy home and kind friends."

This, too, is probably what Mrs. Christmas would have said—if she had not been born and bred an actress. This is what she did say:—

"My dear" (with a kindly smile on the wan face), "suppose you and I are going forward to the footlights, and I take your hand in mine, and look into your face, and say, 'Listen to the sad story of your mother's life?'"

"Well, Lady Jane?"

"You are supposed to be interested in it, and take its moral deeply to heart. Well, I'm going to tell you a story, sweetheart, although you may not see any moral in it—it's a story your mother knew."

"If she were here now!" the girl murmured, inadvertently.

"When I was three years younger than you, I was first chambermaid in the Theatre Royal, Bristol. Half the pit were my sweethearts; and I got heaps

of letters, of the kind that you know, Annie—some of them impudent, some of them very loving and respectful. Sometimes it was, 'My dear Miss, will you take a glass of wine with me at such and such a place, on such and such a night?' and sometimes it was, 'I dare not seek an introduction, lest I read my fate in your refusal. I can only look at you from afar off, and be miserable.' Poor boys! they were all very kind to me, and used to take such heaps of tickets for my benefits, for in Bristol, you know, the first chambermaid had a benefit like her betters."

"There were none better than you in the theatre, I'm sure, mother," said Annie.

"Don't interrupt the story, my dear; for we are at the footlights, and the gallery is supposed to be anxious to hear it. I declare I have always loved the top gallery. There you find critics who are attentive, watchful, who are ready to applaud when they're pleased, and to hiss when they're not. Well, there was one poor lad, out of all my admirers, got to be acquainted with our little household, and he and I became—friends. He was a wood-engraver, or something like that, only a little older than myself—long fair hair, a boyish face, gentleness like a girl about him; and nothing would do but that I should engage to be his wife, and he was to be a great artist and do wonders for my sake."

The hard look on the young girl's face had died away now, and there was a dreaminess in her eyes.

"I did promise; and for about two years we were a couple of the maddest young fools in the world—I begging him to make haste, and get money, and marry me—he full of audacious schemes, and as cheerful as a lark in the certainty of marrying me. He tried painting pictures; then he began scene-painting, and succeeded so well that he at last got an engagement in a London theatre, and nearly broke his heart when he went away there to make money for both of us."

The old woman heaved a gentle sigh.

"Whenever I'm very sad, all the wretchedness of that first parting of my life comes over me, and I see the wet streets of Bristol, and the shining lamps, and his piteous face, though he tried to be very brave over it, and cheer me up. I felt like a stone, and didn't know what was going on; I only wished that I could get away into a corner and cry myself dead. Very well, he went, and I remained in Bristol. I needn't tell you how it came about—how I was a little tired of waiting, and we had a quarrel, and, in short, I married a gentleman who had been very kind and attentive to me. He was over thirty, and had plenty of money, for he was a merchant in Bristol, and his father was an old man who had made a fine big fortune in Jamaica. He was very kind to me, in his way, and for a year or two we lived very well together; but I knew that he thought twenty times of his business for once he thought of me. And what was I thinking of? Ah, Miss Annie, don't consider me very wicked if I tell you, that from the hour in which I was married

there never passed a single day in which I did not think of the *other one*."

"Poor mother!" said the girl.

"Every day; and I used to go down on my knees and pray for him, that so I might be sure my interest in him was harmless. We came to London, too; and every time I drove along the streets—I sate in ray own carriage, then, my dear—I used to wonder if I should see *him*. I went to the theatre in which he was scene-painter, thinking I might catch a glimpse of him from one of the boxes, passing through the wings; but I never did. I knew his house, however, and sometimes I passed it; but I never had the courage to look at the windows, for fear he should be there. It was very wicked, very wicked, Annie."

"Was your husband kind to you?"

"In a distant sort of way that tormented me. He seemed always to consider me an actress, and a baby; and he invariably went out into society alone, lest I should compromise him, I suppose. I think I grew mad altogether; for one day, I left his house resolved never to go back again——"

"And you said he was kind to you!" repeated the girl, with a slight accent of reproach.

"I suppose I was mad, Annie; at any rate I felt myself driven to it, and couldn't help myself. I went straight to the street in which *he* lived, and walked up and down, expecting to meet him. He did not come. I took lodgings in a coffeehouse. Next day I went back to that street; even then I did not see him. On the third afternoon, I saw him come down the steps from his house, and I all at once felt sick and cold. How different he looked now!—firm, and resolute, and manly, but still with the old gentleness about the eyes. He turned very pale when he saw me, and was about to pass on. Then he saw that my eyes followed him, and perhaps they told him something, for he turned and came up to me, and held out his hand, without saying a word."

There were tears in the old woman's eyes now.

"'You forgive me?' I said, and he said 'Yes' so eagerly that I looked up again. I took his arm, and we walked on, in the old fashion, and I forgot everything but the old, old days, and I wished I could have died just then. It seemed as if all the hard intervening years had been swept out, and we were still down in Bristol, and still looking forward to a long life together. I think we were both out of our senses for several minutes; and I shall never forget the light there was on his face and in his eyes. Then he began to question me, and all at once he turned to me, with a scared look, and said—

"'What have you done?'

"It was past undoing then. I knew he loved me at that moment as much as ever, by the terrible state he got into. He implored me to go back to my husband. I told him it was too late. I had already been away two days from home.

"'If I could only have seen you on the day you left your husband's house," he said, 'this would never have happened. I should have made you go back.'

"Then I began to feel a kind of fear, and I said—

"'What am I to do, Charlie? What are you going to do with me?'

"'I?' he said. 'Do you ask me what I must do? Would you have me leave my wife and children——?'

"I did not know he was married, you see, Miss Annie. Oh, the shame that came over me when I heard these words! The moment before I scarcely knew that I walked at all, so deliriously full of joy I was; *then* I wished the ground would open beneath my feet. He offered to go to my husband and intercede for me; but I would have drowned myself rather than go back. I was the wretchedest woman in the whole world. And I could see that he loved me as much as ever, though he never would say so. That is all of my story that need concern you; but shall I tell you the rest, Miss Annie?"

"Yes, Lady Jane."

"Your mother was then the most popular actress in London; she could do anything she liked in the theatre; and it was for that theatre that *he* chiefly worked then, though he became a great artist afterwards. Well, he took me back to the coffeehouse, and left me then; and then he went and persuaded your mother to take an interest in me, and through her means I got an engagement in the same theatre. From the moment I was settled there, he treated me almost like a stranger. He took off his hat to me in the street, and passed on without speaking. If I met him in the theatre, he would say 'Good evening' as he would to the other ladies. He used to send me little presents, and he never forgot my birthday; but they were always sent anonymously, and if I saw him the next day he seemed more distant than ever, as if to keep me away. Oh, many and many a time have I been on the point of throwing myself at his feet, and clasping his knees, and thanking him with my whole heart for his goodness to me. I used to hate his wife, whom I had never seen, until one Sunday morning I saw her and him going to church, one little girl at his hand, another at hers—and the sweet face she had turned my heart towards her. Would you believe it, he bowed to me as kindly and respectfully as ever, and I think he would have stopped and spoken to me *then*, only I hurried away out of his sight."

"And you never went back?" said the girl, softly.

"How could I go back, clothed with shame, and subject myself to his suspicion? Besides, he was the last man to have taken me back. Once he felt sure I had left his house wilfully, I am certain he did not trouble himself much about me—as why should he?—why should he?"

"It is a very sad story, Lady Jane."

"And it has a moral."

"But not for me. You are afraid I should marry Count Schönstein out of pique, and so be wretched? But there is no other person whom I could marry."

"Come closer to me, sweetheart. There, bend your head down, and whisper. *Is there no other person whom you love?*"

The girl's head was so close down to the pillow that the blush on her face was unseen as she said, in a scarcely audible voice—

"*There is, mother.*"

"I thought so, my poor girl. And he loves you, does he not?"

"He does, Lady Jane. That is the misery of it."

"You think he is not rich enough? He has his way to make? Or perhaps his friends?"

"You are speaking of——?"

"Mr. Anerley."

"But all your conjectures are wrong, mother—all quite wrong. Indeed, I cannot explain it to you. I only know, mother, that I am very unhappy."

"And you mean to marry Count Schönstein to revenge yourself——?"

"I did not say I would marry Count Schönstein," said the girl, fretfully, "and I have nothing to revenge. I am very sorry, Lady Jane, to think of the sad troubles you have had, and you are very good to warn me; but I have not quarrelled with anybody, and I am not asked to wait in order to marry anybody, and——"

Here she raised herself up, and the old bitter hard look came to the sad and gentle face.

"——And if I should marry Count Schönstein, I shall disappoint no one, and break no promise. Before I marry Count Schönstein, he shall know what he may expect from me. I can give him my esteem, and confidence, and a certain amount of liking; and many people have lived comfortably on less. And you, mother, should be the last to say anything against an arrangement which would give you comfort, and relieve your mind from anxiety——"

"And you have lived so long with me," said old Mother Christmas, reproachfully, "and you don't know yet that sooner than let my comfort bring you to harm, Annie, or tempt you to a false step, I would twenty times rather beg my bread?"

"Forgive me, mother!" said the girl, impetuously, "but I don't know what I've been saying. Everything seems wrong, and cruel, and if I forget that you have been a mother to me, it is—it is because—I am—so miserable that——"

And here the two women had a hearty cry together, which smoothed down

their troubles for the present, and drew them closer to each other.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LEFT ALONE.

"No," said Dove, blocking up the doorway with her slight little figure, as the waggonette was driven round, "neither of you stirs a step until you tell me where you are going."

Will's last injunction to his father had been, "Don't let the women know." So the women did not know; and on this Monday morning both men were stealthily slipping away up to London when the heroic little Dove caught them in the act.

"We are going to London, my dear," said Mr. Anerley.

"On business," said Will.

"Yes, on business!" said Dove, pouting. "I know what it is. You go into somebody's office in the forenoon and talk a little; and then both of you go away and play billiards; then you dine at Will's club or at a hotel, and then you go to the theatre."

"Will has been telling tales," said Mr. Anerley.

"And to-day of all days," continued the implacable Dove, "when you know very well, papa, and you needn't try to deny it, that you promised to help me in getting down the last of the walnuts. No; neither of you shall stir this day; so you may as well send back the waggonette."

"My dear, the most important business——" said Mr. Anerley, gravely.

"I don't care," said Dove. "If you two people are going up to amuse yourselves in London, you must take me. Else stay at home."

"But how can you go?" said Will. "We have now barely time to catch the train."

"Go by the ten-o'clock train," said Dove, resolutely, "and I shall be dressed by then. Or the walnuts, if you like."

"Of the two evils, I prefer to take you," said Will. "So run and get your things ready; and we shall take you to the theatre to-night."

"My boy," said his father, when she was gone, "look at the additional expense——"

"In for a penny, in for a pound, father," said Will. "I shall allow my finances to suffer for the stall-tickets; and you, having just been ruined, ought to be in a

position to give us a very nice dinner. People won't believe you have lost your money unless you double your expenditure and scatter money about as freely as dust."

"You both look as if I had thrust myself on you!" said Dove, reproachfully, as they all got into the waggonette and drove off. "But I forgive you, as you're going to take me to the theatre. Shall I tell you which, Will? Take me to see Miss Brunel, won't you?"

She looked into his face for a moment; but there was evidently no covert intention in her words.

From Charing Cross Station they drove to the Langham Hotel. Dove said she was not afraid to spend an hour or so (under the shelter of a thick veil) in looking at the Regent-street and Oxford-street shops, while the gentlemen were gone into the city. At the expiry of that time she was to return to the hotel and wait for them. They then took a Hansom and drove to Mr. Anerley's solicitor.

"And there," said Mr. Anerley, on the way, "as if we were not sufficiently penniless, Hubbard's brougham and a pair of his horses are coming over to-morrow."

"Did you buy them?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"For Dove. I was afraid of her driving in an open vehicle during the winter, as she has been rather delicate all the time you were away. I had calculated on selling the waggonette and Oscar; and now I have the whole lot on my hands."

"How much have you promised him for them?"

"200*l*. I hope he'll let me withdraw from the bargain."

"He won't. I know the Count very well," said the young man. "He is a good fellow in his way, but he wants credit for his goodness. He'll stick to this bargain, because he thinks it advantageous to himself; and *then* he will, with the greatest freedom, lend you the 200*l.*, or a larger sum, if you require it. Nor will he lend you the money at interest; but he will let you know what interest he would have received had he lent it to somebody else."

"Perhaps so. But how to pay him the 200*l.*?"

"Tell him, if he does not take back his brougham and horses, you will become bankrupt, and only pay him tenpence in the pound."

Mr. Anerley's solicitor—a stout, cheerful little man—did his very best to look sorrowful, and would probably have shed tears, had he been able, to give effect to his condolences. Any more material consolation he had none. There was no doubt about it: Miall & Welling had wholly collapsed. Ultimately the lawyer suggested that things might pull together again; but in the meantime shareholders were likely to suffer.

"They do hint queer things about the directors," he continued, "and if what I hear whispered be true, I'd have some of them put in the stocks until they told what they had done with the money. I'd make 'em disgorge it, sir. Why, sir, men settling their forty or fifty thousand a year on their wives out of money belonging to all sorts of people who have worked for it, who have nothing else to live on, who are likely to starve——"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Anerley, calmly, "you don't look at the matter in its proper light. You don't see the use of such men. You don't reflect that the tendency to excess of reproduction in animals is wholesomely checked by the ravages of other animals. But who is to do that for men, except men? There is, you see, a necessity for human tigers, to prey on their species, kill the weakly members, and improve the race by limiting its numbers and narrowing the conditions of existence."

"That's very nice as a theory, Mr. Anerley; but it wouldn't console me for losing the money that you have lost."

"Because you don't believe in it. Tell me now, how is a penniless man, without a trade, but with some knowledge of the multiplication-table, to gain a living in London?"

"There are too many trying to solve the problem, Mr. Anerley," said the lawyer.

"You say there is a chance of the bank retrieving itself in a certain time?"

"Yes. I have shown you how the money has been sunk. But in time——"

"Until then, those who are in a position like myself must contrive to exist somehow?"

"That's it."

"Unfortunately, I never settled, as you know, a farthing on my wife; and as for my life-insurance, they illogically and unreasonably exclude suicide from their list of casualties. Your ordinary suicide does not compass his own death any more doggedly than the man who persists in living in an undrained house, or in drinking brandy until his brain gives way, or in lighting his pipe in a coal-mine. However, that's neither here nor there. You have been my lawyer, Mr. Green, for a great many years, and you have given me some good advice. But at the most critical moment, I find you without a scrap. Still I bear you no malice; for I don't owe you any money."

"It isn't very easy, sir, to tell a gentleman how to recover his fortune," said Mr. Green, with a smile—glad that his client was taking matters so coolly.

"I was a gentleman three days ago," said Mr. Anerley. "Now I am a man, very anxious to live, and not seeing my way clearly towards that end."

"Come, sir," said Will, "Mr. Green is anxious to live too; and we are taking up his time."

"But really, Mr. Anerley," said the lawyer, "I should like to know what your views are?"

"Ah, you want to know what I propose to do. I am not good at blacking boots; I am indifferent at cookery. Gardening—well, no. I should like to be head-keeper to a duke; or, if they start any more of these fancy stage-coaches between London and the seaside, I can drive pretty well."

"You are joking," said the other, dubiously.

"A man with empty pockets never jokes, unless he hopes to fill them. At present—well, good day to you—you will let me know if you hear of anything to my advantage."

No sooner were they outside, than Will earnestly remonstrated with his father.

"You should not suddenly lose your pride, sir."

"I never had any, my boy. If I had, it is time I should lose it."

"And why need you talk of taking a situation? If you can only tide over a little time, Miall & Welling will come all right."

"My lad, the bladders that help you to float in that little time are rather expensive."

"I have a few pounds——"

"And you will lend me them. Good. What we must do now is this. Get your landlord to give us a couple of bedrooms in the house, and we can all use your sitting-room. Then we shall be together; and the first opportunity I have offered me of earning money, in whatever employment, I will accept it."

"If I were not disabled, sir, by this confounded arm, you would not need to do anything of the kind."

"Tuts! Every man for himself, and all of us for poor Dove, who, at present, will be moping up in that great room, terrified by the attentions of the waiters."

How they passed the day does not matter to us. In the evening they went to the theatre, and chose, at Will's instigation, the dress-circle instead of the stalls. He hoped that he might escape being seen.

He had scarcely cast his eye over the bill handed to him by the box-keeper, when he discovered that Annie Brunel's name was not there at all.

"Dove," he said, "here's a disappointment for you. Miss Featherstone plays 'Rosalind' to-night, not Miss Brunel."

"Doesn't she appear at all to-night?" said Dove, with a crestfallen face.

"Apparently not. Will you go to some other theatre?"

"No," said Dove, decidedly. "I want to see 'Rosalind,' whoever is 'Rosalind.' Don't you, papa?"

"My dear, I want to see anything that you want to see; and I'm sure to be pleased if you laugh."

"It isn't a laughing part, and you know that quite well, you tedious old thing!" said Dove.

Will went and saw Mr. Melton, from whom he learned little beyond the fact that Annie Brunel did not intend to act any more in his theatre.

"She is not unwell?"

"I believe not."

"Has she given up the stage altogether?"

"I fancy so. You'd better ask Count Schönstein: he seems to know all about it," said Mr. Melton, with a peculiar smile.

"Why should *he* know all about it?" asked Will, rather angrily: but Melton only shrugged his shoulders.

He returned to his place by Dove's side; but the peculiar meaning of that smile—or rather the possible meaning of it—vexed and irritated him so that he could not remain there. He professed himself tired of having seen the piece so often; and said he would go out for a walk, to cure himself of a headache he had, and return before the play was over.

So he went out into the cool night-air, and wandered carelessly on along the dark streets, bearing vaguely westward. He was thinking of many things, and scarcely knew that he rambled along Piccadilly, and still westward, until he found himself in the neighbourhood of Kensington.

Then he stopped; and when he recognised the place in which he stood, he laughed slightly and bitterly.

"Down here, of course. I had persuaded myself I had no wish to go to the theatre beyond that of taking Dove there, and that I was not disappointed when I found she did not play. Well, my feet are honester than my head."

He took out his watch. He had walked down so quickly that there were nearly two hours before he had to return to the theatre. Then he said to himself that, as he had nothing to do, he might as well walk down and take a look at the house which he knew so well. Perhaps it was the last time he might look on it, and know that she was inside.

So he walked in that direction, taking little heed of the objects around him. People passed and repassed along the pavement; they were to him vague and meaningless shadows, occasionally lit up by the glare of a shop-window or a lamp. Here and there he noticed some tall building, or other object, which recalled old scenes and old times; and, indeed, he walked on in a kind of dream, in which the past was as clearly around him as the present.

At the corner of the street leading down to the smaller street, or square, in which Annie Brunel lived, there was a chemist's shop, with large windows looking both ways. Also at the corner of the pavement was a lamp, which shed its clear orange light suddenly on the faces of the men and women who passed.

He paused there for a moment, uncertain whether to turn or venture on, when a figure came out of the shop which—without his recognising either the dress or the face—startled him, and made him involuntarily withdraw a step. It was the form, perhaps, or the motion, that told him who it was; at all events he knew that she herself was there, within a few yards of him. He did not know what to do. There was a vague desire in his heart to throw to the wind all considerations—his promise, his duty to one very dear to him; but he only looked apprehensively at her. It was all over in a second, in half a second. She caught sight of him, shrank back a little, uncertain, trembling, and then appeared as if she were about to pass on. But the great yearning in both their hearts suddenly became master of the situation; for, at the same moment, apparently moved by the same impulse, they advanced to each other, he caught her hands in his, and there was between them only one intense look of supreme and unutterable joy.

Such a look it is given to most men to receive once or twice—seldom oftener—in their lives. It is never to be forgotten. When a strong revulsion of feeling, from despondency and despair to the keen delight of meeting again, draws away from a girl's eyes that coy veil of maiden bashfulness that generally half-shrouds their light, when the spirit shines full and frank there, no disguise being longer possible, and it seems as if the beautiful eyes had speech in them—but how is it possible to describe such a moment in cold and brittle words? The remembrance of one such meeting colours a man's life. You know that when you have lain and dreamed of enjoying companionship with one hopelessly separated from you—of seeing glad eyes you can never see again, and hearing sweet talk that you can never again hear—you rise with a confused sense of happiness, as if the morning air were full of tender thrills; you still hear the voice, and you seem to be walking by the side of the sea, and there is sunshine and the sound of waves abroad. That dizzy remembrance, in itself a perplexing, despairing joy, is something like the thought of such a moment and such a look as that I speak of, when one glances backward, after long years, and wonders how near heaven earth has been.

When she went towards him, and looked up into his face, and when they walked away together, there was no thought of speech between them. Silence being so full of an indescribable joy, why should they break it? It was enough that they were near each other—that, for the present, there was no wide and mournful space between them, full of dim longings and bitter regrets. To-morrow was afar off, and did not concern them.

"Did you come to see me?" she said at last, very timidly.

"No."

Another interval of supreme silence, and then he said—

"Have you got quite reconciled yet? I was afraid of seeing you—of meeting

you; but now it seems as if it were a very harmless pleasure. Do you remember the last terrible night?"

"There is no use talking of that," she said; "and yet we ought not to meet each other—except—you know——"

"As friends, of course," he said, with a smile. "Well, Annie, we shan't he enemies; but I do think, myself, it were rather more prudent, you understand, that we should not see each other—for a long time, at least. Now, tell me, why are you not at the theatre?"

"I have given up the theatre."

"You do not mean to act any more?"

"No."

There suddenly recurred to him Mr. Melton's significant smile; and dead silence fell upon him. If there could be anything in the notion that the Count——

Clearly, it was no business of his whether she married the Count or no. Nay, if it were possible that her marriage with the Count should blot out certain memories, he ought to have been rejoiced at it. And yet a great dread fell upon him when he thought of this thing; and he felt as though the trusting little hand which was laid upon his arm had no business there, and was an alien touch.

"But," he said, in rather an embarrassed way, "if you have given up the theatre, it must have been for some reason——"

"For the reason that I could not bear it a moment longer."

"And now——"

"Now I am free."

"Yes, of course, free; but still—what do you propose to do?"

"I don't know yet. I have been looking at some advertisements——"

"Have you actually no plan whatever before you?" he said, with surprise—and yet the surprise was not painful.

"*None.*"

"Why," he said, "we have all of us got into a nice condition, just as in a play. I shouldn't wonder if the next act found the whole of us in a garret, in the dead of winter, of course."

"What do you mean?"

"My father has lost all his money, and doesn't know where to turn to keep his household alive. I——"

Here he stopped.

"Ah," she said, "and you find yourself unable to help them because of your arm."

"That will soon be better," he said, cheerfully, "and we will try not to starve. But you—what are you going to do? You do not know people in London; and you do not know the terrible struggle that lies in wait for any unaided girl trying to

make a living."

"So the Count says."

"Oh, you have told the Count?"

"Yes."

"What did he suggest?"

"He thinks I ought to marry him," she said, frankly.

"*You* marry *him*?"

"Yes. That was the only way, I daresay, in which he thought he could be of service to me. He really is so very kind, and thoughtful, and unselfish."

"And you answered——?"

He uttered these words with an air of forced carelessness. He wished her to understand that he would be rather glad if she thought well of the proposal. For a moment she looked at him, questioningly, as if to ask whether there was honest advice in that tone, and then she said, slowly—

"I said neither yes nor no. At the moment I did not know what to think. I—I knew that he would be kind to me, and that—he knew—that I liked him pretty well—as an acquaintance——"

"And you have not decided whether you ought to make the Count happy or no?"

The false cheerfulness of his voice did not deceive her.

"Yes, I have decided," she said, in a low voice.

"And you will——?"

"Why not be frank with me?" she said, passionately, and turning to him with imploring eyes. "Why speak like that?—would you not despise me if I married that man?—would I not despise myself? You see I talk to you frankly, for you are my friend: I could not marry him—I dare not think of my being his *wife*. I shall never be his wife—I shall never be any man's wife."

"Annie, be reasonable——"

"Perhaps it is not to you I should say that, and yet I know it. I am ashamed of myself when I think that I let him go away with the thought that I *might* accept his offer. But then I had not decided—I did not see it properly, not until I looked in your face to-night."

"It seems that I must always come between you and happiness."

"Do you call that happiness? But I must go back, now; poor Lady Jane is rather worse to-day, and I was at the chemist's, with a prescription from the doctor, when I met you. I hope we have not done wrong in speaking to each other."

So they went back, and he bade her farewell tenderly, and yet not so sadly as at their former parting.

It seemed to him, as he passed away from the door, that he heard a faint

sharp cry from inside the house. He took no notice of it, however. He was already some distance off when he heard swift footsteps behind him, and then the maidservant of the house, breathless and wild-eyed, caught him by the arm.

"Oh, sir, please come back; Mrs. Christmas is dead, sir! and the young missis is in such a dreadful state!"

He at once hurried back, and found that the terrible intelligence was too true. Annie Brunel seemed almost to have lost her senses,—so bitterly did she reproach herself for having neglected the bedside of her old friend.

"She was well enough, ma'am, when you went out," the servant maintained, consoling her mistress, "and there was nothing you could have done. I was in the room, and she asked for those letters as always lies in that drawer, ma'am; and when I took them over to her, she tried to put up her hand, and then she sank back, and in a minute it was all over. What could you have done, ma'am? She couldn't ha' spoken a word to you."

But the girl was inconsolable, and it was past midnight when Will left her, having wholly failed in his efforts to soothe the bitterness of her grief and desolation.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COUNT HESITATES.

When Will returned to the hotel, he found his father waiting up for him, alone. He was too much overcome by the terrible scene he had just witnessed to make any but the barest apology for his discourtesy, and even that his father interrupted as unnecessary.

"I left the theatre early," he said gloomily. "Dove was feverish and unwell. I think she must have caught cold when coming up with us in the morning. When I got her here, her cheeks were flushed and hot, and I saw that she was restless and languid by turns—in short, very feverish."

"Did you send for a doctor?"

"Oh, no; there was nothing one could speak to him about. To-morrow morning, if these symptoms are not gone, it might be advisable to consult some one."

They sate up very late that night discussing their future plans. There were but two alternatives before them. It was considered possible that with a few

thousand pounds Mr. Anerley could meet present liabilities, and wait over for the time at which it was hoped the affairs of the bank would, through the realisation of certain securities, be in a fair way of recovery. If, on the other hand, this present money was not forthcoming, the only course for Mr. Anerley was to remove from St. Mary-Kirby to London, and try to find some means of subsistence in the great city.

"There is only Hubbard, of all my old acquaintances, in a position to help me," said Mr. Anerley; "and he is the last whom I should like to ask for any such favour."

"I think you are inclined to misjudge the Count, sir," said Will; "and in this case you ought at least to see what he has to say before impeaching his good feeling. After all, you will find a good many men with as much money as the Count, and as little to spend it on, quite as unwilling to oblige an old friend as you half expect him to be."

After a good deal of argument, it was arranged that Mr. Anerley should see the Count on the following morning. Will forced him to this decision by a long description of what would fall upon the St. Mary-Kirby household in the event of his refusal.

"What is your pride compared with their wretchedness?" he said.

"My boy," he replied, "I have no pride, except when I have a good gun in my hand and a good dog working bravely in front of me. Further, do you know so little of your own family as to think that poverty, the nightmare of novelists, would be so appalling to them?"

"Not to them, perhaps; but to you, looking at them."

And that was true of the Chesnut Bank household. Misfortune was as bitter to them as to any other family; only it was for one another that they grieved. They had been educated into a great unselfishness through the constant kindly and half-mocking counsel of the head of the house; but that unselfishness only embittered misfortune. They did not brood over their individual mishaps, but they exaggerated the possible effects of misfortune on each other, and shared this imaginary misery. Mr. Anerley was not much put out by the knowledge that henceforth he would scarcely have the wherewithal to keep himself decently clothed; but it was only when he thought of Dove being deprived of her port-wine, and of Mrs. Anerley being cabined up in London lodgings (though these two were as careless of these matters as he about his matters), that he vowed he would go and see Count Schönstein, and beg him for this present assistance.

"As for Dove, poor girl!" he said to Will, "you know what riches she prizes. You know what she craves for. A look from one she loves is riches to her; you can make her as wealthy as an empress by being kind to her."

"I'm sure no one ever could be unkind to *her*," said Will.

But the visit to Count Schönstein was postponed next morning; for Dove was worse than on the previous night, and was fain to remain in bed. Of course a physician was called in. He had a long talk with Mr. Anerley, afterwards; and perhaps it was his manner, more than anything he actually said, that disquieted Dove's guardian. What he actually did say was that the young girl was evidently very delicate; that on her tender constitution this slight febrile attack might lead to graver consequences; and that she must at once have careful, womanly nursing and country air. *Per se*, her ailment was not of a serious character.

Mrs. Anerley was at once telegraphed for. Under the circumstances, they did not care to remove Dove to St. Mary-Kirby, with the chance of her having to return a few days afterwards to London.

"And if I had any misgivings about asking the Count to lend me the money," said Mr. Anerley, "I have none now. If country air is necessary to Dove's health, country air she shall have, somehow or other."

"If we cannot manage *that*, sir," said Will, "we had better go and bury ourselves for a couple of imbeciles."

So it was on the next morning that Mr. Anerley went to Count Schönstein's house in Bayswater. He went early, and found that the Count had just breakfasted. He was shown up to the drawing-room.

It was a large and handsome apartment, showily and somewhat tawdrily furnished. A woman's hand was evidently wanted in the place. The pale lavender walls, with their stripes of delicately-painted panelling, were scratched and smudged here and there; the chintz coverings of the couches and chairs were ragged and uneven; and the gauzy drapery of the chandeliers and mirrors was about as thick with dust as the ornate books which lay uncovered on the tables. There were a hundred other little points which a woman's eye would have detected, but which, on the duller masculine perception, only produced a vague feeling of uncomfortable disorder and want of cleanliness.

The Count entered in a gorgeously embroidered dressing-gown, above the collar of which a black satin neckerchief was tied round his neck in a series of oily folds.

"Good morning, Anerley," he said, in his grandest manner—so grand, indeed, that his visitor was profoundly surprised. Indeed, the Count very rarely attempted seignorial airs with his Chesnut Bank neighbour.

It is unnecessary to repeat the details of a very unpleasant interview. Mr. Anerley explained his position; the Count, while not actually refusing to lend him the money, took occasion to betray his resentment against Will. The upshot of it was that Mr. Anerley, with some dignity, refused the help which the Count had scarcely offered, and walked out of the house.

He was a little angry, doubtless, and there was a contemptuous curl on his

lips as he strode down the street; but these feelings soon subsided into a gentler sadness, as he thought of Dove and the chances of her getting country air.

He looked up at the large houses on both sides of him, and thought how the owners of these houses had only to decide between one sheltered seaside village and another, between this gentle climate and that gentler one, for pleasure's sake; while he, with the health of his darling in the balance, was tied down to the thick and clammy atmosphere of the streets. And then he thought of how many a tramp, footsore and sickeningly hungry, must have looked up at Chesnut Bank, and wondered why God had given all His good things—sweet food, and grateful wine, and warm clothing, and pleasant society, and comfortable sleep—to the occupant of that pleasant-looking place. It was now his turn to be envious; but it was for Dove alone that he coveted a portion of their wealth.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DECISION.

Dark as was the night on which Will and Annie Brunel had wandered along the lonely pavements of Kensington, they had not escaped observation. On whatever errand he was bent, Count Schönstein happened to be down in that neighbourhood on this night; and while these two were so much engaged in mutual confidences as scarcely to take notice of any passer-by, the Count had perceived them, and determined to watch them.

This he did during the whole of the time they remained outside. What he gathered from his observations was not much. At another time he would have paid little attention to their walking together for an hour or two; but that at this very time, when she was supposed to be considering whether she would become the Count's wife, she should be strolling about at night with one who was evidently on very intimate terms with her—this awakened the Count's suspicions and wrath. But the more he watched, the more he was puzzled. They did not bear the demeanour of lovers; yet what they said was evidently of deep interest to them both. There was no self-satisfied joy in their faces—rather an anxious and tender sadness; and yet they seemed to find satisfaction in this converse, and were evidently in no hurry to return to the house.

Once Miss Brunel had returned to the house, the Count relinquished further watch. He therefore did not witness Will's recall. But he had seen enough

greatly to disquiet him; and as he went homeward, he resolved to have a clear understanding with Miss Brunel on the following morning. He believed he had granted her sufficient time to make up her mind; and, undoubtedly, when he came to put the question point-blank, he found that her mind was made up.

Briefly, she gave him to understand that she never could, and that she never would, be his wife. Perhaps she announced her determination all the more curtly, in that her sorrow for the loss of Mrs. Christmas seemed to render the Count's demand at such a moment an insult.

The poor Count was in a dreadful way. In this crisis he quite forgot all about the reasons which had first induced him to cultivate Annie Brunel's society, and honestly felt that if her present decision were persevered in, life was of no further use or good to him.

"I am sorry," she said, "I have given you pain. But you asked me to speak plainly, and I have done so."

"You have so astonished me—your tone when we last saw each other at least gave me the right to anticipate——"

"There I have to beg for your forgiveness. I was very wrong. I did not know my own mind—I could come to no decision."

"May I venture to ask what enabled you to come to a decision?"

"I would rather not answer the question," she replied, coldly.

"Will you tell me if your mind was made up yesterday morning?" he asked, insidiously.

"It was not. But pray, Count Schönstein, don't say anything more about this at present. Consider the position I am in just now——"

"I only wish to have a few words from you for my further guidance, Miss Brunel," he said. "You came to this decision last night. Last night you saw Mr. Anerley. Have I not a right to ask you if he had anything to do with it?"

"You have no such right," she said, indignantly.

"Then I take your refusal to mean that he had. Are you aware that he is engaged to be married? Do you know that he is a beggar, and his father also? Do you know——?"

"I hope I may be allowed to be free from insult in my own house," she said, as she rose and—with a wonderful dignity, and pride, and grace that abashed and awed him—walked out of the room.

A dim sort of compunction seized him, and he would willingly have followed her, and begged her to pardon what he had said. Then he, too, felt a little hurt, remembering that he was a Count, and she an actress. Finally, he quietly withdrew, found a servant at the door waiting to let him out, and departed from the house with a heavy heart.

"A woman's 'no' generally means 'yes,'" he said to himself, disconsolately

trying to extract comfort from the old proverb.

He would not despair. Perhaps the time had been inopportune. Perhaps he should have postponed the crisis when he learned of Mrs. Christmas's death. Then he reflected, that he had been so intent on his own purpose as to forget to offer the most ordinary condolences.

"That is it," he said. "She is offended by my having spoken at such a time."

The Count was a shifty man, and invariably found hope in the mere fact of having something to do. There was yet opportunity to retrieve his blunder. So he drove to the office of Cayley & Hubbard, and found his meek brother sitting in his room.

"I never come to see you except when I am in trouble," said the Count, with a grim smile.

"I am always glad to see you, Frederick. What is your trouble now?"

"Oh, the old affair. She has left the theatre, as you know; she has lost that old woman; she is quite alone and penniless; and, this morning, when I offered to make her my wife, she said no."

"What were her reasons?"

"A woman never has any. But I think I vexed her in making the proposal when the corpse was lying in the next room. It was rather rum, wasn't it? And then she had been crying, and very likely did not wish to be disturbed. However, I don't despair. No. Look at her position. She *can't live* unless she accepts assistance from me."

"Unless——"

Mr. John Hubbard did not complete the sentence, but his face twitched more nervously than ever.

"Who *could* tell her?" asked the Count, angrily.

"She may get assistance from those other people——"

"The Anerleys?" replied the Count, with a splendid laugh. "Why, man, every penny of old Anerley's money is with Miall & Welling. Safe keeping there, eh? Bless you, she has no alternative—except this, that she's sure to run off and disappear suddenly in some wild attempt at becoming a governess. I know she means something that way."

"And then you'll lose sight of her," said the thin-faced brother, peering into the slip of grey sky visible through the small and dusty window.

What *his* thoughts were at this moment he revealed to his wife at night.

"My dear," he said, in dulcet tones, "I am afraid my brother is a very selfish man, and wants to get this poor girl's money. If she were to become friends with us, we might guard her against him. Indeed, it might only be fair to tell her what money awaits her, whenever she chooses to take it; and perhaps, you know, Jane, she might give a little present to the children, out of gratitude, you know."

"A few thousand pounds would be nothing to her, John," said the wife, thinking of her darling boys.

"And Fred's money he's sure to keep to himself. He seems to have no idea that his family have claims upon him."

However, to return to the Count, he then proceeded to unfold to his brother the plan he had conceived for the entrapping of this golden-crested wren which was so likely to fly away:

"All the little money she may have saved will be swallowed up in the funeral expenses. After that—what? Music-lessons, or French, or something. Very good. I know she has been already watching the advertisements in the *Times*. Now what I want you to do is this—publish an advertisement which will attract her attention, and secure her as a governess."

The two men had thought of the same thing, at the same moment, each for his own purpose. But John Hubbard suddenly began to fear that he would be made a cat's-paw of by his more favoured brother.

"The name, Frederick, might suggest to her——"

"I don't think she knows my personal name," said the Count, coldly. "Besides, you would not advertise as Cayley & Hubbard, which might remind her of *one* resource open to her, and you would not advertise as my brother, which would frighten her away. Let Jane advertise—she will do it better than either of us; and if it is necessary to get rid of your present governess, you can give her some small *solatium*, which I will repay you."

This was the advertisement which was finally concocted between them—

"*Wanted, a Governess. Must be thoroughly proficient in music and French. One who could assist in arranging private theatricals preferred. Apply,*" *&c., &c.*

It was submitted by Mr. John Hubbard to the inspection of his wife; and the mild, fat, pretty little woman approved of it:

"That is how I fancy we might get acquainted with her, my dear; and you know Frederick dare not come near the house at first, or she would be frightened away at once. Then, you know, we could be very kind to her, and make her grateful. She ought to be grateful, considering her position."

Jane acquiesced, but was not hopeful. She had heard her husband frequently speak of the strange things he encountered in his professional career; but she had never herself seen any of them. She did not believe, therefore, that any portion of a romance could be enacted in her prosaic house.

"It would be very nice," she said to her husband, "if it all came right; and we were to be friends with such a rich lady, and if she would only give the children something to make them independent of their uncle Frederick. I'm not fond of money for its own sake; but for the children, my dear——"

"Yes, the children are to be considered," said John, wondering whether his

pretty, placid, good-natured little wife believed that he believed that she believed what she said.

"I am sure a lady so well-born will be a charming companion," said Mrs. John, "whether she has been an actress or not."

"And we must change the sherry," said her husband.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONFESSION.

By the time that Mrs. Anerley arrived, Dove was sufficiently well to suffer removal from the hotel; and as there was now no help for it, the whole family removed to those rooms which Will had engaged for them from his landlord. The position of affairs had now to be disclosed; and with all the cheerfulness and mutual consolation they could muster, the prospect seemed doleful enough. Every one seemed to be chiefly concerned for Dove, and Dove was the least concerned of all. She put her arm round Mr. Anerley's neck, as he bent over the couch on which she lay, and whispered to him—

"You have lost all your shooting, poor papa."

"Yes."

"But then you have me. I'm as good as the biggest partridge you ever saw, am I not?"

"I think you are, darling."

"And you have lost all your fishing, poor papa."

"Yes, that too."

"But did you ever get a trout to kiss you as I do?"

Which was followed by the usual caress.

"And you won't have such lots of wine; but you know, papa, how angry you used to be when people did not appreciate what you thought was good."

"And where is my little Dove to get her port-wine after dinner on Sunday?" said he.

"You'll see, papa. Just after dinner, when we're all sitting at the table, and you are looking sadly at the dry walnuts, and everybody is thinking about the nice Sundays down in the country, you know, there will be a little rustling, and a little murmur of music in the air—somewhere near the roof; and all at once two bottles of wine will be hung round your neck by the fairies—for it's only

you who care about it, you know—and everybody will laugh at you. That is the punishment for thinking about port-wine. Do I want port-wine? You're an old cheat, papa, and try to make me believe I am ill that you may have your port-wine on Sunday. But I am not, and I won't have any extravagance."

He, with a great pain at his heart, saw the forced look of cheerfulness on her sweet face, and made some abominable vow about selling his mother's marriage-ring before Dove should want her port-wine.

Dove was really so well, however, when Mrs. Anerley came, that the anxious and tender mamma was almost at a loss how to expend the care and sympathy with which she had charged herself. It was at this juncture that Will proposed that Mr. and Mrs. Anerley should go and see Annie Brunel, and give her what comfort and assistance lay in their power. And no sooner were the circumstances of the girl's position mentioned, than both at once, and gladly, consented.

"But why not come with us?" said his mother.

"I would rather you went by yourselves. She will be only too grateful if you go to see her. She does not know how to manage a funeral. Then she is alone; you will be able to speak to her better than I, and in any case I must remain with Dove."

So they went, and when they were gone, Dove asked him to come and seat himself beside her couch. She put out her little white hand to him, and he noticed that her eyes were singularly large and clear. They were fixed upon him with the old tender sadness, and he was forced to think of the time when heaven itself seemed open to him in those beautiful, transparent depths. But why should they be sad? He remembered the old delight of them, the mystery of them, the kindness of them; and perhaps he thought that in a little time he would be able to awaken the old light in them, and rejoice in the gladness, and be honestly, wholly in love with his future wife.

"Why didn't you go with them?" she asked.

"And leave you alone?"

He could have wished that those eyes were less frank and less penetrating.

"Sometimes I fancy, Will, that you think me a great baby, and that there is no use explaining things to me, and that I am only to be petted and treated like a child. And so you have always petted me, like the rest, and I liked it very well, as you know. But if I am to be your wife, Will, you mustn't treat me as a child any more."

"Would you like to be old and wise and motherly, Dove? How must I treat you? You know you are only a poor little child, my dearest; but then, when we marry, you will suddenly grow very old."

There was no glad pleasure and hope in his voice, and doubtless she caught the tone of his speech, for the large eyes were absent and troubled.

"You are not frank with me, Will," she said, in a low voice. "You won't explain the difference there has been in you ever since you came back from Germany. Ah, such a difference!" she added, with a sigh, and her eyes were withdrawn from his face. "Perhaps I only imagine it, but everything seems altered. We are not to each other what we used to be: you are kinder than ever, I think, and you want to be what you were; but something has come between us, Will."

Every word she uttered lacerated his heart, for how could he look upon the patient, kind, sweet face, and tell a lie?—and how dared he tell the truth?

"Come closer, Will. Bend your head down, and I'll whisper something to you. It is this: Ever since you came back from Germany I have been wretched, without knowing why. Many a time I was going to tell you; then you always looked as if you were not as much my friend as you used to be, and I dared not do it. You have not been frank with me, and I have seen it often and often as I have watched you, and my heart used to lie cold and still like lead. And oh, Will, do you know what I've been thinking?—I've been thinking that you don't love me any more!"

She turned away her agonised face from him, and a slight shudder ran through her frame.

"Dove, listen to me——"

"And if it is true, Will," she said, with trembling lips, her face still being turned from him—"if it is true, don't tell me that it is, Will; how could I bear to hear you say that? I should only wish to die at once, and be out of everybody's way—out of your way too, Will, if I am in the way. I never expected to talk like this to you—never, never; for I used to think—down there in St. Mary-Kirby, you know—that you could never do anything but love me, and that we should always go on the same wherever we were. But things are all changed, Will. It was never the same after you left the last time, and since you have come back, they have changed more and more. And now up here in London, it seems as if all the old life were broken away, and we two had only been dreaming down there. And I have been sick at heart, and wretched; and when I found myself ill the other day, I wished I might die."

He had destroyed that beautiful world; and he knew it, although there was no chorus of spirits to sing to him—

"Weh! weh!
Du hast sie zerstört,
Die schöne Welt!
Mit mächtiger Faust;
Sie stürzt, sie zerfallt!

* * * * *

Prächtiger
Baue sie wieder
In deinem Busen baue sie auf!
Neuen Lebenslauf
Beginne,
Wit hellem Sinne
Und neue Lieder
Tönen darauf!"

Was it possible for him to build it up again, and restore the old love and the old confidence? It was not until this heartbroken wail was wrung from the poor girl that he fully saw the desolation that had fallen upon them. Bitterly he accused himself of all that had happened, and vainly he looked about for some brief solace he might now offer her.

"You don't say anything," she murmured, "because you have been always kind to me, and you do not wish to pain me. But I know it is true, Will, whether you speak or not. Everything is changed now—everything; and—and I've heard, Will, that when one is heartbroken, one dies."

"If you do not wish to break my heart, Dove, don't talk like that," he said, beside himself with despair and remorse. "See, give me your hand, and I'll tell you all about it. Turn your eyes to me, dearest. We are a little changed, I know; but what does it matter? So soon as ever we can, we shall marry, Dove; and then the old confidence will come back again. I have been away so much from you that we have lost our old familiarity; but when we are married, you know——"

Then she turned, and the beautiful violet eyes were once more reading his face.

"You *wish* us to be married, Will?"

"My darling, I do," he said eagerly, honestly, joyously—for in the mere thought that thereby he *might* make some reparation there lay peace and assurance for the future. "I wish that we could be married to-morrow morning."

She pressed his hand and lay back on the cushion with a sigh. There was a pale, wan pleasure in her face, and a satisfied languor in her eyes.

"I think I shall make a very good wife," she said, a little while after, with the old smile on her face. "But I shall have to be petted, and cared for, and spoiled, just as before. I don't think I should wish to be treated differently if I knew you were frank with me, and explained your griefs to me, and so on. I wished, darling, to be older, and out of this spoiling, because I thought you considered me such a baby——"

"You will be no longer a baby when you are married. Think of yourself

as a married woman, Dove—the importance you will have, the dignity you will assume. Think of yourself presiding over your own tea-table—think of yourself choosing a house down near Hastings, and making wonderful arrangements with the milkman, and the butcher; and getting into a terrible rage when they forget your orders, and blaming all their negligence on me."

"My dear, I don't think I shall have anything to do with butchers and milkmen."

"Why?"

"Because I don't think you will ever have any money to pay them with."

"So long as I have only one arm with which to work for you, Dove, you must learn to live on little; but still——"

"I shall not want much, shall I, if I have you beside me to make me forget that I am hungry? But it all looks like a dream, just like what is past. Are they both dreams, dearest? Were those real times down in the old house, when you and I used to sit together, or walk out together, over the common, you know, and over the bridge by the mill-head, and away over the meadows down by that strip of wood, and so on, and so on, until we came to the river again, and the road, and Balnacluith House, and the deer-park? How pleasant it was, in the summer evenings; but that seems so long ago!"

"How sad you have been these last few days, Dove!"

"Because I have been thinking, Will. And all that seems a dream, and all that is coming seems a dream, and there is nothing real but just now, and then I find you and me estranged from each other. Ah, yes, Will; you are very kind in speaking of our marriage; but we are not now what we were once."

"Dove," he said, with a desperate effort, "I cannot bear this any longer. If you go on moping like this, you will kill yourself. It is better you should know all the truth at once—you will listen, dearest, and forgive me, and help me to make the best we can of the future."

There was a quick sparkle of joy in her eyes.

"Oh, Will, Will, are you going to tell me all now?"

"Yes, dearest."

"Then you needn't speak a word—not a word—for I know you love me, after all. Perhaps not altogether; but quite enough to satisfy me, Will, and I am so glad—so glad!"

She burst into tears, and hid her face from him.

He scarcely knew whether grief or joy was the cause of this emotion; but in a minute or two she said—

"I am going to whisper something to you. You fell in love with Miss Brunel when you were over in Germany, and you found it out when it was too late, and you did not know what to do. Your kindness brought you back to me, though

your thoughts were with her. Is it not all true I have been telling you? And I was afraid it would be so always, and that you and I were parted for ever; for you hid the secret from me, and dared not tell me. But the moment I saw in your eyes that you were going to tell me, I knew some of the old love must be there—some of our old confidence; and now—now—oh, my darling, I can trust you with my life, and my heart, and all the love I can offer you!"

"You have spoken the truth, Dove," he said, and he knew that her rare womanly instinct had not lied to her, "and you have made me happier than I have been for many a day. You do not blame me much for what is past and gone? And you see that after all the old love may come back between us; and you will help me to bring it back, and keep it safe."

"And I will be a true wife to you, Will."

She fixed her eyes gravely and earnestly upon him. Then she lifted his hand to her lips, and—bethinking herself, perhaps, of some quaint foreign custom of which she may have heard—she kissed it, in token of meek submission and wifely self-surrender.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BAIT IS TAKEN.

Mrs. Anerley felt very nervous in going to visit Miss Brunel. She had never seen an actress in private life; and, on the stage, this particular actress had seemed so grand and majestic—so thoroughly out of and beyond the ordinary sphere of everyday existence—that she almost feared to approach so glorious a creature.

She was very particular about her dress; and perhaps she inwardly composed a few phrases to break the difficulty of introduction.

But there was no awkwardness where Mr. Anerley was concerned. He went forward, and took the girl by the hand, and told her, in as gentle a way as possible, the object of their mission. She was apparently much touched by this sign of their thoughtfulness and goodness; and said so briefly. Mrs. Anerley forgot all her prepared little speeches. While her husband talked to Annie Brunel, she stood and watched the strange intensity of the girl's large dark-grey eyes. There was no embarrassment there, and no scanning of the embarrassment of others; they were too absent, and yet full of a strong personal feeling, which showed itself as she accepted, with great gratitude, Mr. Anerley's offer.

"There is one other thing you ought to do," he said. "Get away from the house at once."

"If we could only have asked you to come down to our house in the country for a few days," said Mrs. Anerley, in her kindly way, "that would have been the best thing for you, and a great pleasure to us."

"You would have asked me to visit your home?" said the young girl, suddenly flashing her clear honest eyes on Mrs. Anerley's face.

"Yes—why not?" said Mrs. Anerley, almost in fright, fancying she had committed herself.

"You are very kind indeed," said Annie Brunel. "Actresses are not accustomed to such kindness—especially from strangers."

"But you mustn't call us strangers," said Mr. Anerley, good-naturedly. "We have the pleasure of knowing you very well; and in a few days we hope you will know something of us, if we can be of any service to you. To live in this house, alone, with these sad remembrances, is very unwise; and, in a day or two, you must leave it."

"Yes, I must leave it—because I must go where I can earn my bread. Has your son told you, sir, that I have left the stage? So I have; but at present I have no clear idea of what I must do—and yet I must do something."

"I am afraid you have placed yourself in a very perilous position," said Mr. Anerley.

"But I got to dislike the stage so much that I had to leave it."

"Why *you* should have left the stage!" exclaimed Mrs. Anerley, in open admiration, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Annie Brunel looked at her for a moment, and said, slowly—

"I have been very fortunate in giving you a good impression of myself. I thought most ladies outside the theatre looked down upon us theatre folk; and I was afraid you had come here only at your son's solicitation, with a sort of——"

"Ah, don't say any more," said Mrs. Anerley, with a genuine pain on her face. "It is not right to judge of people like that. I wish I could only show you what Dove and I would like to do in taking you among us, and making you comfortable, until you should forget this sad blow."

"As for *her*," said Miss Brunel, with a smile, "I knew she was too gentle and good to despise any one, the moment I saw her. But she was so much sweeter and truer than ordinary women that I accounted for it on that ground; and I grew so fond of her in a few minutes. And you, too—what can I offer you for your goodness to me but my gratitude and my love?"

"My poor girl!" said Mrs. Anerley, with a touch of moisture in the corner of her eyes, "I hope we may have some opportunity of proving to you what we think of you."

Mr. Anerley found that Will had explained to Miss Brunel the circumstances in which the family were now placed; so that he was relieved from the embarrassment of saying that whatever aid he might give her would not be pecuniary aid. But he had not much experience yet of the girl to whom he was speaking—of the quaint plainness and directness of her speech, the very antithesis of the style and manner which Mrs. Anerley had expected to meet.

Annie Brunel told him what small savings she possessed, and asked him if these could be made to cover all the expenses of the funeral, so that she might start on her new career unencumbered with debt. He thought it might be done, and he at once assumed the management of the sad details of the business before them.

"But then," she said, "I have the servant to pay: and I don't know what arrangement I may be able to make with the landlord of the house. Hitherto he has been very obliging."

"That, also, I will look after," said Mr. Anerley, "if you can put confidence in a man who has so successfully managed his own affairs as to bring his whole family into poverty."

"And I? Can I do nothing for you?" said Mrs. Anerley. "We who are all suffering from some kind of trouble should be glad to accept help from each other. Now, tell me—the clothes you may want—what have you done?"

"I had just begun to look over some things when you came in."

"Shall I stay and help you until dinner-time? Do let me."

And so, whilst Mr. Anerley went off to see the landlord, Mrs. Anerley stayed behind and lent her assistance to that work in which the feminine heart, even when overshadowed by a funeral, finds consolation and delight. And she afterwards declared that she had never worked with a pleasanter companion than this patient, self-possessed, and cheerful girl, whose queenly gestures, and rich voice, and dark clear face had so entranced and awed her when 'Juliet' came upon the stage.

The two women became confidential with each other in the most natural and easy way. Mrs. Anerley entirely forgot the actress, and became wonderfully fond of and familiar with this quaint-mannered girl, with the splendid hair and the honest eyes.

"For my own part," she said to her, "I am not at all sorry that my husband has lost this money, if it were not likely to affect Dove's comfort. You know he is such a very good man, and the very kindest and best husband a woman could wish to have; but I cannot tell you how it troubles me sometimes to think that he is not of the same religious opinions as the rest of us. That is the only thing; and I am sure it has been brought on by his being too well-off, and having nothing to do but read and speculate. He has never been put in a position requiring that

aid and comfort we get from religious service; and it is only carelessness, I am convinced, has led him away."

"And now you think this misfortune——"

"Not the misfortune altogether, but the rougher fight he will have with the world. He will be glad to have that sense of peace and rest with which people sit together in church, and forget their everyday troubles. If it will only do that for him—if it will only bring him back to us—I shall be glad that we have lost every penny we had in the world. It has been my trouble for years to think of his perilous state."

"He does not look like a man who would believe anything dangerous."

"I hope not—I hope not," said the tender wife; "I hope it is not dangerous. And yet I shall never feel that he is safe until he returns to the old faith and opinions he had when I first knew him. Even then, when a very young man, I was never sure of him. But he was always so respectful to every kind of religion, whether he believed in it or not, that I—yes, I—took him on trust."

"You do not seem to have regretted your choice," said Annie Brunel.

"No," she said, with a pleased and proud smile, "You won't find many people live more comfortably than we. But there is that one thing you see——"

"And your son—does he go with his father in these things?"

"I don't think so. I hope not. But both of them are such good men that I can't make up my mind to go and speak to them as if—as if they were sinners, you know."

A perplexed, humorous smile came over her face; and yet Annie saw that her friend was very much in earnest over this matter. It was the one bitter thing in this good woman's contented and peaceful lot.

After that interview Mrs. Anerley spent the better part of each day with her new protégée, and a wonderful love grew up between the two women—motherly and tender on the one side, trusting and childlike on the other. And for the first day or two Mr. Anerley paid far more attention to Annie Brunel's affairs than he did to his own, until Mrs. Christmas was hidden away from a world that had perhaps not been over-kind to her, and until the young girl was ready to go forth and seek her own existence. Will during this time never came near. He was trying to repair the beautiful world that he had shattered, and he kept faithfully to the task.

Finally, there came the question as to how Annie Brunel was to earn a living, and the *Times* was again called into requisition. Many a weary hour did Mrs. Anerley and her charge spend in reading through the advertisements, and writing letters in reply to those which seemed most suitable. No answer came to any one of these applications. For some reason or other they had not thought it worth while to reply to the advertisement about music, French, and private theatricals;

but at last the pertinacity with which the lines appeared in the newspaper drew discussion down upon them.

"If I were to be asked how I became proficient in theatricals, I should have to say I was on the stage; and I don't wish to do that."

"Why, dear?"

"Because the people might say they did not wish to have an actress in the house, and I want to avoid the insult."

"My dear, you have the absurdest notions. If they had seen you on the stage, they will be all the more delighted to have you. It was because you were an actress, I firmly believe, that I came to see you; and in a few days I have made a daughter of you."

"Nobody seems inclined to answer my letters," said the girl, ruefully.

"You may wait, and wait, for months," said Mrs. Anerley. "Add this one to the number, and tell them who you are. But you must tell them that you only want a small salary, or they will never think of engaging you."

So the letter was written in accordance with these suggestions, and posted with several others. By that night's post—and the exceeding swiftness of the response might have provoked some suspicion in less unworldly minds—there came a letter. Annie Brunel was alone. She saw by the unknown handwriting that the letter was likely to be a reply to one of her applications; and for a minute or two she allowed the envelope to remain unopened, while she wondered what sort of destiny lay folded within it.

These were the words she read—

"Rose Villa, Haverstock Hill, October 29, 18—.

"Mrs. John Hubbard presents compliments to Miss Brunel; is exceedingly obliged by the offer of her valuable assistance, and would Miss Brunel be good enough to call, at her convenience, any forenoon between ten and two? Mrs. Hubbard hopes that if Miss Brunel can be induced to accept the situation which lies at her disposal, nothing will be wanting to render her position in the house more that of a friend than an instructress. Mrs. Hubbard hopes her proposal, when properly explained to Miss Brunel, will meet with Miss Brunel's favourable consideration."

This to a governess! The girl scarcely knew how to regard the letter—so familiar, so respectful, so anxious.

"Here is another person who does not object to my being an actress. And I am to be her friend."

She came to the conclusion that a lady who could so write to a perfect stranger, must either be mad, or have an idea that, in asking Annie Brunel to her house, it was 'Juliet' or 'Rosalind' who might be expected to come.

CHAPTER XXXIV.
THE NEW GOVERNESS.

It was a cold wet day, in the beginning of November, when Annie Brunel got out of the Hampstead 'bus, and found herself in the muddy highway of Haverstock Hill: a wet and cheerless day, with a damp and cutting wind, and a perpetual drizzling rain, that made the black stems of the leafless trees glisten and drip; a day to make the people who passed each other in the street, vainly muffled-up against the wet and the keen cold, hate each other with a vague and gratuitous hatred. There was scarcely a traveller on foot who did not regard all others in similar plight as somehow responsible for the contrariety of the elements.

"What a pity you should have come to-day!" cried Mrs. John Hubbard, as she came into the hall to receive her visitor. "I would rather you had broken a dozen appointments. I hope you are not wet. I hope you are not cold. Come into the drawing-room at once; there is a nice warm fire to bring the blood to your fingers again."

During this speech Annie Brunel had time to examine her future mistress. She was not obviously mad. Indeed, the coal-black hair, the rosy cheeks, the small and pretty mouth, the neat figure and small hands, were the natural ornaments of a person who seemed mentally far too colourless and contented ever to be troubled by intellectual derangement. Yet the new governess was as much puzzled by her reception as by the letter she had received.

"There now, take this easy-chair—let me draw it in for you—and we shall have a chat over the matter. I have hitherto only had a morning governess, you know; the poor girl took unwell some time ago, and she has not been here for some days now."

At this precise moment, Miss Betham was upstairs, packing her music and preparing for final departure. But to the good-natured and mentally limp Mrs. Hubbard, lying came as easily as telling the truth. She would not have told a lie to secure a particular end; but in the course of conversation she did not seem to recognise the necessity of being exact in her statements. She lied broadly and

often; but she lied harmlessly—at least she meant to do no harm by her lying.

"I won't ask you any questions, Miss Brunel—not one. You have your own reasons for leaving the stage; and I'm not going to quarrel with what enables me to have your assistance (if we can make arrangements, that is), which I don't doubt for a moment."

"I am quite inexperienced, as I told you in my letter——"

"Oh, that does not signify," said the other, affably.

Annie Brunel looked up with a glance of astonishment, which any woman not a fool would have noticed.

"And if you think that I know enough to attempt to get into the way of teaching, I shall leave all the other arrangements to you. I am not anxious about the salary you may be inclined to give me; because, after all, it is only a trial. And if you think I am worth to you, in the meantime, so much per week as will keep me in food and pay my lodgings——"

"Your lodgings! I could not think of submitting you to the misery of lodgings so long as I have a comfortable room to offer you."

Mrs. Hubbard did not look like a practical joker; but her reception of the new governess looked uncommonly like a practical joke.

"You are very kind," said Annie, the wide eyes being a little wider than usual; "but I thought it was as a day-governess——"

"To be sure, we have always had a day-governess. But in *your* case I should prefer a resident governess, especially if you are about to leave your home and take lodgings."

"I meant to take lodgings somewhere near you, if I had the good fortune to please you."

"In this neighbourhood you couldn't get lodgings; and if you go down to Camden Town, or over to Kentish Town—oh, my dear, I couldn't think of it. My husband is very particular about everybody connected with us being treated fairly—like one of ourselves, you understand; and as soon as he heard of your being inclined to answer the advertisement, he said—

"'I hope Miss Brunel will find a comfortable home here.'"

This was another lie—indeed, what little intellect the poor woman had chiefly took the form of invention.

"I am not anxious to go into lodgings," said Annie Brunel, with a smile, "as I had a good deal of experience of them at one time."

"Shall we consider it settled, then?"

"But you do not know whether I am fit for the duties you require."

"What an objection! I know you are."

"Then, as to terms——"

"We shan't quarrel about terms. Come and stay with us as soon as you can,

and we'll make everything comfortable and agreeable for you, and we'll settle about terms afterwards. Then, you know, we shall have private theatricals to amuse you."

In certain stories, and in not a few dramas, Annie Brunel had seen a perfect stranger suddenly determine to play the part of a special Providence towards the heroine; but she was lost in astonishment to meet that incomprehensible friend in real life. Here she was, however; and when it is manna that the clouds rain, there is little reason in putting up an umbrella.

Mrs. Hubbard rang the bell, and sent a servant for the children. They came trooping down to the drawing-room, pushing each other, and looking very shy and a trifle sulky.

"This is the lady who will help you with your lessons now, my dears, since Miss Betham has gone."

"Miss Betham hasn't gone—she is upstairs yet," said Master Alexander, "and she has just told Kate to fetch her her sherry."

"Ah, come to look after some music she has left behind, perhaps," said Mrs. Hubbard, with a significant nod to Annie.

"You will find the children very obedient," she continued, "and nothing shall be wanting to add to your comfort. May we conclude the bargain to be settled?"

"Certainly, so far as I am concerned," said the girl.

These were the agreeable tidings which awaited Mr. John Hubbard when he returned home that night.

"She is such a charming person," said his wife; "I don't wonder at your brother being fond of her."

"He is fond of her money," said John Hubbard, gloomily, "and fancies himself sure of it now."

"It would be very wicked to take advantage of the girl's innocence in any way," said Mrs. Hubbard, a proposition to which her husband assented.

"But if we can touch her *gratitude*, my dear," said he, "there is no saying, as I told you before, what might happen."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANOTHER BLUNDER.

The old year died out; the new one came in—not attended with any very bright

auspices for the persons concerned in this story. John Hubbard was, perhaps, the only one of them who was pleased with present events, and hopeful for the future. During many a secret conclave with his good-natured, pretty, limp, and lying little wife, he speculated on what shape his governess's gratitude would ultimately assume.

Mr. Anerley had not succeeded in getting any employment. Several times he was offered certain situations, and was on the point of accepting, when his son peremptorily forbade any such notion.

"If you can get proper employment, and proper remuneration," said Will, "well and good; if not, the pound or two you would get would not compensate for the trouble and ignominy of such a position."

Will's voice in the matter was powerful, for he was supporting the household with such exertions as he was yet permitted to make. The old man did not think of trouble or ignominy. He thought only of Dove, and the numerous little luxuries to which she was accustomed. Nor dared he speak of this, except to his wife; for both saw the perpetual endeavours that Will was making for all of them. Sometimes the old man distrusted the audacious cheerfulness with which Will insisted on his mother and Dove having this or that particular luxury; and once he made a discovery that led him to think retrospectively of many things.

Down in St. Mary-Kirby there was no home entertainment which afforded Dove so much pleasure as having red mullet and champagne for supper; and the disgraceful little epicure picked so daintily her tiny morsel of fish, and sipped so quaintly, with coquettish eyes thrown at her father, her glass of wine, that to the other people the feast was much more æsthetic than sensuous.

"Mother," said Will, one evening, when he came home (but his words were directed to Dove), "we haven't had red mullet for supper for a long time. I've brought home some; and I've brought home a small case of champagne for the especial use of people who behave themselves."

"Oh, Will!" said the mother, "what extravagance!"

"The boy's mad!" said the father.

"Do you hear them, Dove? Now they have misconducted themselves, you and I shall have all the champagne to ourselves."

What a merry little party it was, that evening! The landlord of the house lent them the proper wineglasses; Dove went and put on part of the blue pearl head-dress the Count had given her, to make-believe she had been at the theatre; and when they sate down at the bright white cloth, with everything on the table as brilliant and clean as fingers could make it, it was quite like old times.

"Now, Will," said Mr. Anerley, "let's see what you've brought. Mind you, my taste isn't dulled by want of exercise."

"I didn't consider your taste a bit, sir. I got the wine for Dove, and it is as

sweet as——"

"Herself! These young people are too bashful to pay compliments nowadays. Ah, Dove, don't these bits of blue paper hold wonders within them—the treasures of the deep—the only fish worth calling a fish—and every one of them with a diamond ring in its mouth? Here, Will, give me your ring, that I may see how it looks on the nose of this famous fellow which I mean to give to Dove."

The young man darted a hasty deprecating look towards his father, and the blood rushed over his face. The father caught that swift look, and glanced at the finger on which Will generally wore this ring—one he had brought from Turkey. There was no ring there; it *had* been there that morning.

Mr. Anerley did not enjoy the supper. Sometimes the fish seemed to stick in his throat; and the wine had a bitter flavour.

But he did not spoil the enjoyment of the others; and Dove's delight at recalling one of the old bygone evenings was immense. She persisted in making-believe that they had been to the theatre, and criticized the actors gravely and severely. She pecked at her little piece of fish like a thrush at a ripe white cherry; and she wore on her pretty, small, blue-veined wrist a wonderful bracelet that Will had brought her from abroad.

"Shall I kiss the goblet for you, Sir Knight?" she said, taking a little sip out of Will's glass.

"And yours, venerable sir?"

"It seems to me," said Mr. Anerley, "that the old custom was a system of levying blackmail on all the wineglasses round. Still, I will pay the price. Well, now it isn't bad wine; but the bouquet is clearly owing to you, Dove."

"I didn't like the lover to-night," said Dove, critically. "He seemed as if his clothes were quite new. I can't bear a lover coming with new clothes, and trying to make an effect. A lover should forget his tailor when he is in love. And I am against people being married in new clothes, with bridesmaids in new clothes, and everybody in new clothes, and everybody feeling cramped, and stiff, and embarrassed. When I marry, I shall have my husband wear the old, old suit in which I used to see him come home from his work!—the clothes which I've got to love about as much as himself. I shan't have the tailor come between him and me."

"The heroine was rather pretty," hazarded Will, concerning the imaginary play.

"Well, yes. But she made love to us, and not to him. And I can't bear kissing on the stage—before such a lot of people—why don't they do all that before they come on the stage, and then appear as engaged or married?"

"But you would have to employ a chorus to come and explain to the audience what was going on in the 'wings,'" said Will.

And so they chatted, and gossiped, and laughed, and it seemed as if they were again down in the old and happy Kentish valley.

When they had retired for the night, Mr. Anerley told his wife his suspicions about the ring.

"I was afraid he had done something like that," she said. "But who could regret it, seeing Dove so delighted? I hope he won't do it again, however. I should tell him of it but that I know he will be vexed if we mention it."

By common consent the case of champagne was relegated to the grand occasions of the future. The family was not in a position to pay a wine-merchant's bill; and so they remained contented with the knowledge that on any sudden prompting they had it in their power to become extravagant and luxurious.

Then Dove was better, so far as they could see; and they bore their little hardships with wonderful equanimity. She was better, doubtless, but she was very delicate; and the doctor had had a long and serious conversation with Mr. Anerley, in which he was advised to take Dove to spend the rest of the winter in Italy. Sirius was quite as possible a destination.

By this time Annie Brunel had become familiar with the Hubbard family, and had definitely entered upon her new duties. The longer she stayed in the house, the more she was puzzled by the consideration with which every one, except her pupils, treated her; and even they were impertinent not through intention, but by habit. Mrs. Hubbard was almost obtrusively affectionate towards her governess. Everything was done to make her residence in the house agreeable. She lunched and dined with Mrs. Hubbard, so that poor Miss Betham's sherry was never called into requisition. When there was a dinner-party or a dance in the house, Annie Brunel was invited as a guest, introduced to visitors as a guest, treated with all the courtesy due to a guest. She was never asked to sing by the Hubbards; although she played and sang enough at the solicitation of other people. The children were taught to consider her, not as a governess, but as a friend of their mamma's. When there were people at the house, they were obliged to treat her as a gracious and distinguished lady who had come to spend the evening, not as a poor governess expected to find correct accompaniments for people who gratuitously changed the key three or four times in the course of a song.

As a governess, she ought to have been very grateful for such treatment. Yet she felt far from happy or contented. She did not like the pale, round-shouldered, nervous man who never looked one in the face. Despite the gratitude she could not but feel towards Mrs. Hubbard, she did not admire or love much that lady, whose unnecessary mendacity she had once or twice discovered. Here, however, was a home. Outside, the cold elements, the chiller hearts of strangers, the vicissitudes, trials, struggles, martyrdom of a fight for life; inside, warmth and

comfort, apparently true friends, and easy duties. She tried to be grateful for all these things; and when moods of lonely despair and melancholy overwhelmed her, she upbraided her own weakness, and resolved to be more thankful in the future.

The Count had not ventured to go near her. He was satisfied to know that she was in safe keeping. He could bide his time. He had made one blunder; he would not again commit the mistake of forcing marital concerns upon her while she was moved by grief for the loss of an old friend. He allowed the slow passing days and weeks to work for him; trusting that in time he would only have to step in and reap the rich harvest his prudence had prepared.

But he called frequently at the office of his brother, to receive reports. And the tone of the Count, on one or two occasions, was sufficient to stir up a mild remonstrance from even that patient and much-enduring person.

"You talk to me as if you had paid me to engage her and keep her in the house for you."

"Did you engage her for yourself? You know I suggested the thing to you; and am prepared to reimburse you for any extra expense you may have been put to."

"I declare," said the milder brother, "you talk as if you were fattening a pig, and I was watching the yard. You come and look over the palings, and gloat over your future satisfaction, and compliment me if the prospect is pleasing to you. Mind you, I don't think you have any supreme claim on the girl."

"Have *you*?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, what's the use of talking nonsense, Jack? If I marry her, it will be as good for you as for me."

"How?" said the lawyer, coldly, and with affected carelessness.

"Well," replied the Count, with some embarrassment, "there's the money, you see, coming into the family. That's a great matter."

"Yes, to *you*," said John Hubbard.

The Count looked at him for a moment; perhaps a thought struck him just then that, after all, his brother might be sincere in his view of the matter, and might testify his sincerity by carrying off the prize for himself.

"Gad, he can't do that very well," said the Count to himself, with a merry laugh, when he came to reflect on the conversation, "or what would Jane say? The girl is useless to him, so what's the use of his talking nonsense? Her money is safe from him, if safe from anybody."

But the more the Count thought over the affair, the less did he like the tone that his brother had lately assumed in talking of Annie Brunel. Further, he would have been as well pleased had he known that Miss Brunel was not *quite*

so comfortable in his brother's house.

These things were the subject of much conjecture and calculation on his part. They were also the theme of his after-dinner musings. Now, after-dinner dreams and resolves are very beautiful at times; but they should never be put down on paper. In an evil hour—it was one evening after he had dined, all by himself, in that great house down in Kent—he placed the following words in a letter to his brother:

"**Balnacluith House, near St. Mary-Kirby**, "Jan. 17, 18—.

"DEAR JOHN,

"Let me add a word to what I recently said about Miss Brunel. It is *your* interest to forward *my* interest, as you will discover. Now, I am afraid you are treating her with so much mistaken kindness that she will get to consider the position of governess pleasant. This is misleading her. She will only suffer for it afterwards. Nothing like wholesome severity at the time—nothing. Hubert Anerley came to me and asked me to lend him some money and let him off a bargain about my brougham and a pair of horses. Did I? I knew it would only delude him with absurd hopes, and I said no; and so he accepted his fate, and I suppose has set about repairing a fortune lost by his own carelessness. That's *my* way, Jack; and you're too kind to the girl. Get Jane to try some wholesome severity—to teach her what a governess is—frighten her—threaten to turn her out without a character, or something of the sort. Anything, so she is made to understand how insecure her position is. You understand? Then I step in, and our family becomes one of the richest in England. What do you say to that? Do it at once—and firmly. It will be better to be done *decisively—very decisively—and soon.*

"**Your affectionate brother**, "FRED. v. SCHÖNSTEIN."

Frederick von Schönstein should have seen his brother's face when that letter arrived. It was not an expressive face; but on this occasion there were several emotions clearly visible in it, and they were not of a mournful kind. Indeed, John Hubbard looked upon this letter as worth thousands of pounds to him. It was the key of the position. He showed it to his wife.

"What a brute!" she said, "to think of harming the poor girl. I have never liked your brother, my dear, since he began to try to entrap this girl, but now I am beginning to hate him."

And doubtless Mrs. Hubbard imagined, quite honestly, that it was merely compassion for her charming and unprotected governess which provoked her mild wrath and contempt.

"Fred's a fool, my dear, or he wouldn't have written that letter."

"Why?"

"Don't you see?" observed the husband, proud of his superior masculine perspicacity; "whenever he seeks to interfere with her, or with our relations towards her, we have only to show her this letter, and I think that will considerably cook his goose."

It was not often that the meek and proper brother of the Count was tempted into slang; but on this great occasion, when a lucky chance had delivered everything into his hands, he could not forbear.

Count Schönstein never waited for that course of severity which was to render Annie Brunel an easy capture. His solitary life at Balnacluith House was becoming more and more unbearable; and so, at length, he resolved to precipitate matters.

One forenoon, when he knew his brother would be out, he went up to Haverstock Hill. His sister-in-law was a little frightened by his appearance. She so far knew her own nature as to be aware that the Count had only to command and she would obey. *How* she wished that her husband were at home!

The Count was gracious, but firm. He begged her to grant him an interview with Miss Brunel, in tones which expressed his resolution to obtain the interview, whether his gentle sister-in-law agreed or not. For a moment a lie hovered on her lips; but probably she knew it would be of no avail; and so she only ventured on a remonstrance.

"If you do this now," said Mrs. John, "you will terrify her. She is not prepared. She does not know you are connected with us——"

"I can explain all these matters," said the Count, peremptorily.

"Very well," said his sister-in-law, meekly.

In a minute afterwards, Annie Brunel entered the room. No sooner did she see who the visitor was, than a surprised pleased light came into her eyes, and the heart of the Count leapt for joy. How beautiful she was to him then! The big bright eyes, the delicately rounded chin, the pretty mouth, the fine southern languor, and grace, and softness of her face and figure—and the cold, cheerless, empty desolation of Balnacluith House!

She shook hands with him.

"How did you discover me here?"

"Don't you know?" he asked. "Don't you know that Mrs. Hubbard is my sister-in-law—that her husband is my brother—have they never spoken of me?"

In an instant the whole thing was laid bare to her. She understood

now the extraordinary courtesy of her mistress; she understood now the references made by the children to the deer that their uncle Frederick kept; and the advertisement—she saw that that was a trap. The discovery shocked her a little, but it also nerved her. She knew she had been deceived; she was yet unaware of any purpose that the deception could serve; but she confronted the Count with an intrepid spirit, and looked him in the face.

That look terrified him. "Have I," he thought, "made another blunder?"

The next moment found him entering on a long series of explanations, entreaties, and superfluous assertions. It had all been done honestly. They were afraid she would be homeless. They had advertised out of friendly intention—in perfect good faith. He had refrained from visiting the house, lest she should consider herself persecuted. The Hubbards had not mentioned his name, fearing that even that might frighten her.

For a minute or two these rapid revelations and confessions somewhat confused her. But out of the blundering representations of the Count arose certain facts strong and clear as the daylight.

"That advertisement *was* a trap?" she said, fixing her large honest eyes upon him.

"But, you see——"

"And they have been treating me kindly, and deceiving me at the same time, that you might come——?"

"Don't say that," said the Count, deprecatingly. "They deceived you with the best intentions towards yourself. And have I not the same intentions? Look at your position—a governess, dependent on other people for your bread, liable to be out of a situation and starving at any moment, bound down to certain duties every day, and living a solitary monotonous life. Then look at what you would be if you would only listen to me; you would have nothing to do but enjoy yourself from January to December—you would have everything at your command——"

"I think I have heard quite enough, Count Schönstein," she said, firmly. "And you would have spared both of us some pain if you had taken the answer I gave you before."

"And that is your only answer?"

"It is."

"How can you be so cruel?—so unreasonable? What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to leave this house."

"Why?" he said, struck with astonishment.

"*You* need not ask me why. You have been a good friend to me, and I do not wish to part from you in anger. You have been kind to me. I am sorry it is impossible for me to ask you to see me again. I do not wish to see you again, or Mr. or Mrs. Hubbard, after what you have just told me."

She left the room, and the Count sate staring blindly before him, remotely conscious that something terrible had befallen him. The next thing he saw was Annie Brunel entering the drawing-room, followed by Mrs. John. The younger lady was dressed in black, and had now her bonnet and shawl on.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hubbard. "You astonish me. Deceive you? Never such a thought entered my head. And as for that advertisement, it was no trap at all, but addressed to all governesses. Of course we knew that you *might* see it, and we were very glad when you did see it; but that we intentionally deceived you, I appeal to Count Schönstein, Miss Brunel."

"What I know of these matters, Mrs. Hubbard, I have just learned from Count Schönstein," she said, coldly. "I don't accuse any one. Perhaps you did nothing unusual. I don't know anything about the customs among ladies. I have been brought up amongst another kind of people. Good morning."

There was no resentment on the calm and beautiful face, nor the least touch of sarcasm in the low soft voice. There was sadness, however—a resigned, patient sadness, that smote the heart of both her auditors, and kept them silent there, while she went outside—into London, alone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN OLD ADMIRER.

Nelly Featherstone was busy that night. The small room in which she sate working was littered with all sorts of beautiful dressmaking materials; and Nelly herself was diligently engaged—sewing heavy golden fringe upon a resplendent Venetian doublet of green satin, which had glimmerings of white and crimson silk across the chest, and white satin sleeves, tightened and crisped with gold. Indeed, the sheen of satin and glitter of gold lay all over the dingy little room. These were the raw material of the new grand burlesque; and Nelly, who made all her dresses herself, was famous for the historical accuracy of her costume. On this occasion, however, there was a green satin Glengarry lying on a chair, and green satin boots, with the heels not much bigger than a fourpenny-piece, on the table: and she wore on her fingers, to try their lustre, two large rings of cut-glass—the one a shining emerald, the other a brilliant crimson.

When Annie Brunel tapped at the door and stepped in, Nelly threw all these things aside, and rushed to her old friend, and hugged and kissed her in her usual

impulsive manner, with a dozen "my dears" to every sentence. Her friend's story was soon told; she wanted Nelly to help her to get some cheap lodgings in the neighbourhood.

"And so you know where to come first when you're down in your luck," said the girl, giving her another kiss, with the tears coming into her eyes—for Nelly's well-worn heart had still a true and tender throb in it. "So sit you down and take everything off your mind—and share my room to-night, and to-morrow we'll see about business. Give me your bonnet, there now. Poor dear mother Christmas!—and I'll give you something to do until supper-time comes, and then we shall have a bit of cold mutton and bottled stout. Oh, I've had my trials, too, my dear, since I saw you."

"What's been the matter with you, Nelly? That young gentleman, I suppose——?"

"Oh, yes, he's always at it. But, thank goodness, I've got rid of him at last."

"Quite sure?" said the other, with a smile.

"Oh, quite. Such a fearful row we had, my dear. First about lip-salve; he accused me of using that to make my lips red, when I declare I haven't used it for two years. Very well, just as we had made that up, you know, dear, we were walking along Oxford Street, and there was a match-boy amusing himself, opposite a publichouse, with a lot of other boys, and he was dancing a very, *very* clever breakdown step, and I said I'd give my ears if I could do that, just in fun, you know; and, lor, the passion he got into! Stormed about my low tastes, abused the British drama, said I had no more sentiment than a clown; and then I ordered him off, and walked home by myself."

"And which of you was the more miserable, Nelly?"

"I miserable? Not I. That very night Mr. Helstone sent me the most beautiful little speech about politics and other stuff, and Mr. Melton says I may use it in my part."

"You'll break that young gentleman's heart, Nelly. Indeed, it is a shame——"

"Nonsense! But I'll have my revenge upon him this time for his quarrelling with me. You see this is a boy's dress. I've made the skirt of it two inches shorter than I should have done. There. And I shall be in tights; and dance a breakdown; and sing a music-hall song; and when the lime-light comes on at the end, *I'll stare into it as hard as ever I can.*"

"But why should you injure your eyes?"

"To provoke him. He will be there. And he hates to see me in a boy's dress; and he hates to see me dance——"

"But I thought you were never to see him again."

"Neither I shall. Never."

Miss Featherstone's landlady tapped at the door, and entered with a letter.

"Please, miss, he says he's sorry to trouble you, but is there an answer?"

Nelly hurriedly ran over the letter, and there was a wicked smile of triumph on her face.

"It's *him*," she said to her companion. "Would you like to see him? Shall I ask him to come up, since you are here?"

"By all means."

"Mrs. Goddridge, tell him I have a friend with me, and he may come up, if he likes."

Blushing, embarrassed, delighted, shamefaced, and yet radiant with joy, Mr. Frank Glyn was introduced to Annie Brunel. He was a good-looking slightly-built young fellow, with a sensitive cast of face, pleasant large blue eyes, and a certain tenderness about the lines of the mouth which boded ill for his future reminiscences of his acquaintance with Miss Nelly Featherstone. That young person should have been flirted with by a man of stronger mettle than Frank Glyn.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," he said, nervously, looking at the table.

"I hope you are in a better temper than when I last saw you," said she.

"We may let bygones be bygones now, Nelly. It wouldn't do to fight before Miss Brunel. She might have a strange impression of us."

"I think you are two foolish children," said Annie Brunel, "who don't spend a peaceable life when you might."

"I say so, too," said Nelly. "Life is not so long, as I have told him, that we can afford to throw it away in quarrels. And yet he *will* quarrel. Confess that you always do quarrel, Frank. There's only one person in the world who is always good to me; and I do so love him! When the dear old gentleman who made me these boots brought them home, and when I looked at them, I could have thrown my arms round his neck."

"I dare say you could, without looking at the boots," said her lover, with a fierce and terrible sneer.

"I suppose it's a weakness," said Nelly, with philosophic equanimity, "but I confess that I love a pair of beautiful little, bright, neat, soft, close-fitting boots better than any man I ever saw."

She caught up that charming little pair of gleaming boots, and pressed them to her bosom, and folded her hands over them, and then took them and kissed them affectionately before placing them again on the table.

An awful thundercloud dwelt on poor Frank's brow.

"I shall take them to bed with me," said the young lady, with loving eyes still on the small heels and the green satin; "and I'll put them underneath my pillow, and dream of them all the night through."

Mr. Glyn got up. There was a terrible look in his eyes, and a terrible cold

harshness in his voice, as he said:

"I am interrupting your work and your conversation, ladies. Good-night, Miss Brunel; good-bye, *Miss Featherstone*."

With which he shook hands and departed—to spend the rest of the evening in walking recklessly along dark suburban roads, wondering whether a few drops of prussic acid might not be his gentlest and truest friend.

First love had been awakened in Frank Glyn's heart by the unlucky instrumentality of Miss Featherstone. Delighted with this new and beautiful idealism, he was eager to repay her with an extravagant gratitude for what, after all, was only his own gift to himself. Nelly knew nothing of this occult psychical problem; but was aware of the extravagant gratitude, and conducted herself towards it and him with such results as do not concern this present history.

"You are very hard upon the poor boy," said Annie Brunel.

Nelly pouted prettily, as if she had been ten years younger than she was, and said he had no business to be so quick-tempered. But after supper, when they were retiring for the night, and she had grown confidential, she confessed she was very fond of him, and hoped he would come again and "make it up."

"I can't help quarrelling with him, and he can't help quarrelling with me; and so we'll go on, and on, and on——"

"Until you marry."

"No, until I marry somebody else, for the sake of peace and quiet. And yet I declare if he were to come boldly up to-morrow and insist on my marrying him, I'd do it at once. But he is always too sensitive and respectful, and I can't help teasing him. Why doesn't he *make* me do what he wants? He's a man, and I'm a woman, and yet I never feel as if he were stronger than I was—as if I ought to look to him for strength, and advice, and what not. He's too much of a girl in his delicate frightened ways."

Next morning Nelly got a messenger and sent him up to Mr. John Hubbard's for Annie Brunel's boxes, which had been left packed up. Then they two went out to inspect some lodgings which had been recommended to them by Miss Featherstone's landlady. The house was a dingy building in Howland Street, Tottenham Court Road; but the rent of the two rooms was small, and Miss Brunel engaged them. She had very little money now in her purse. Mrs. Hubbard and she had been on so peculiar terms that both refrained from talking about salary; and when the boxes were brought down to Nelly's place by the messenger, no communication of any kind accompanied them.

"If they want to see me, Nelly," said Annie Brunel, "they will send to your house, thinking that my address. But I don't want my address to be given them, mind, on any consideration."

"But how are you to live, my dear?"

"I must find out, like other people," she said, with a smile.

"Won't your Anerley friends help you?"

"What help could I take from them? Besides, they are worse off than myself, and that pretty girl of theirs, about whom I have so often spoken to you, is very poorly, and wants to be taken out of London. I should rather like to help them than think of their helping me."

"Won't you come back to the stage, then?"

"Not until I'm starving."

The rehearsals for the new burlesque began, and a farce was put on in which Nelly played; so that, for several days, she was so busy from morning till night that she never had time to run up to see her friend in these poor Howland-street lodgings. So Annie Brunel was left alone. The Anerleys had not her address. The Hubbards she was only too anxious to avoid. Mrs. Christmas, her old companion, was gone; and around her were thousands of her fellow-creatures all struggling to get that bit of bread and that glass of water which were necessary to her existence.

The landlady and her husband treated her with great respect, because, when asked for a month's rent in advance, she at once gave them the two sovereigns demanded. There remained to her, in available money, about twenty-four shillings, which is not a great sum wherewith to support a person looking out for a situation in London.

In about a week's time Nelly Featherstone called. After the usual osculation and "my dearing," Nelly assumed a serious air, and said that it wouldn't do.

"You're looking remarkably ill, and you'll be worse if you sit moping here, and doing nothing. You must be a descendant of Don Quixote. Why not come down to the theatre, see Mr. Melton, and get an engagement?"

"I can't do it, Nelly.

"You mean you won't. Then, at all events, you'll spend to-day as a holiday. The rehearsals are all over. I shall send for Frank, and he will take us into the country."

"For shame!—to drive that poor fellow mad, and then call him back whenever you want a service from him!"

"It will give him far more delight than it will us."

"No, Nelly; I have no heart to go anywhere. If you have promised to meet your Frank, as I imagine, you ought to go off by yourself at once."

"I'm not going to do anything of the kind. Tell me what you mean to do if you remain in the house."

"See if there are any more letters I can write, and watch the postman as he comes round from Tottenham Court Road."

"Then you can't go on doing that for ever. Put on your bonnet, and let us

have a walk down Regent Street, and then come and have dinner with me, and spend the afternoon with me, until I go to the theatre."

This she was ultimately persuaded to do. Nelly did her utmost to keep her friend in good spirits; and altogether the day was passed pleasantly enough.

But the reaction came when Nelly had to go down to the theatre alone.

"You look so very wretched and miserable," said she, to Annie. "I can't bear the idea of your going home to that dull room. And what nonsense it is not to have a fire because you can't afford it! Come you down to the theatre; Mr. Melton will give you a stage-box all to yourself; then you'll go home with me to-night, and stay with me."

She would not do that. She went home to the cold dark room—she lit only one candle for economy's sake—and she asked if there were any letters. There were none.

She had only a few shillings left now. She abhorred the idea of getting into debt with her landlady; but that, or starvation, lay clearly before her. And as she sate and pondered over her future, she wondered whether her mother had ever been in the like straits—whether she, too, had ever been alone, with scarcely a friend in the world. She thought of the Count, too.

"If the beggar would marry the king, and exchange her rags for silk attire," she said to herself, bitterly, "now would be the time."

By the nine-o'clock post no letter came; but a few minutes after the postman had passed, the landlord came up to the door of her room.

"A letter, please, miss—left by a boy."

Hoping against hope, she opened it as soon as the man had left. Something tumbled out and fell on the floor. On the page before her she saw inscribed, in a large, coarse, masculine handwriting, these words—

"*An old admirer begs the liberty to send the enclosed to Miss Brunel, with love and affection.*"

But in that assumed handwriting Nelly Featherstone's *e*'s and *r*'s were plainly legible. The recipient of the letter picked up the folded paper that had fallen. It was a five-pound note.

"Poor Nelly!" she said, with a sort of nervous smile; and then her head fell on her hands, which were on the table, and she burst into tears over the scrawled bit of paper.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

POSSESSION.

Mr. Joseph Cayley., Junr., sate in his private room in the office of Cayley & Hubbard. He was an unusually tall man, with a thin, cold, hard face, black eyes, black hair, and an expression of extraordinary solemnity. He looked as if none of his ancestors had ever laughed. A shrewd and clear-headed man of business, he was remarkable at once for his upright conduct of professional affairs, and for the uncompromising frankness, with the extreme courtesy, of his personal demeanour. His friends used to wonder how such a man and John Hubbard ever pulled together; but they did, and their business was even better now than when old Mr. Cayley took John Hubbard into partnership.

A card was handed to Mr. Cayley by one of the youths in the office. He glanced at the card, looked at it attentively, and then there came over his face a singular expression of concern, surprise, and almost fear.

"Show her in," he said, sharply, to the lad.

He rose and paced up and down the room for a moment; then he found himself bowing into a chair a lady completely dressed in black, who had just entered.

"Will you permit me," he said, fixing his big black eyes upon her, "to ask my partner to join us? I anticipate the object of your visit—and—and——"

"Does your partner live at Haverstock Hill?"

"Yes."

"I would rather speak with you alone, then," said the young lady, calmly. "I have here a letter from my mother, Mrs. Brunel, to you. I need not explain to you why the letter has not been delivered for years. I was not to deliver it until necessity——"

"You need not explain," said Mr. Cayley, hurriedly taking the letter. "This is addressed to my father; but I may open it. I know its contents; I know everything you wish to know, Miss Brunel."

When he had opened the letter, he read it, and handed it to Annie Brunel, who read these words—

" *Mr. Cayley,*

" ***My daughter claims her rights.*** " *Annie Marchioness of Knottingley.* "

She looked at him, vaguely, wonderingly, and then at the faded brown writing again. The words seemed to disappear in a mist; then there was a soft sound in

her ears, as of her mother's voice; and then a sort of languor stole over her, and it seemed to her that she was falling asleep.

"Take this glass of wine," was the next thing she heard. "You have been surprised, alarmed, perhaps. But you know the handwriting to be your mother's?"

"Yes," was the reply, in a low voice.

"And you understand now why you were to call upon us?"

"I don't know—I don't understand—my mother ought to be here now," said the girl, in hurried, despairing accents. "If that letter means anything, if my mother was a rich lady, why did she keep always to the stage? Why conceal it from me? And my father?—where was he that he allowed her to travel about, and work day after day and night after night?"

"He was dead."

Many and many a time had Joseph Cayley rehearsed this scene upon which he had now entered. His earliest initiation into the secrets of the office was connected with it. It had been a legacy to him from his father; and the unusual mystery and importance of the case had so impressed him, that he used to imagine all the circumstances of the young girl's coming to claim her own, and of his speeches and bearing during the interview. He forgot all his elaborate speeches, and remembering only the bare facts of the case, related them with as great delicacy as he could. Now for the first time did Annie Brunel understand the sad circumstances of her mother's story, and for the moment she lost sight of everything else. She was away back in that strange and mournful past, recalling her mother's patient bearing, her heroic labour, her more than heroic cheerfulness and self-denial, and the bitter loneliness of her last hours.

"It was his friends who kept him from her?" she asked, not daring to look up.

The lawyer knew better; but he dared not tell the cruel truth to the girl.

"Doubtless," he said. "Your father's friends were very proud, and very much against his marrying an actress."

"And my mother feared my going among them?"

"Doubtless. But you need not do so now."

"Do they know who I am?"

"Yes, *my lady*."

He uttered the words, not out of compliment, but of set purpose. It was part of the information he had to give her. She looked up to him with a curious look, as if he were some magician who had suddenly given her sacksful of gold, and was about to change the gold again into flints.

"If all this is true, why did I never hear it from any one else?"

"We alone knew, and your father's friends. They concealed the marriage as well as they could, and certainly never would speak to any one about you."

"And all these estates you speak of are mine?" she said, with a bewildered look on her face.

"Yes."

"And all that money?"

"Certainly."

"Without the chance of anybody coming forward and saying it is not mine?"

"There is no such chance that I know of, once you have been identified as Lady Knottingley's daughter, and that will not be difficult."

"And I can do with the money what I like?" she asked, the bewilderment turning to a look of joy.

"Most undoubtedly."

"Out of such sums as you mention, I could give 20,000*l.* to one person, and the same amount to another?"

"Certainly. But you will forgive my saying that such bequests are not usual—perhaps you will get the advice of a friend."

"I have only two friends—a Miss Featherstone, and an old gentleman called Mr. Anerley. These are the two I mean."

Mr. Cayley opened his eyes with astonishment.

"Miss Featherstone of the —— Theatre?"

"Yes."

"You propose to give her 20,000*l.*?"

"Yes," said the young girl, frankly, and with a bright happy look on her face.

"The imprudence—the indiscretion—if I may say so!—(although it is no business of mine, my lady, and we shall be glad to fulfil any of your instructions). What could such a girl do with that sum of money?"

"What shall I do with all the rest—if it is real, which I can scarcely believe yet? But I wish you to tell me truly what was my mother's intention in keeping this secret from me. I was only to apply to you in extreme need. No one knows how extreme my need is—how extreme it was last night, when it drove me to take out that letter and resolve to appeal to you."

"Your mother told my father why she should keep the secret from you. She wished you never to undergo the wrongs she had suffered by coming in contact with those people whose influence over your father she feared and hated."

"And how she used to teach me always to rely upon the stage!" she said, musingly, and scarcely addressing herself to the man before her. "Perhaps I have done very wrong in relinquishing it. Perhaps I am to have as miserable a life as she had; but it will not be through *them*."

"Now, my lady, there is no necessity why you should ever see one of the family."

"And it was her wish that I should come to you when I was in extreme distress——?"

"Distress! I hope not pecuniary——"

"That, and nothing else," said the girl, calmly.

Mr. Cayley was only too glad to become her banker until the legal arrangements should permit of her stepping into a command of money such as Harry Ormond himself had never owned.

"And in the meantime," she added, "you will not mention to any one my having seen you. I do not know what I shall do yet. I fear there is something wrong about it all—something unreal or dangerous; and when I think of my poor mother's life, I do not wish to do anything in haste. I cannot believe that all this money is mine. And the title, too—I should feel as if I were on the stage again, and were assuming a part that I should have to drop in an hour. I don't want all that money; I should be afraid of it. If my mother were only here to tell me!"

Mr. Cayley was called away at this moment to see some other visitor. In his absence John Hubbard came to the door of the room and looked in.

He saw before him a figure which he instantly recognised. The girl was looking at the sheet of brown paper which bore her mother's name, her eyes were wet, and her hands were clasped together, as if in mute supplication to that scrap of writing to say something more and guide her in this great emergency. John Hubbard guessed the whole situation of affairs directly. Without a moment's hesitation, he entered, and Annie Brunel looked up.

"My poor girl!" he said, in accents of deep compassion, with his pale face twitching nervously, "I understand your sad position; and if you had only remained in our house a few days longer, our counsel and advice might have been of service to you in this crisis. How deeply you must feel the want of a true and faithful adviser——!"

John Hubbard became aware that he had made a mistake. All the return that his sympathetic consolation provoked was a calm and penetrating look: and then, with a sudden change of manner, that surprised and half frightened him, she rose to her feet, and said, coldly and proudly—

"I am here on business; it is Mr. Cayley I wish to see."

Bewildered alike by her manner and her speech, Mr. Hubbard only blundered the worse.

"My lady," he said hurriedly, and with profound respect, "you will forgive me if I have been too forgetful in offering you my sympathy. But as an old friend—our old relations—the pleasant evenings——"

"Mr. Hubbard," she said, in the same tone (and before the clear, cold, cruel notes of her voice the walls of his imaginative Jericho fell down and crumbled into dust), "I am much obliged to you and your wife for having employed me. I

hope I did my work in return for the food I received. As to your kindness, and the pleasant evenings spent in your house, I have an impression which I need not put into words. You know I had a conversation with your brother before I left your house which seemed to explain your kindness to me. At the same time, I am as grateful to you as I can be."

"That brother of mine again!" thought John Hubbard, with an inward groan.

Mr. Cayley came into the room, and was surprised to find his partner there.

"I wish to speak to you in private, sir," said Miss Brunel to Mr. Cayley; and thus dismissed, John Hubbard retired, thinking of the poor children who had been deprived of handsome little presents all through the blundering folly of their uncle.

"Hang him!" said John Hubbard; "the best thing the fool can do is to shoot himself and leave his money to the boys. As for *her*, he has set her dead against me for ever. And now she will be Lady Annie Knottingley, and my wife might have been her best friend, and we might have lived, almost, at that splendid place in Berks—and the children——"

There was no more miserable creature in London that day than the Count's brother; and he considered himself an injured, ill-used, and virtuous man.

The appearance of John Hubbard had done this one good thing—it had determined Annie Brunel to make up her mind. It recalled so forcibly the loneliness and misery, the humiliation and wretchedness of these past months, that she instantly resolved never, if she could help it, to come into contact with such people again. With this wealth at her command, she was free. She could choose such friends, and scenes, and pursuits as she liked best; she could—and here the warm heart of her leapt up with joy—she could reach out her hand to those friends who might be in want—she could be their secret protector, and glide in like an invisible fairy to scare away the wolf from their door by the sunshine of her gilded and luminous presence. This splendid potentiality she hugged to her heart with a great joy; and as she went away from Mr. Cayley's office (after a long interview, in which he explained to her the legal aspects and requirements of the situation) there was a fine happy light on her face. She no longer doubted that it was all real. She already felt the tingling of a full hand; and her brain was busy with pictures of all the people to whom that hand was to be freely extended. In many a romance had she played; but never a romance like this, in which all the world but herself was ignorant of the secret. She would go about, like an emperor with a bundle of pardons in his pocket, like a kindly spirit who would transform the coals in poor men's grates into lumps of gleaming rubies, and diamonds, and emeralds. She would conceal her mysterious power; and lo! the invisible will would go forth, and this or that unhappy man or woman—ready to sink in despair before the crushing powers of circumstance—would suddenly receive her

kindly help, and find himself or herself enriched and made comfortable by an unknown agency.

Like every one who has suffered the trials of poverty, she fancied that nearly all the ills of life were attributable to want of money, and she saw in this wealth which had become hers a magnificent instrument of amelioration. She had a very confused notion of Mr. Cayley's figures. She knew the value of five pounds, or twenty, or even a hundred; but when it came to thousands, comprehension failed her. She could not tell the difference between a hundred and fifty thousand pounds and the same sum per annum; both quantities were not reducible to the imagination, and consequently conveyed no distinct impression. She knew vaguely that the money at her command was inexhaustible; she could give each of her friends—certainly she had not many—a fortune without affecting (sensibly to herself) this accumulation of banker's ciphers.

So she walked westward through the crowded city, weaving dreams. Habit had so taught her to dread the expense of a cab, that she never thought of employing a conveyance, although she had in her pocket fifty pounds which Mr. Cayley had pressed upon her. She was unaware of the people, the noise, the cold January wind, and the dust. Her heart was sick with the delight of these vague imaginings, and the inexpressible joy of her anticipations was proof against those physical inconveniences which, indeed, she never perceived.

Yet her joy was troubled. For among all the figures that her heart loved to dwell upon,—all the persons whom she pictured as receiving her munificent and secret kindness—there was one with whom she knew not how to deal. What should she give to Will Anerley? The whole love of her heart he already possessed; could she, even though he were to know nothing of the donor, offer him money? She shrank from such a suggestion with apprehensive dislike and repugnance; but yet her love for him seemed to ask for something, and that something was not money.

"What can I do better than make him marry Dove, and forget me?" she said to herself; and she was aware of a pang at her heart which all Harry Ormond's money, and twenty times that, could not have removed.

For a little while the light died away from her face; but by-and-by the old cheerful resolute spirit returned, and she continued her brisk walk through the grey and busy streets.

"Mr. Cayley," she said to herself, talking over her projects as a child prattles to its new toys, "fancies Mr. Anerley had thirty or forty thousand pounds. If I send him that, they will all go down to Kent again, and Dove will win her lover back to her with the old associations. They might well marry then, if Will were not as fiercely independent as if he were a Spanish Duke. I could not send him money; if he were to discover it, I should die of shame. But it might be sent to

him indirectly as a professional engagement; and then—then they would marry, I know—and perhaps they might even ask me to the wedding. And I should like to go, to see Dove dressed as a bride, and the look on her face!"

Dove did not know at that moment what beautiful and generous spirit was scheming with a woman's wit to secure her welfare—what tender projects were blossoming up, like the white flowers of charity and love, in the midst of the dull and selfish London streets. But when Annie Brunel, having walked still farther westward, entered the house which the Anerleys occupied, and when she came into the room, Dove thought she had never seen the beautiful dark face look so like the face of an angel.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ORMOND PLACE.

A still, cold, beautiful morning in March,—the dark crimson sun slowly creeping up behind the tall and leafless trees of the wood on this Berkshire hill. There is snow everywhere,—snow on the far uplands, snow on this sloping forest, snow on the shelving ground that glides down to the banks of the smooth blue waters of the Thames. There is a ruddy glow over that wintry waste of white; for the eastern vapours deaden the light of the sun, and redden it, and steep the far horizon in a soft purple haze. There is not a breath of wind. The sere and withered stems of the tall grey rushes by the riverside are motionless, except when the wild ducks stir in their marshy secrecy, or the water-hens swim out to take a cautious look up and down the stream. Here and there, too, the river catches a streak of crimson and purple, as it lies hushed and still in the hushed, still white meadows.

Back from these meadows lies the long low hill which slopes downward to the east, and loses itself in illimitable woods. Up here on its summit is the little village of Steyne—only a church, with a square grey tower, a vicarage smothered in dark ivy, and two or three cottages. Farther along the great bank you come to the woods of Ormond Place; and right in the centre of them, in a great clearance visible for miles round, stands, fronting the river and the broad valley and the far landscape, the house in which Harry Ormond, Marquis of Knottingley, died.

It is a modern house, large, roomy, and stately, with oval-roofed green-houses breaking the sharp descent of the walls to the ground; a house so tall and well-placed as to overlook the great elms in the park, which, on the other side

of the broad and banked-up lawn, slopes down into the valley. As the red sun rises over the purple fog, it catches the pale front of the house, and sheds over it a glimmer of gold. The snow gleams cold and yellow on the evergreens, on the iron railings of the park, on the lawn where it is crossed and recrossed with a network of rabbits' footprints. Finally, as the sun masters the eastern vapours, and strikes with a wintry radiance on the crimson curtains inside the large windows (and they have on this morning a wanner light flickering upon them from within), Ormond Place, all white and gold, shines like a palace of dreams, raised high and clear over that spacious English landscape that lies cold and beautiful along the noblest of English rivers.

There was life and stir in Ormond Place this morning. The carriage-drive had been swept; the principal rooms in the house stripped of their chintz coverings; great fires lit; the children of the lodge dressed in their smartest pinafores; the servants in new liveries; harness, horses, carriages, and stables alike polished to the last degree. The big fires shone in the grates, and threw lengthening splashes of soft crimson on the thick carpets and up the palely-decorated walls. The sleeping palace had awoke, and the new rush of life tingled in its veins.

About twelve o'clock in the forenoon the carriage that had been sent to Corchester Station returned with two occupants inside. The children at the lodge, drawn up in line, bobbed a curtsey as they stared wonderingly at the carriage-window, where they saw nothing. A few minutes afterwards Annie Brunel, pale a little, and dressed entirely and simply in black, walked into her father's house between the servants, who were unconsciously trying to learn their future fate in the expression of her face. And if they did not read in that face a calm forbearance, a certain sad sympathy and patience, they had less penetration than servants generally have.

She entered one of the rooms—a great place with panelled pillars in the centre, and a vague vision of crystal and green leaves at the farther end—and sate down in one of the chairs near the blazing fire. It was not a moment of triumph—it was a moment of profound, unutterable sadness. The greatness of the place, the strange faces around her, increased the weight of loneliness she felt. And then all the reminiscences of her mother's life were present to her, and she seemed to have established a new and strange link between herself and her. It seemed as if the great chasm of time and circumstance had been bridged over, and that in discovering her mother's house, and the old associations of these bygone years, she should have discovered her also, and met the kindly face she once knew. If Annie Napier had walked into the room just then, and laid her hand on her daughter's shoulder, I do not think the girl would have been surprised.

"Was my mother ever in this house?" she asked of Mr. Cayley, not noticing that he was still standing with his hat in his hand.

"Doubtless. She was married in that little church we passed."

"And instead of spending her life here in comfort and quiet, he let her go away to America, and work hard and bitterly for herself and me."

Mr. Cayley said nothing.

"Do you know anything of her life here? How long she stayed? What were her favourite rooms? Where she used to sit?"

"No, your ladyship; I only presume Lady Knottingley must have lived here for a little while before going to Switzerland. My father might be able to tell me."

"I am very anxious to see him,—he is the only person I am anxious to see. He knew my mother; perhaps he can tell me something about her life here and in Switzerland. She *may* have left some things in the house—a book or a picture—that he might tell me was hers; don't you think so?"

Mr. Cayley, against his knowledge, was forced to admit that it *was* possible, for he saw there were tears in the girl's eyes.

"Would you care to go through the house now?" he suggested. "Mrs. Tillotson will go with you, and see what arrangements or alterations you want made. And about your future residence here——"

"I cannot stay here," she said; "the place is too big and too lonely. I could not bear to live alone in this great place."

"Your ladyship need not want for society. Both of the trustees, Lord Sefton and——"

"I will not see one of them!" she said, with flashing eyes. "I consented to see them, when you said it was necessary—but to meet them as friends! They knew my mother; they must have seen her and known her; and they never tried to help her. They were men; and they let a woman be treated like that!"

The bitter scorn of the words sounded so strangely as it came from the gentle face; but there was an indignant flush in her cheeks, and indignation in her eyes.

"My mother spent years of weary labour that she might never go amongst these people. With all her love for me, she thought it better that I, too, should work for my living, and run the chances of illness, rather than go amongst them; and am I to make friends with them now? Their condescension is great; but when a woman has lived the life that I have; she begins to mistrust people who want to be friends with you only when you become fortunate. And why do they want to be friends with me? They will take me into society?—I don't wish to go. They will offer me their wives and sisters as companions?—I prefer other companions. I would rather walk out of this house a beggar to-morrow morning, than pretend to be friends with people *whom I hate*!"

"Your ladyship is unjust," said Mr. Cayley. "These gentlemen tried to induce your mother to return to England, and accept that effort at compensation which

Lord Knottingley made when it was too late. Nor could they show any interest in your welfare before now without revealing that secret which your mother had imposed on us all. As well blame me for not seeking you out before you came to our office. We all of us knew who you were; we were bound to let you make the first overtures yourself."

"Compensation? You imagine that a woman who had her heart broken should have accepted that tardy acknowledgment of her rights as a sufficient compensation?"

"It was all Lord Knottingley could then offer," said the lawyer, who stuck manfully to the clear outlines of the case as they lay mapped out in his brain, without regard to the distortion produced by the generous impulses of love, and pity, and indignation. These disturbant influences, in the present case, he could not well understand; for he failed to comprehend the powerful caste-hatred which the girl had sucked in with her mother's milk—a bitter and illogical prejudice, which neither the tenderness of her own nature, nor the provoked arguments of Will, nor the wise counsel and example of Mr. Anerley, had in any way tempered.

Shortly afterwards, they went on a tour of inspection through the house, accompanied by Mrs. Tillotson, a tall, thin-faced, dark woman, with placid melancholy eyes and a soft voice. The first question asked of the housekeeper by her new mistress was whether she remembered Lord Knottingley's wife. But neither Mrs. Tillotson, nor any one of the servants, had been with Lord Knottingley at that time.

"Except Brooks, my lady, perhaps; he has been with the family since he was a boy.

"Who is Brooks?"

"The lodge-keeper. Perhaps your ladyship didn't see him at the gate, for he is old, and seldom moves out-of-doors. But surely on such a day as this——"

"I saw some children——"

"They are his grandchildren—John Brooks's children. They all live in the lodge. But he is sure to present himself during the day; and I hope your ladyship won't be offended by his—his manner—his bluntness of speaking——"

When they had gone through the house, and the young girl had indicated what rooms she should occupy, they returned downstairs. There was an old man in the hall, his cap in his hand, his long white hair falling on the neck of his fine Sunday coat, which was considerably too small for him. He regarded Annie Brunel with a curious look, and said to her, as she approached—

"Pardon, my lady; I thought I'd come up and see as it were all true. And true it is—true it is."

"That is Brooks," said Mrs. Tillotson.

The girl bade the old man go into the great drawing-room.

"You don't remember me," he said. "I remember you; but as you came down them stairs, I'd 'a sworn it wasn't you. If they hadn't told me you were coming, I should ha' said it was a ghost—the ghost o' your mother as come down them stairs."

"You remember her?" she said, with an eager bright look.

"Ay, and you too. You don't remember me; but I nearly killed you once—when your pony tried to take the upper 'and on ye, and I 'it 'im, and afoor I knew where I was——"

"But where did all this happen?"

"Why, in Switzerland, where you and your mother was. I've good eyes; I can remember. And there's lots more o' the old folk as might, only they've turned 'em all off, and brought in new uns, as doesn't know nothin' o' the family, or the Place. It was your father as said I should live here till I died, and then they can turn me out, if they like; and I came up to see if it was true you had come home, and whether you'd want me to go with the rest. If you mean it, say it, plump and plain. I'm not afear'd to go; I can earn my living as well as younger men I knows on about this 'ere very place——"

"My good man, don't disquiet yourself. You will never have to leave your house through me. But I want you to tell me all you know about my mother—everything. Won't you sit down? And you will have some wine?"

Mr. Cayley rang for some wine; and Annie Brunel herself poured some into a glass, and gave it to the old man.

"I like the wine—and it's not the first time by forty year as I've tasted his lordship's wine—but I can't abide them big blazing fires as melts a man's marrow."

"Come outside, then," said the girl; "the day is pleasant enough out-of-doors."

"Ah, that's better," he said; and his keen fresh face brightened up as he stepped outside into the brisk cold air, with the brilliant sunshine lying on the crisp snow.

The two of them walked up and down the long carriage-drive, between the tall rows of bleak trees; and as the old man garrulously gossiped about the past times, and his more or less confused memories, it seemed to Annie Brunel as though the whole scene around her were unreal. The narrowing avenue of trees, the heaped-up snow, the broad shafts of sunlight falling across the path, the glimpses of the white meadows, and the blue stream, and the wintry sunshine hitting on the vane of the village church, were all so very like a theatrical "set;" while the man beside her, whom she had never seen before, seemed to be some strange link connecting her with a forgotten and inscrutable past. The assurance that he would not be "turned off to follow the rest" had softened old Brooks's

usually querulous and pugnacious manner; and in his most genial fashion he recalled and recounted whatever stories he could remember of Annie Brunel's old childhood, and of her mother's happy life on the margin of that Swiss lake.

He actually gossiped his companion into cheerfulness. Forgetting all about Mr. Cayley, she went with Brooks down to the lodge; and there the old man, intensely proud of the familiarity he had already established between himself and her, presented to her, with calm airs of superiority, his overawed son and daughter-in-law. And the new mistress made herself quite at home; and had two of the children on her knee at once; and was interested in Tom's pet blackbird; and expressed her admiration of Jack's string of blown eggs; and finally invited all the young ones to tea, in the housekeeper's room, that evening at six punctually. Another visitor was expected that evening. Much as Annie Brunel desired to play the part of a secret and invisible benefactor to all her friends, she found that this would cut off from her any chance of companionship; and so, before going down into Berks, she had told the story of her altered fortunes to Nelly Featherstone, and begged of that young person to come down and stay with her for a time. Nelly burst into tears of joy; was profoundly conscious of the benefit of having so desirably rich a friend; was honestly delighted and prudently speculative at the same moment, and accepted the invitation.

Nelly was a girl of spirit. She knew she would be inspected by critical servants, and perhaps by visitors of exalted rank, and she resolved not to shame her old friend. She accurately sketched beforehand the character she would assume; fixed her demeanour; decided the tone she would adopt in speaking to Lady Annie Knottingley; and, finally, bought the current number of *Punch*, and dressed her hair and herself in imitation of one of the ladies of that periodical.

The carriage was sent to meet her at Corchester in the evening. The calm dignity with which she treated the servants was admirable. Nor was her dress less admirable, so far as a faithful copy of the *Punch* lady was concerned, except in point of colour. Unfortunately she had no guide to colour, except her own rather whimsical taste; and as several parts of her attire belonged to her dramatic wardrobe, she looked like a well-dressed lady seen through a prism.

When she entered the house, confronted the servants, was introduced to Mr. Cayley, and quietly went up to kiss Annie Brunel, her manner was excellent. A woman who makes a living by studying the ridiculous, and imitating it, can lay it aside when she chooses. Nor was her assumption of womanly dignity and reserve less a matter of ease. Nelly Featherstone was clever enough to conceal herself from the eyes of a critical London audience; surely she was able to impose on a lot of country servants, and a lawyer inexperienced in theatrical affairs.

When she came into the drawing-room before dinner, her make-up was magnificent. She was a little too gorgeous, certainly; but in these days consider-

able latitude is allowed in colour and shape. Miss Brunel was alone.

"Why, Nelly," she said, "what was the use of your troubling to make yourself so fine? I must have put you to so much expense."

"Well, you have," said the other. "But it isn't every day I dine at a grand house."

"And you mustn't talk to me as if I were a duchess merely because Mr. Cayley is present. I have asked him to dine with us. You must speak to me as you are speaking now."

"Oh, no, my dear, it would never do," said the practical Nelly, with a wise shake of the head. "If you don't remember who you are, I must. You are a fine lady; I am an actress. If you ask me to visit you, it is because you wish me to amuse you. But when I'm not amusing you, I must be respectful. Mr. Cayley knows who I am; the servants don't. I can be grand to them; but with him——"

"My absurd girl, why won't you be yourself? You don't need to care for Mr. Cayley, or the servants, or any one else. Mr. Cayley knows I was an actress; if the servants don't, they will very soon. And you are here merely as my friend; and I am deeply indebted to you for coming; and if Mr. Melton will only refrain from changing the pieces for weeks to come, we shall have a pleasant romp together down here. By the way, did you hear some absurd noises a few minutes ago?"

"I did."

"That was my first token of popularity. I had the lodge-keeper's children up here to tea; and as they all got a lump of cake when they went away, they collected round the door outside and cheered. I think they call that intimidation and bribery—buying the popular vote, or something of the kind."

During dinner an obvious battle was being waged between Nelly and the butler. But the official and cumbrous dignity of the one was no match for the splendid and haughty languor of Nelly's eyes, and the indolent indifference of her manner and tone. Somehow the notice of the servants was chiefly drawn to Miss Featherstone; but she decidedly managed to conquer them, and that in a style which puzzled and amused her friend at the head of the table. Nor would Nelly permit the least familiarity of approach on the part of her hostess. And as it would have been preposterous to have chatted confidentially with a person who returned these advances with a marked deference and respect, "my lady" fell into her friend's whim, and the conversation at dinner was consequently somewhat peculiar.

When the two women were left alone, however, Annie Brunel strongly remonstrated. But Nelly was firm:

"If you don't know who you are, I do."

Drawing two low easy-chairs in towards the fire, they sat down and entered into mutual confidences. The one had much to tell—the other much to suggest;

and never had two children more delight in planning what they would do if they were emperors, than had these two girls in concocting plots for the benefit of all the persons they knew, and a great many more.

Miss Brunel took a note from her pocket, and gave it to her companion to read.

"In strict confidence," she added.

These were the words Nelly saw:—"*A friend, who has urgent reasons for remaining unknown has placed to the credit of Mr. Hubert Anerley, at the London and Westminster Bank, the sum of* 30,000*l. Mr. Anerley is asked to accept this money as a free and frankly-offered gift, to be used on behalf of himself and his family. A bank-note of* 100*l. is enclosed, to satisfy Mr. Anerley that this communication is made in good faith.*"

"Thirty thousand pounds!" said Nelly, in an awed whisper. "I have often thought of some one sending me a lot of money—thousands, millions of money—but I think if any one were actually to send me a hundred pounds, I should die of surprise first and joy afterwards."

"The money has already been placed to his account at the bank; and this note will be sent to him to-morrow, when Mr. Cayley returns to town. How I should like to send old White the prompter a hundred pounds—the poor old man who has that dreadful wife!"

"Don't do anything of the kind, my dear," said Nelly, sagely. "He would starve his wife worse than ever, because he wouldn't earn a penny until he had drunk every farthing of the money you sent him."

"Perhaps you will forbid my giving you anything?"

"Certainly not; I should be glad of a cup of tea or coffee."

"Which?"

"I like coffee best, but I prefer tea," said Nelly, with grave impartiality.

Tea and coffee having been procured, they continued their talk.

"You went to my lodgings?"

"Yes."

"And secured them for an indefinite time?"

"Yes."

"And all my clothes and things are as I left them?"

"Yes—that is, as far as I could look over them. Mr. Glyn was with me."

"Oh, he has forgiven you again!"

"Certainly not," said Nelly, with a touch of indignation. "*He* has not forgiven me, for I never provoked a quarrel with him in my life. He has come to his senses, that is all; and he is no sooner come to them than he is off again. But this is the final blow; he will never get over this."

"This what?"

"My disappearance from London without telling him. I go back. He comes to see me; is surprised, offended; wants me to be penitent for having annoyed him by my silence. Of course I am not. Then he becomes angry, demands to know where I have been. I tell him that is my business, and he goes off in a fury. *That's* nothing new. But then he sends me a formal note, saying that unless I write to him and explain my absence from London he will never see me again."

"Which you will do?"

"How could I without telling him about you?"

"Say you went to visit a friend."

"Then he says, 'What friend?' with a face as black as thunder. I reply that I won't be subjected to his suspicions. He retorts that he is not suspicious; but that common-sense, and what not, and what not. I tell him that he dare not talk to a lady of his own class in the way he talks to me; and that it is because I am an actress that he is suspicious, taking up the vulgar prejudices against actresses. Now, all the time I have known him, I don't think we ever passed a day without having a quarrel about the profession."

"Your acquaintanceship must have been agreeable?"

"It has. There is nothing both of us like so much as quarrelling and making-up. For my part, I couldn't bear to have a sweetheart always pleasant, and reasonable, and sensible. I like one who is madly in love, who does extravagant things, who quarrels fearfully, and gets frantic with delight when you let him be friends again."

"But the very last time we spoke of Mr. Glyn you said he and you would never get on together, because he wanted those very virtues of solidity, and common-sense, and manly forbearance. You said he was too like yourself."

"Did I say so? Well, I have a different explanation of it every day. I only know that we perpetually quarrel, and that the making-up of quarrels is very nice."

"What would you do if I were to give you £500 a-year?"

"Go to Paris, and drive in the Bois de Boulogne with a pair of ponies," replied Nelly, with admirable precision.

"Wouldn't you marry Mr. Glyn, leave the stage, and be comfortable in some small house at Hampstead?"

"No," she said, frankly; "I haven't got the domestic faculty. I should worry his life out in a few months."

"What do you say, then, to going with me to America? I mean to leave England for a long time—for some years—and I shall spend most of the time in America, visiting the places my mother and I used to know."

"You are going to leave England?" said Nelly, looking up with earnest, curious eyes.

"Yes."

"You will forgive my saying it—you have had some peculiar secret from me for a long time—not your coming here, but something quite different. I knew that when you suddenly left the stage, and wouldn't return, for no reason whatever. Why should *you* have left the stage, of all people?"

"I left it simply because I got to dislike it—to hate it!"

Nelly Featherstone said nothing, but she was evidently not satisfied with the answer. She remained unusually thoughtful for some time.

"And now you are going to America," she said. "Is there no other reason besides your wish to visit those places you speak of?"

"There is; but it is of no consequence to any one."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'THE COULIN.'

The snow that shone and gleamed in the sunlight along the Berkshire hills lay thick in the London squares, and was trampled brown and dry in the London streets; and yet even in the City it was white enough to throw a light upon the faces of the passers-by, until commonplace countenances underwent a sort of transfiguration; and there was in the atmosphere a pearly radiance that brightened the fronts of the grey houses, and glimmered into small and dingy rooms.

"Let all the light come in," said Dove, lying in bed, with a strange transparent colour in her cheeks, and a wan lustre in her beautiful violet eyes; and when they let the strong light in, it fell on her face, and painted away the shadows under the eyebrows until the head that lay on the soft pillow acquired a strange ethereal glory—a vision coloured with sunlight.

"You haven't played 'The Coulin' for me for a long time now, Dove," said Mr. Anerley.

"You used never to like my playing 'The Coulin;' why do you want me to play it now?"

"I wish you were well enough to play anything, my darling."

The girl stretched out her tiny pale hand towards his:

"How you have petted me lately! If I were to get up just now and sing you the song I used to sing you, you wouldn't laugh at my 'meghily' any more, would you?"

"*Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now*"—the words sounded in his ears as the refrain of some spirit-song, heard long ago, in happy times, down in the far-off legendary Kentish Eden, where they had once lived.

"A letter for you, papa," said Mrs. Anerley, entering the room.

"I don't want it," he said, petulantly and angrily turning away—quarrelling with the mist of bitter tears that rose around his eyes.

She glanced from him to Dove (her kindly eyes brightened as they met the quiet look of the girl), laid the letter down, and left the room again. Mechanically he took up the letter, opened it, and read it. Before he had finished, however, he seemed to recall himself; and then he read it again from the beginning—carefully, anxiously, with strange surprise on his face. He looked at the envelope, again at the letter, and finally at the bank-note which he held in his hand.

"Dove, Dove!" he said, "look at this! Here is the money that is to take us all down to St. Mary-Kirby again—back to the old house, you know, and your own room upstairs; and in a little while the springtime will be in, and you and I shall go down to the river for primroses, as we used to do. Here it is, Dove—everything we want; and we can go, whenever you brighten up and get strong enough to move."

"But where did you get the money, papa?"

"God must have looked at your face, my darling, and seen that you wanted to go to St. Mary-Kirby."

"And you have plenty of money, papa, to spend on anything?"

All his ordinary prudence forsook him. Even without that guarantee of the bank-note, he would at once have believed in the genuineness of the letter, so eager was he to believe it for Dove's dear sake.

"Plenty of money, Dove? Yes. But not to spend on anything. Only to spend on you."

"There was Will's knock," she said; "he has just come in time to hear the news. But go and tell him in another room, papa, for I am tired."

So he left the room, and, as Will had come in, the two men had a long consultation over this strange letter.

"You need not remain long in suspense, sir," said Will; "write me out a cheque for fifty pounds, and I will take it down to the bank."

"But I have none of the printed cheques of the bank."

"You don't need one. That is a vulgar error. Any bit of paper with a stamp on it will do."

"But they must know that my signature is genuine."

"True. You must come down with me and see the manager. In any case, we can bear the disappointment, if the thing is a hoax. When you have ascertained that you are a rich man, father, I'll give you another piece of good news."

Mrs. Anerley was left with Dove, and the two men drove off to the bank. The manager had expected the visit. He warded off Will's bold inquiries with a grave silence; he had received certain instructions—it was not his business to say from whom.

"Before I can avail myself of this money," said Mr. Anerley, "you must at least answer me one question. Was it placed in your hands by Frederick Hubbard—by Count Schönstein?"

"No."

"Thank you."

So they went out into the free air, and lo! London was changed. It was no longer a cruel and bitter mother, starving her children, heedless of their cries and their sufferings; but a gracious empress, profuse of feasts, with stores of pleasures in her capacious lap. And this generous creature was to exercise all her power on behalf of Dove; and pure air, and the sweet sunlight, and the sharp hunger of health, were once more to make the young girl's face less shadowy and unreal.

"Now for your news, Will," said the old man, cheerfully.

"Nothing much, sir," said he. "Only that I have gained the appointment, and the company guarantees me 1000*l.* a year for three years. It never rains but it pours, you see; and if Heaven would only send one more good——"

"My poor girl's health," said the old man; and he would have given up all his money, and been glad to suffer far greater privations than he had done for the rest of his life, only to secure that one supreme blessing.

When they returned to the house, Mrs. Anerley came to say that Dove wanted to see Will, alone. He went into the room, and stooped over her, and kissed her forehead, and took her hand. She looked very pleased and happy.

"Papa won't be vexed any more. He has got plenty of money, has he not?" she said.

"Yes; but that money is for them. *Our* money, Dove, must come from me; and I have got it—I have got the appointment—and so hurry, hurry fast and get well; and then, hey! for a carriage, and cream-white horses, and jingling bells to take my Dove to church."

She pressed his hand slightly; and her eyes were wistful and absent. The beautiful land lay along the horizon, and she strained her vision to see it, and the sight of it—for it was so very beautiful—made her sad.

"Come close down, Will, and let me whisper to you. I have taken a fancy into my head lately. I never spoke of it, for I knew neither you nor papa had money; but now it is different. You said we were to be married."

"Why talk of our 'maghiage' in that melancholy way, you provoking mouse!"

"Don't laugh at me, Will! What I have been thinking is this: that I should

like to know that I could be married to you at any time without having to wait until I was better—which might be for such a long, long time; and I should like to know that at any moment I could say to you, 'Will, make me your wife *now*,' and you could come into the room, and all the people would know that I was your wife."

There are ghastly dreams in which the sleeper, gazing on a broad and sunny landscape, suddenly becomes conscious of a cold and terrible pressure, and lifting up his eyes sees a broad cloth, white and black like a funeral pall, descending slowly from the sky, and shutting out the glad sunlight, and gliding down upon the earth. All living things fly from it; if they remain, they grow fixed and immovable, and their eyes become glazed as the eyes of death.

As terrible as such a dream was the vague, scarcely-to-be-imagined suggestion which these patient simple words of Dove bore with them; and Will, horror-stricken by the picture on which her absent eyes seemed now to be gazing (with its dreadful hint about the people standing around), demanded why she should ask this thing, or why she troubled her mind with it.

"My dearest," she said, with a faint smile stealing across the childlike face, "it does not vex me. It pleases me. There is nothing dreadful about the idea to you, is there? I cannot go with you to church to be married. When you talk of a carriage, and white horses, and bells, it seems to me to be so far off—so very, very far away—that it is of no use, and it makes me miserable. But now, if we were married here, how I should like to hear you call me your wife, as you went about the room!"

"And so you shall, my pet, whenever you please. But for you to turn such a dreadful heretic, Dove, and imagine that a marriage outside a church is a marriage at all! Why, even a dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury seems sacrilegious where there are no bridecake, and old slippers, and a lot of carriages."

"Now you're becoming kind again, Will. And you'll do as I ask without bothering me about reasons? What I should like, you know, would be the power of getting married when I wanted—if I could have the dispensation, as you say, all ready, and just at any moment I might terrify you by crying out, 'Will, come and marry me!' I might be merciful, too, you know, Will; and perhaps let you off, if you were very good and attentive. I'd tell you some day to go to the drawer and take out the paper and burn it. It would be like giving a slave his freedom."

"You will be such a dreadful tyrant when you're married, Dove, that I shudder to think of what you'll do to me."

"I think I should have been very kind to you, Will," said the girl, suddenly bursting into tears, and turning away her face from him.

Next morning Dove was a great deal better, everybody thought. Even the doctor spoke cheerfully, and the whole house was radiant. A thaw had set in;

the air was foggy, and damp, and close; and the streets were in that condition which melted snow and drizzling rain generally produce in London; but inside the house there was sunlight enough for all concerned. And when, on the following morning, the weather cleared, and the sun painted bars of yellow on the curtains of the windows, it seemed as if the old sad anxious time were past, and the dawn of a new and happy life had broken over them.

Nevertheless, Dove did not give up her idea of the special licence and the private marriage. Rather she lay and brooded over it; and sometimes her face was moved with a happy delight which those around her could not well understand. Indeed, her heart was so bent upon it, that they all agreed to acquiesce in her wishes, and the necessary steps were taken to secure the legalization of the ceremony. The covert opposition which the proposal had met was surely not due to any opposition to the marriage, on the part of any one concerned, but to another and vaguer feeling, which no one of them dared to reveal to the other.

Said Dove to him suddenly this morning—

"Is Miss Brunel in town, Will?"

"I don't know, Dove."

"It is such a long time since she came to see me; I wonder if it was because you treated her so coldly the last time she was here."

"I?"

"You did not speak to her as you ought to have clone. You kept near me, and kept speaking to me, as if you imagined I was afraid she would take you away from me again. I know you did it to please me; but I could see something in her face, Will, that seemed to say that I needn't be afraid, and that she wouldn't come again. I should be sorry for that. Will you go and ask her to come again?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And you will speak to her just as you speak to me. I can't be jealous, Will—of her, because she did not try to take you from me."

"I will go if you like, Dove," said Will; "but considering——"

"I have considered" (with petulant haste). "I have nothing to do all day but lie and consider—and how many things I have considered within this day or two! I have altered my mind completely about the marriage. I won't have you marry me, Will——"

"But all the forms have been gone through——"

She lay silent and meditative for some time, and then she said—

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble; but I should like to alter all my plans. You know the betrothals they have in French stories and in the operas: I should like to have a betrothal, Will, and all you will have to get for me is a big sheet of paper and a marriage-ring."

How eagerly he accepted the offer! This pretty notion of hers, which was

obviously only meant to please a passing whim, was so much more grateful to him than the marriage proposal, with its black background:

"We will have it at once, Dove; and I think you are so well that you might drink a little champagne with us to grace the ceremony. Then I shall be able to call you my wife all the same, and you shall wear the wedding-ring; and then, you know, we can have the white horses and the carriages afterwards. But I am afraid the betrothal contract will be frightfully inaccurate; I don't know the terms——"

"Get a sheet of paper, Will, and I will tell you what to write down."

He got the paper, and, at her dictation, wrote down the following words—

"We two, loving each other very dearly, write our names underneath in token that we have become husband and wife, and as a pledge of our constant love."

She smiled faintly when he placed the writing before her, and then she leant back on the pillow, with a satisfied air. Mrs. Anerley now came into the room, and Will, obeying some further commands, went off to see whether Annie Brunel was yet in her old lodgings, and also to purchase a wedding-ring for the ceremony on which Dove had set her heart.

Miss Brunel's landlady told Will that her lady-lodger would probably return the next day, with which piece of information he returned. He also showed Dove the wedding-ring; and she placed it on her finger, and kept it there.

But that evening the insidious disease from which the girl was suffering withdrew the treacherous semblance of health it had lent to her burning cheeks, and it was obvious that she had grown rapidly worse. They all saw it, and would not confess it to each other. They only noticed that Mrs. Anerley did not stir now from Dove's bedside.

Mr. Anerley spent nearly the whole of that night in walking up and down his own room—from time to time stealthily receiving messages, for they would not admit to Dove that they felt much anxiety about her. The man seemed to have grown greyer; or perhaps it was the utter wretchedness of his face that made him look so old and careworn. Will sate in an easy-chair, gloomily staring into the fire. The appointment he had so eagerly sought and so joyfully gained, fancying it was to bring them all back again into pleasant circumstances, was only a bitter mockery now. He could not bear to think of it. He could bear to think of nothing when this terrible issue was at stake in the next room.

In the morning, when the first grey light was sufficiently clear to show Dove's face to the nurse and Mrs. Anerley, the latter looked at the girl for a long time.

"Why do you look at me so, mamma?" she asked.

She could not answer. She went into the next room, and crying, "Oh, Hubert, Hubert, go and look at my Dove's face!" burst into tears on her husband's bosom. And yet there was nothing remarkable about the girl's face—except, perhaps, to one who had watched it critically all the night through, and was alarmed by the transition from the ruddy lamplight to the grey and haggard tone of the morning.

The doctor came, and went away again, saying nothing.

Towards the forenoon, Dove said to Will—

"I want to hear 'The Coulin'——"

"Not 'The Coulin,' Dove," he pleaded.

"When Miss Brunel comes, perhaps she will play it. The music is simple. Put it on the piano—and—and send for her."

He himself went for her—out into the bright light of that fresh spring morning. Annie Brunel, when he found her, was in her poor lodgings, dressed in the simple black dress in which he had last seen her.

"I was going up to see Dove," she said, "when I heard she had sent for me. But—is there anything the matter?"

"Dove is ill," he said, abruptly. "I—I cannot tell you. But she wants you to come and—play a piece of music for her."

Neither of them spoke a word all the way to the house. When Annie Brunel, pale and calm and beautiful, went to the girl, and took up her white hand, and kissed her, there was a pleased smile on Dove's face.

"Why didn't they tell me you were ill?" she said. "I should have been here before."

"I know that," said Dove, in a whisper, "for—for you have always been kind to me. You have come in time—but I am too weak to tell you—ask Will—the betrothal——"

The brief explanation was speedily given; and then Dove said—

"I am very tired. Will you go into the next room, and play me 'The Coulin;' and when you come back——?"

She went to Dove's piano, and found there the air which she knew so well. And as she played it, so softly that it sounded like some bitter sad leave-taking that the sea had heard and murmured over, Dove lay and listened with a strange look on her face. Will's hand was in hers, and she drew him down to her, and whispered—

"I could have been so happy with you, Will: so very happy, I think. But I had no right to be. Where is the—the paper—I was to sign?"

He brought it, and put it on the table beside her bedside; and Miss Brunel came into the room, and went over to Dove.

"That is the paper I must sign," said the girl. "But how can I? Will you—will

you do it for me? But come closer to me and listen, for I have—a secret——"

When Annie Brunel bent down her head to listen, Dove drew the wedding-ring off her finger, kissed it tenderly, and put it on her companion's hand; and then she said, looking Annie in the face with a faint smile in the peaceful violet eyes—"It is your own name you must sign."

At the same moment she lay back exhausted, and to Mr. Anerley, who had hurriedly stepped forward to take her hand, she sighed wearily—"I am so tired; I shall rest." And presently a beautiful happy light stole over the girlish features; and he heard her murmur indistinctly—as if the words were addressed to him from the other world—the old familiar line, "*Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now.*"

They were the last words that Dove uttered; and the cause of the last smile that was on her sweet face.

THE END.

A Word from Project Gutenberg

We will update this book if we find any errors.

This book can be found under: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/40111

The Full Project Gutenberg License

Section 1. General Terms of Use & Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate ac-

cess to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at https://www.gutenberg.org . If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Guten-

berg™ web site (https://www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and The Project Gutenberg Trademark LLC, the owner of the

Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3. below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES – Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND – If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PUR-

POSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY – You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at https://www.pglaf.org .

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is in Fairbanks, Alaska, with the mailing address: PO Box 750175, Fairbanks, AK 99775, but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation meth-

ods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

https://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.