

# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

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ETC.

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## CHAPTER I.

SIR RUPERT LOWRY was dead.

When the news of his death became known to them his neighbours said to each other, "So old Sir Rupert's gone at last!"

And the tone in which the words were said implied that the death was not a matter for regret. The deceased man had been very aged—over eighty years old—and yet he had not appeared feeble. He had borne his years with a tough kind of strength, and when it suddenly failed beneath the burthen, many persons seemed surprised that he had not been able to live longer. Prophecies had been made that the old man would live to be a hundred. "His feelings won't wear him out in a hurry," said his neighbours. But, although it might

be true that his feelings did not wear him out, nevertheless he did not live to be a hundred. He was just turned eighty-two when, without any preliminary warning which those about him could take note of, he was seized with a sudden palsy, and, after lying insensible for a day and part of a night, breathed his last, and was buried in the family vault in the little village church of Clevenal, near to his own house. Although those about him had perceived no symptom of his approaching end, yet that the old man himself must have had some warning of it was proved by the wording of a letter addressed to his lawyer which was found, folded but not sealed, lying on his writing-table on the morning after his death.

Sir Rupert Lowry's career closes as this story begins ; but inasmuch as his life and character had a great influence on the personages whose experiences and adventures are now to be narrated, it will be necessary that a few words should be said about the old man.

The Lowrys were not very rich people nor very grand people compared with the great nobleman who owned half the district in the immediate vicinity of Clevenal. But they were both rich and grand compared with any other of their neighbours. The houses nearest



to Lowry Place were modest dwellings enough. The doctor lived in one, the vicar in another; a small cottage with a pretty garden was inhabited by the widow of a naval officer, and a larger house—the largest of all the houses in Clevenal parish, indeed, if we except Lowry Place—was the residence of Mr. Sydenham Spencer, who was said to have made his money in Australia, and who now lived with his family at The Beeches, and called himself a country squire. By all these persons, and by several others above the rank of tradesfolk or peasants, the Lowrys of Lowry Place were considered grand and rich people. And I should fear to lower the highly respectable population of Clevenal in public estimation by confessing the real amount of the Lowrys' income. Yet Sir Rupert died a richer man than any of his predecessors had been. He had been a cautious, most people said an avaricious, man, and had saved and scraped and invested money advantageously here and there. Indeed, had it not been for these profitable investments, and one or two speculations that had turned out very successfully, the Lowrys of Lowry Place would have had barely enough to live upon and keep up their property. We all know how such things have

gone in these latter days, and that small landed estates are not desirable possessions for men who have no other source of income. But, as it was, Sir Rupert was to all intents and purposes a rich man. He had no one to compete with in his style of living; for the Earl of Elcaster did not count in that way, being no more to be compared with his neighbours on the score of wealth than a gas lamp can be compared with a tallow candle on the score of illuminating power. He never spent the season in London, he never entertained guests at home, and he had to bear but small expense for the maintenance of his family. How this came to pass was owing to some circumstances which must be briefly told.

Sir Rupert Lowry had married late in life, and was the father of two children, a son and daughter. Sir Rupert's wife had long been dead, and his daughter, a lady of thirty years old, lived with the old man in the home she had been born in and inhabited all her life. The son had entered the army when he was just over his majority, and within six months afterwards had married, and had by so doing displeased his father beyond forgiveness. Not that the match he had made was in any way disgraceful. It was simply wildly imprudent.

Cosmo Lowry had run away with a fashionable, flirting, penniless young lady, who had a taste for finery of all sorts, and a delicate constitution. She was a year or two older than Cosmo, which circumstance enabled Sir Rupert to maintain that "the jade had entrapped the young fool into marrying her after she had been hacked through a dozen seasons without catching a husband."

That was a forcible, but untrue, statement of the case. Sir Rupert's statement of anything that displeased him was sure to be forcible, and likely to be untrue. The wrath which he expended on the "scheming jade" by no means exhausted his stock of resentment. There remained in his heart enough anger against his son to make him renounce the young man, refuse to see him or answer his letters, and threaten constantly and publicly to disinherit him, and leave him and his brats to starve. Sir Rupert had had plans, and projects, and ambitions about this son and heir of his. He was a tyrannical and selfish man, who ruled with absolute mastery over his wife and children, and who, because Cosmo's future career was the one toy that amused and occupied his narrow and sterile imagination, conceived Cosmo to be therefore

bound to him by ties of more than the ordinary gratitude which a son should feel towards an affectionate parent. "I've thought of scarcely anything but his advancement in the world ever since he was breeched. I have made sacrifices, I have debarred myself from many pleasures that I might have enjoyed, in order to leave Cosmo a better property than I inherited from *my* father, and see the thanks I get! The young villain insists on tying himself to a sickly doll without a penny—a puppet, a clothes-peg, a fool of a would-be fine lady without birth, brains, or constitution! And when I say 'no,' and try to hold him back from ruin, he runs off with the jade—curse her!—and expects me to smile and say 'thank ye'!"

After this fashion Sir Rupert would inveigh against his son and his son's wife. All his acquaintances thought his wrath extremely exaggerated, and disproportioned to the offence. Of course Cosmo had behaved like a fool, they said; but, after all, he had committed no crime. No doubt Miss Neville's people had secretly encouraged the thing, knowing old Sir Rupert to be a man of substance. Well, what could you expect? Young women without a penny—especially

that sort of ball-room young woman—naturally would take any means to catch the heir to a snug property and an old name. And, after all, she was respectably connected, and it might have been worse. But no one ever dared to talk in this manner to Sir Rupert. He would get over his anger by-and-by, they said. Cosmo was his only son, his heir, and his favourite, and the best way was to say nothing on the subject until the baronet's wrath should have cooled down—which it certainly would do some day. Best leave it to time!

But the years passed by and brought no softening to the old man's stern harshness. Cosmo was not to be mentioned to him: Cosmo was to be blotted out of his existence. Only one person ventured to speak of and plead for the absent son, and that was his sister Mary. Her advocacy had little apparent effect; but perhaps to it was owing the fact that Sir Rupert's threat of leaving Cosmo and his family to starve was not literally carried out. A small yearly sum was doled out to him; but it was so small a sum that it would have done little more than keep him and his from starvation had it been their sole means of support. Eked out by his pay, it

did feed and clothe them, and enable them to keep up those piteous shams which genteel poverty fences itself about with, and which are scarce more efficient defences against the keen assaults of misfortune than the lath and canvas castles of a stage scene would be against a real out-o'-doors north-easter.

Cosmo wandered about the world with his regiment, getting no promotion, as he had neither money, interest, nor industry. His wife bore him five children, very quickly, but they all died in early infancy except one little girl, the eldest. And the pretty Isabel Neville, the airy ball-room belle, who had turned men's heads as she floated over a well-chalked floor in clouds of white gauze, came to be a sickly, faded, fretful, anxious slattern. For a year or two she had kept up her courage, and had had a certain success in the society of garrison towns. She was sure, quite sure, that Sir Rupert would relent; he *must* relent. She had a secret conviction that if she could see him and exercise her fascinations on him, the unreasonable old man would be melted into tenderness and admiration;—a conviction which being once hinted to Cosmo, caused the latter to draw down the corners of his mouth in the bitter smile which was a

characteristic of the Lowrys, and to say, "Well for you that you have no chance of making the experiment! *You!* My father would make mincemeat of you!" And by degrees stern Fate blew aside these gossamer illusions, and showed her her life, as it was, and was to be. Then poor Bell drained a bitter cup of disappointment to the dregs, and died.

After her death her husband sold his commission, and made some advances towards a reconciliation with his father. Sir Rupert might have been in some measure appeased by the amount of his son's misery and humiliation, and, having sated his vindictiveness, might have enjoyed the new pleasure of lifting his victim from the dust, but Cosmo inherited too much of the paternal gall to make his application in the form of a simple appeal to whatever affection still lingered in his father's heart. He could not resist a sneer. He preferred his request in such fashion as to make it appear that if it were granted the bitterness of his feeling towards Sir Rupert would not be mitigated, and could scarcely be aggravated if it were refused. It was refused. A few angry letters passed between the two men, and then Cosmo seemed once more to be

hopelessly shut out from the interests, the hopes, the hearts of his family.

Mary Lowry had tried to prevail with her father to allow her to receive Cosmo's sole surviving child into the old home, and to watch over and educate the motherless little girl. But the old man stubbornly refused. Had the child been a boy, the heir to his name if to little else, he might have consented; although he never admitted even this much. But he declared that he would have no daughter of Isabel Neville in his house, to disgust him by a second edition of her mother's under-bred airs and her mother's sickly face. And at the end of seven years after Isabel's death, Sir Rupert died in his turn, and his neighbours said to each other, "So he's gone at last!"

At nine o'clock on the morning after Sir Rupert's decease, Mr. Flint, the family lawyer, was seated in the library at Lowry Place in conversation with Miss Lowry. Mr. Flint was a stout, bald, mild-faced man, who showed no trace of the qualities associated with his name unless, perhaps, in a certain determined firmness with which his clean shaven upper lip met the lower one. He had been the legal adviser of Sir Rupert for many years: and his



friend, so far as it was possible for any man to maintain friendship with Sir Rupert.

"This was sudden, Miss Lowry," said Mr. Flint, speaking without any cant of woe, but yet with a tone in his voice which showed that he was not quite unmoved. "The last time that I saw Sir Rupert—on Thursday last I think it was: yes; Thursday—he came into Elcaster to my office, to speak about Wobley's lease, and I thought him looking very strong and hearty. He was riding, and sat his horse as firmly as ever."

"I think that death must always seem sudden," answered Mary Lowry.

She was sitting opposite to the lawyer, with her elbow resting on the table, and her chin resting on her hand. The light fell full on her face from a large bay window which opened on to the garden. The Lowrys had been for generations a handsome race. Perhaps very few of them all had surpassed Mary Lowry in physical beauty; and, to judge by the family portraits which remained, not one certainly had equalled her in the beauty which comes from expression. The black-browed ladies and gentlemen who looked out from the old picture-frames in the dining-room seemed either haughty, or sullen, or stupid, and some-

times all three at once. But the expression of Mary Lowry's face was made up of sweetness, sadness, and sense. At this moment it was paler than usual, and her eyelids were swollen and heavy, partly with watching, partly with crying. Her eyes and eyebrows were dark, but the brows were not thick and heavy like those which characterized most of her race. Mary's eyebrows were delicately pencilled in a soft curve. Her skin was singularly pure and fair, although not rosy or blooming. Her features resembled those of her father's family in their firm, finely-moulded outline. But the most striking thing in her appearance was the contrast between her dark eyes and brows and the colour of her rich brown hair with golden lights in it. The hair was parted smoothly back from her forehead, but its natural ripples could not be effaced. It was gathered into a massive knot at the back of the head, and behind the ears a few tresses were allowed to fall carelessly in curls as light and graceful as the tendrils of the vine. A very beautiful woman was Mary Lowry. Mr. Flint, who had known her from her childhood, thought to himself that, despite her pale cheeks and heavy eyelids, he had never seen her look

more beautiful than she did as she sat there opposite to him with the morning light on her face.

"Yes," said he, in answer to her words, "I suppose death almost always does seem sudden when it takes those who are near to us. We never know how much hope has lain hidden in our hearts until all is over, and there is no hoping more. Did Sir Rupert recover consciousness at all before the end?"

"Dr. Akroyd will tell you that he did not. But I believe that he knew me just before he died. He could not make the least movement. He could not return the pressure of my hand, but a look of recognition came into his eyes. I cannot describe it, but I saw it."

There was a short silence. Then Mr. Flint said, "Have you communicated with your brother? He should have been telegraphed to."

"I could not telegraph to him. I have no means of doing so," answered Mary.

"Do you not know his address?"

"During the last three months I have been sending letters to him addressed to the Post-office, Lambrook, Worcestershire. He told me that he was staying at a farm-house near that place, and would go into Lambrook once a week for his letters."

"What is he doing there? Do you know?"

"I only know that he tells me there is good fishing in the neighbourhood."

"How long is it since you heard from him?"

"More than five weeks. Cosmo has never been in the habit of writing frequently. I wrote to him yesterday morning—or this morning, was it? My sense of time is confused. Yes; I wrote to him a few lines this morning, telling him——" Miss Lowry paused for an instant, but went on again in a firm, clear voice—"telling him of our father's death. And I sent a man on horse-back into Elcaster with the letter, in order to have it posted there instead of at Clevelen, so as to catch the early mail. The same man who came to summon you carried the letter."

"I think I should send a telegram to the Post-office at Lambrook. I will see to it, Miss Lowry. Your brother ought to be here for the—to pay the last office of respect to Sir Rupert. Now, you must let me know if there is anything further that I can do for you before I return to Elcaster."

"Nothing, thank you, except——"

Mr. Flint interrupted her. "As to all the last sad arrangements, you will leave them entirely to me. I shall speak to Akroyd, and

the day will be settled—the longest day possible, so as to give Mr. Lowry—Sir Cosmo, I must call him now—every chance to be here. If you have any special wish, any special arrangement to suggest, you will let me know. I shall wait on you to-morrow morning, about ten o'clock, if that will suit your convenience."

Miss Lowry took his proffered hand, and rose from her chair. "I wish you, Mr. Flint," she said, "to take the key of papa's little study, and to keep it until Cosmo comes." And she held out the key to him with her left hand as she spoke.

"My dear Miss Lowry! We have looked through Sir Rupert's papers together; all was in order—a most methodical man—thoroughly so!—an example to be followed! I have sealed the lock of his writing-table in your presence. His last will and testament is safe in the strong box at my office. There can be no need—no sort of need——"

"I wish you to keep the key until Cosmo comes, Mr. Flint," repeated Mary Lowry quietly, and speaking the words almost as if she were repeating a lesson learned by heart. "My brother is master here now. It is right that he should find that all has been

scrupulously done and ordered. Such scrupulousness might be over-strained in some cases, but with Cosmo it is different. He has been an exile very long. He may have grown estranged and distrustful. I would have him be sure that there has been no unjust stewardship—no, not even for a day, for an hour ! ”

Thought travels quickly. Mr. Flint's thoughts travelled very quickly as Mary Lowry stood opposite to him offering him the key. They travelled back over many years ;—over the time of the heir's marriage, and his wife's death, and the attempt at reconciliation, and the second and final estrangement. And during all that time he saw the image of Mary Lowry, true, steadfast, faithful in word and deed to the cause of the absent and oppressed. And then an odd feeling of antagonism against Cosmo Lowry came into his heart. A shamefully unreasonable feeling he would have called it had it been confessed to him by another : an absurdly unreasonable feeling he would have pronounced it if he had read of it in a book. But the secret feelings of the heart, even in a staid gentleman of fifty-five, with half the law business of the county in his hands, are apt to be irreconcilable

with any recognized code of reason; and, what is more extraordinary still, at variance with all the recognized rules of self-interest. Mr. Flint's heart said, "If Cosmo Lowry can distrust *you*, let him go hang for an ungrateful suspicious cur!" Mr. Flint's tongue said, "I respect your scruples, Miss Lowry. I think them exaggerated, but I understand them. Your brother will appreciate them as they deserve. Now, good-bye. Well, I will take the key, since you wish it. God bless you, my dear!"

The last words were jerked out by Mr. Flint's heart, almost in spite of Mr. Flint's teeth. And then he hurried away without further farewell.

## CHAPTER II.

THE funeral was over. The body of Sir Rupert Lowry, baronet, had been laid to moulder side by side with the bodies of other Lowrys who had lived and reigned on their paternal acres, and Clevelen churchyard was emptied of the throng which had assembled to stare at the plumes, and the pall, and the black horses, and the oaken coffin, with its silver plate. The eyes of the gazers had, however, been cheated of one great object of curiosity: the dead man's son and successor had not been there to witness his father's burial. It was whispered about that he had been sent for, but had telegraphed back to say that it was impossible for him to arrive in time. But this simple explanation of his absence was much too insipid for the popular taste. Village wiseacres nodded to one another with an air of knowing incredulity, and said, ay, ay, it was very well to make that excuse,



but Clevelen folks knew better. Clevelen folks knew the Lowrys, or ought to it! And whenever did father and son agree in that family? When did you ever see the heir a standing by the father's death-bed, or yet beside his grave?

It would have been difficult for any one of those present in Clevelen churchyard to answer this question correctly, seeing that the last funeral of a chief of the Lowry family had taken place just sixty-two years ago, when Sir Rupert was a handsome undergraduate who had not yet attained his majority. But the question was not intended to elicit information. It was of a purely rhetorical character. And the reply which it drew forth in nine cases out of ten—"Ah, very true! When, indeed?"—was considered to be quite satisfactory.

The crowd had dispersed. The prancing black horses had gone back to their stables. The two or three gentlemen who had sat in the first mourning coach had pulled the long crape streamers off their hats, and returned each to his home. Mr. Flint, after paying a short visit to Miss Lowry, and ascertaining from her that no further communication had been received from her brother since the telegram of that morning, had been driven back in his sober

close carriage to Elcester, and was attending to his business there, in the leisurely quiet way which marked the performance of all professional transactions in his office. Mary Lowry sat in the library with her hands folded in her lap, looking straight before her, and musing on many things. The library had been for many years her favourite sitting-room. She usually had undisturbed possession of it, for Sir Rupert habitually used only three rooms in the house : his bed-chamber, the dining-room, and the little room called the "study." This study was a repository for Sir Rupert's hunting and driving whips ; for a curious collection of pipes ; for disused dog-collars and old-fashioned fowling pieces ; in a word, for numberless odds and ends of no value which Sir Rupert insisted upon hoarding. Not a book was to be seen in it, except the "County Gazetteer" and one or two old almanacs, but there were some books kept there out of sight ; vellum-bound volumes of accounts in a drawer of the huge, antique, walnut-wood writing-table at which Sir Rupert had been wont to spend some hours of each day. Beside the hearth stood a roomy arm-chair, antiquated and shabby, but comfortable. A pair of rusty horse-pistols was crossed above the mantelpiece, and over them hung the

portrait of a favourite horse of Sir Rupert's—a famous hunter whose bones had now been mouldering under the great ash tree at the bottom of the lawn for nigh upon half a century. For several years before the old man's death a superb Irish setter might have been seen every morning, winter and summer, lying on the hearth whilst his master wrote, or smoked, or dozed, in the "study." But now the room was shut and locked, and the key, as we know, was in Mr. Flint's possession at Elcaster. The blinds were drawn down, and the sunlight came muffled through them, and there was no sound to be heard save the sharp chirrup of a little bird outside, whose shadow on the white blind swayed with the swaying of the branch he sat on, and poor old Connaught, the Irish setter, had taken up his quarters in the library. He lay stretched on Mary Lowry's black gown where it flowed on to the carpet. He had refused to leave her during the day ever since his master's death: and at night had lain outside the door of her chamber, whining so piteously when the servants tried to remove him that Mary had not the heart to send him away.

The house, always a quiet one, was now hushed into absolute stillness. The great bay window at the end of the library was open, and

admitted, besides the summer sunshine, the sweet warm fragrance of flowers, and a low sound made up of the hum of insects, the rustling of leaves, and the cawing of rooks in the distant elm-tree avenue—a sound so low that it served but to emphasize the silence. The beautiful sad-faced woman who sat alone there had been musing for hours. She had thought much of the past, and memory had brought a sharp pain to her heart, and hot tears to her dreamy wide-open eyes. The tears were not for the old man who lay at rest in Clovenal church. She had wept for him naturally and unaffectedly, as one weeps in presence of the unspeakable sadness of death—the sightless eyes, the helpless hands, the cold white brow whose calmness is not conscious rest, but the frozen stillness of the grave, unchangeable, to be thawed by no earthly sun that shines or shall shine evermore. She had wept, above all, as those weep whose daily lives have been a sacrifice to the needs and desires of another, and who suddenly miss the clinging hand, the querulous voice, the fond, craving selfishness to which they were so precious and so necessary. But it was not thoughts such as these which had brought the sharpest pain to Mary Lowry's heart, and scalded her

eyes with bitter tears, and dyed her cheeks and throat with a hot intolerable flush. The vision of a bygone youth and a lost love had been with her, and had made her heart ache sorely. And at length she had turned her mind resolutely away from vain regrets—so bitter because so vain—and tried to look at the future that lay before her.

Cosmo would probably come to live now at Lowry Place. She did not know the precise terms of her father's will, but she knew that Mr. Flint had expressed himself satisfied with it on the whole; and she felt sure that Mr. Flint would have been satisfied with no will which should be grossly unjust to Cosmo. The lawyer had been her secret ally in the matter for many years. He never could be brought to take Cosmo's part as heartily as she would have wished, but as far as Mr. Flint's partisanship went, it was staunch and valuable. He had had many a stout battle with Sir Rupert about his last will and testament, as Mary knew. The battles had sometimes been fought out in her presence, and sometimes they had been narrated to her by one or both of the contending parties. A part of the Lowry property was entailed. It consisted of that small portion of the land which

had descended from father to son for generations, and which a century ago was considered a very pretty property for a country gentleman. All the rest of the estate—acquired partly by purchase, partly by Sir Rupert's marriage with Miss Mary Hovenden, an heiress whose land adjoined his own—Sir Rupert was free to dispose of as he pleased. Free within certain limits, that is to say: for by the terms of Mary Hovenden's marriage settlement, the land she had brought to the Lowry family must be inherited by one or other of her children. But a discretionary power was reserved to the surviving parent, who could determine by will which of the children should possess it. This arrangement had been strongly insisted on by Sir Rupert; and not greatly opposed by Miss Hovenden's guardian, who thought that as the bride was nearly twenty years her husband's junior, the final disposition of her property would thus, in all probability, rest with herself. During the twenty years which elapsed between his son's birth and his son's marriage Sir Rupert had been constantly accumulating money. He pictured to himself Cosmo, his handsome Cosmo, a Lowry every inch of him, rising to a distinguished rank in his profession, and

then in the prime of his manhood bringing home a high-born, richly-dowered wife to add to the glories of Lowry Place. Cosmo must make a great marriage. Why should he not? Why should not the Lowrys come to be as prosperous a family as any in the county? Sir Rupert implicitly believed their pedigree to be the most unimpeachable, and was apt to draw his mouth down superciliously at mention of the splendours of Elcaster House. He would have considered a Lowry of Lowry who should have allied himself with a scion of the rich peer's family to have made a decided *mésalliance*, and condescended—perhaps not unpardonably—to the upsetting spirit of the times.

But then all pride and pleasure in Cosmo's career was suddenly put an end to by the latter's ill-starred marriage. Economy had grown so habitual with Sir Rupert that he could not have relinquished it had he wished to do so. But, although he continued to save and scrape and look sharply after his investments, there was no heart or enjoyment in it. It was all dust and ashes. Formerly he had associated every successful speculation with visions of Cosmo's future. What if the Lowry liveries were shabby, and the Lowry house-keeping on a meagre scale? So much the

more handsome and easy would Cosmo's life be when it came to his turn to reign in the old place! But now—that bubble had burst; that toy was broken; there was no savour in life. Whom had he to save for, or think of, now? Mary? Well, Mary was a good girl, but she was sufficiently provided for under her mother's marriage settlement; quite sufficiently for a single woman. And as to Cosmo—he meant to disinherit him. He had wrangled and quarrelled with Mr. Flint as to the making of his will; and once, when Mr. Flint had pointblank refused to draw it up in accordance with his instructions, had threatened to go to London and get it done by a lawyer there. But, finally, he had been partly scolded, partly coaxed, partly wearied, into making such a will as Mr. Flint did on the whole approve. Mary was always at work with her gentle pleadings for her brother, and Sir Rupert in his heart of hearts did not like the idea of a Lowry of Lowry living impoverished on his paternal acres in the sight of all men. The sweetness and the triumph he had promised himself in providing handsomely for Cosmo had been changed to gall and wormwood. But still on the whole Mr. Flint was not dissatisfied with Sir Rupert's will; and he



so far departed from professional etiquette as to hint as much to Miss Lowry.

Mary thought of all these things as she sat in the library on the afternoon of her father's funeral. Yes; doubtless Cosmo would be master here now. He would come back to the old home and bring with him his motherless child. Mary had never seen the girl, but her heart yearned towards her, and she looked forward to the meeting with Rosamond almost more anxiously than to the meeting with her brother. How she would love and cherish the poor child so long deprived of a mother's care! How she would delight in making her acquainted with all the familiar things and persons in the old home! The flowers in the garden, the family portraits on the walls, the rich woods of Clevenal, the village people, old and young—Rosamond should learn to know them all, and to understand them and to like them. For was she not to be Miss Lowry of Lowry? Mary was almost a child at heart still in some things, and she looked forward to Rosamond's coming with a child's vivid fancy and singleness of heart. As she sat thus with the tears scarcely dried on her eyelashes and a faint smile on her lips, the old footman brought her a letter. James had grown grey

in the Lowry service, and a certain liberty of speech was permitted to him. "From Mr. Lowry—Sir Cosmo, I mean—I believe it to be, ma'am," said he, as he handed her the letter sealed with a great lump of black wax on which the family coat of arms was impressed.

Mary opened the letter eagerly; and this is what she read in it:—

"August 15th, 187—

"MY DEAR MARY,

"Your letter announcing Sir Rupert Lowry's death reached me this morning. It had been lying for three days in the Post-office at Lambrook, where I also found a telegraphic despatch from Mr. Flint. I telegraphed at once in reply, and that message you will have received before you receive this, and you will know that it was impossible for me to be present at Sir Rupert's funeral. I shall start for Clevenal as soon as possible. I write now, however, to give you some news which will, perhaps, surprise you. I was married on the 2nd of July last. My wife is a simple country girl, very inexperienced, very unsophisticated—in short, a farmer's daughter. I hope this announcement will not shock you. I did not think it necessary to make it to Sir

Rupert, having long ago resolved to trouble him with no communication of any sort under any circumstances. But you have always shown a sisterly spirit towards me, so far as I know, and I hope we shall continue to be good friends. Rosamond is still in London with her aunt. At the last accounts she was quite well. It is unnecessary to say more at present as we shall meet so soon, but I wished to give you the news of my marriage so as not to take you by surprise. You will have had time before I see you to decide on your course of action, and to make up your mind whether the prejudices of Miss Lowry of Lowry are to predominate over the feelings of my sister. Whatever your decision may be, I am sure your good sense will spare me anything like a scene. Sarah wished me to give you her love, but I have advised her to wait a little. I am sorry if this seems hard, but my experience of Lowry Place has not taught me to be soft in my dealings with it.

“I remain, my dear Mary,

“Your affectionate brother,

“COSMO LOWRY.

“P.S.—I presume that Mr. Flint will be prepared to show my late father's will to me as soon as I arrive.—C. L.”

## CHAPTER III.

IN about half an hour later, James was summoned to the library by an unusually sharp peal at the bell. He found Miss Lowry very pale, standing with a folded packet in her hand. "This must be taken into Elcaster at once," she said. "Tell the groom to ride down with it and bring me the answer. Let him saddle Bluestocking; she will go faster than the old pony."

"I ask pardon, ma'am," said James after an instant's hesitation, "but I hope there's no ill news about young master?"

"No, James; he is quite well."

"Please to forgive my making so bold, ma'am, but I can remember the day he was born; and Sir Rupert planted the oak sapling under Madam's window, and next day they laid down the October home-brewed to be drunk when he came of age."

"My brother is quite well, James. There

is no bad news. Now please to send my letter at once."

James, as he withdrew with the packet, felt a large broken seal under the paper cover directed to Samuel Flint, Esquire. "Miss Lowry's a sending of young master's letter down to the lawyer to read," said he to himself. But he imparted this observation to nobody. And very soon the groom was galloping along the high road to Elcaster, Blue-stocking striding over the ground in a way which showed she was glad to get out of her stable and stretch her legs.

Mr. Flint was sitting over his wine after dinner when the messenger arrived. Mr. Flint always dined at five o'clock. It was now half-past six, and the low rays of the sun were illuminating Mr. Flint's bald head as he sat with the dining-room windows open, looking into his old-fashioned garden. Mr. Flint's house was old-fashioned too. It was one of the oldest dwellings in Elcaster:—a red brick house in a narrow street, but with a considerable extent of ground behind it, garden, and orchard, and paddock. Everything about the place looked peaceful, mellow, well-to-do, long-established. There was plenty of ripe wall-fruit within view from the dining-room

windows, and near to Mr. Flint's elbow stood a dish of peaches which might have equally tempted an epicure and a painter.

Mr. Flint was not alone. His wife sat opposite to him, and sipped her wine with an air of well-considered appreciation. Mrs. Flint was very fat, with a large double chin, and a distinct dark down on her upper lip. She had a pair of bright black eyes, a set of sound, serviceable, white teeth, and a high round forehead, over which her black "front" of false hair was smoothly parted. Mrs. Flint always wore black. In the morning her gown would be of some silken or woollen material, and in the evening it was invariably of the richest satin. But the sable hue of her robe was enlivened by some bright coloured ribbons in her lace cap—crimson, amber, or ultramarine. A massive gold chain supporting a massive gold eye-glass meandered over her ample bodice, and her fat fingers were adorned with numerous diamond rings. Such had been Mrs. Flint's dinner costume for twenty years. She was nearly of the same age as her husband, and they were cited amongst their acquaintances as a singularly well-assorted couple. They certainly had several tastes in common; amongst others a taste for old port

wine, within discreet limits, and an undisguised enjoyment of good cookery.

Mrs. Flint was just setting down her glass on the table, when she was struck by the expression of her husband's face as he read the letter enclosed to him by Miss Lowry, with a few words pencilled by herself on the back of it. "Samuel," said Mrs. Flint in her deep, muffled voice, and holding the wine-glass poised in her hand, "what is the matter?"

Mr. Flint brought down his clenched hand on the table so heavily that the decanters jingled.

"Samuel!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint once more, "nothing has happened to Mary Lowry, I hope! No more trouble for her, poor dear?"

"Nothing happened to her—no; but as for more trouble—— One moment! I must send back an answer at once."

Mr. Flint rang the bell, and said to the servant who appeared in answer to the summons, "Tell the messenger that I will wait on Miss Lowry this evening about eight o'clock, and bid him beg her to excuse my sending a verbal answer."

"Well?" said Mrs. Flint, when the servant was gone.

"Well! A piece of news with a vengeance! What do you think? Cosmo Lowry got married again six weeks ago!"

"You don't mean it, Samuel!"

"Yes, I do."

"And kept it secret all this time?"

"Well for him that he did keep it secret as long as Sir Rupert lived."

"What?—you don't mean to say——"

"Here," said Mr. Flint, pushing the letter across the table to his wife, "you may as well read it. There are no secrets in it. It is written on purpose to convey the information and to *prepare* us all, as he calls it."

Mrs. Flint put up her gold eye-glass and read the letter through. When she had finished it she laid it down, re-folded it, shut up her eye-glass, clasped her hands before her, and drawing herself up so as to bring an extra crease into her double chin, exclaimed in her deepest bass notes, "This passes belief! Isabel Neville was bad enough, for in spite of her fine name she really had *no* birth to speak of—but this——! A farmer's daughter! It's enough to make the dead and gone Lowrys turn in their graves!"

"I'm afraid it's enough to make one living



Lowry very unhappy—which is more to the purpose,” said Mr. Flint, drumming on the table, whilst his eyes traversed line after line of Cosmo’s letter, which he had laid out smooth before him. “To think of his writing in that tone to Mary! ‘You have always shown a sisterly spirit towards me *so far as I know!*’ Ay; and perhaps farther than he knows. It’s a bad letter. It’s a damned bad letter!” added Mr. Flint, who, what with indignation, old port, and the warmth of the evening, had a crimson flush covering his face, and even his smooth bald head.

“Samuel!”

“I beg your pardon, my dear, for the strength of the expression; but I hope and believe that I utter your sentiments as well as my own, when I deliberately repeat that this is a *damned* bad letter.” And Mr. Flint mopped his brow with his ample silk handkerchief.

“How can Miss Lowry of Lowry receive this person as a sister-in-law? ‘A simple country girl’ he calls her. Who knows what sort of a creature? Perhaps she can scarcely read and write! Good gracious, Samuel, and to think that she is now, actually at this moment, Lady Lowry!” Mrs. Flint leant

back in her chair, and shut her eyes hopelessly.

"As to her, Bertha, don't nourish a prejudice against her beforehand."

"A prejudice, Samuel? Why——"

"It may be that the young woman has more natural good feeling than her husband;—it wouldn't be easy to have less, I'm afraid. At all events, as to the new wife Miss Lowry must judge for herself. Mary is a good woman, and a sensible woman, and her friends are bound to abide by her decision. In any case it isn't your part nor mine to fan ill-feeling or foster family dissensions. The thing's done, and can't be undone."

"Poor Miss Lowry! What a blow for her! I declare it has quite upset me."

"It is just seven," said Mr. Flint, looking at his watch. "I think I shall set off for Cleveland at once. I mean to walk. It is a fine evening, and I shall have time, if I start now, to go leisurely, and to think matters over—and to get cool."

"And what time shall you be back, Samuel?"

"Oh, as soon as I can. I don't think it likely that I shall be detained long. The poor girl only wants some one to say a kind word

to her. She must feel her loneliness terribly. Such a letter as Cosmo's is calculated to make her feel it."

"Because, Samuel," proceeded Mrs. Flint with a melancholy air, "Betsy was ordered to cook a sweetbread for supper in the way you like it. And one would wish to be punctual, if possible. I know I shall feel such a sinking by-and-by after the worry of this horrid news!"

"I think I can undertake to be back by ten, Bertha," said Mr. Flint from the hall outside, where he was getting his hat.

"Mind you give my kind love to Miss Lowry, and tell her that if there is anything in the world I can do for her, I beg her to let me know."

"I will, my dear; I will."

"Poor dear, I hope the servants look after her meals properly. But that old cook of theirs has no more notion——! However, I must own that Mary Lowry never seems to know what she's eating." And Mrs. Flint sighed, and shook her head for full a minute after her husband had set off on his way to Clevenal.

Mr. Flint had, as he had foreseen, time to think matters over and to get cool before

reaching his destination. "I'm glad," said he to himself, "as things are turning out, that Sir Rupert has made it impossible for Mary to put herself quite under her brother's feet. She would err on the generous side if she erred at all. That has been her way from childhood."

He found Miss Lowry in the library as usual. The one lamp on a small table at which she was seated illuminated only a part of the long room, with its lining of books and dark oak wainscot below them. But the soft summer twilight filled the other end of the room. The casement window was partly open, and a crescent moon made the lozenge-shaped panes of glass glitter with a silver lustre.

"Do forgive me, Mr. Flint," said Miss Lowry, rising and holding out her hand. "I ought not to have sent for you to-night. But at the moment I was taken by surprise, and I naturally turned to you. You have stood my friend in all sorts of troubles ever since I can remember."

"I won't deny that this news has not only surprised but vexed me," Mr. Flint was beginning as he took a seat, but Miss Lowry interrupted him.

"When I talk of 'trouble,' you know, Mr. Flint, I only mean because of the suddenness, and—and—Cosmo's secrecy about the matter. But, in truth, I hope that this marriage may prove to be anything but a trouble."

"It can do no harm to hope so," rejoined Mr. Flint, drily.

"No; and—— Now, you must not set yourself against Cosmo, Mr. Flint! Nor against Cosmo's wife."

"I don't wish to set myself against her."

"I have had time for reflection since I sent for you, and I see how absurd it would be to blame my brother or my brother's wife. Of course it was a little shock at first. But if Cosmo has been so long banished from the society of persons of his own class, is that any reason why he should be expected to give up all human sympathies?"

"I don't see that he has been banished at all. But I agree with you that there was no need in any case for him to give up all human sympathies," quoth Mr. Flint, with the new baronet's letter rankling in his mind.

"Oh yes, he was banished; virtually banished," cried Mary, ignoring the sting in Mr. Flint's words. "After Isabel's death, when he gave up his profession and had to

live in what for a man of his breeding was real poverty, he gave up also the society of his equals. He has been leading a very lonely life ever since Isabel died. And now if there came to him the sweetness of some one whom he could love, and who loved him, was he to reject it because her pedigree was defective?"

"Some folks would answer 'Yes,' Miss Lowry."

"But you would not so answer! No, no, I am very sure that you would not say it was my brother's duty to think more of family pride than of the happiness of his whole future life."

"You are preaching strange heterodox doctrine for a Lowry of Lowry, Miss Mary!"

"Mr. Flint, it is just because I am a Lowry of Lowry, as you say, that I have learned to hold that doctrine. I have seen so much bitter suffering caused by overweening pride of birth and family ambition. Look at my brother's life, sacrificed and wasted! And poor Isabel made so miserable! And my father,—do you think he did not suffer? Oh, Mr. Flint, when I looked at him in his coffin before they carried him away for ever, my heart yearned with pity for my father. I used to feel sorry only for Cosmo; but when I saw

that white, still face, and thought of the last look in his eyes—a look that seemed to seek so piteously for sympathy—I understood all on a sudden how sad and hard my poor father's life had been. And for what? For a fetish that devoured youth and hope and home and love in sheer stupid cruelty!”

Mary's face was ashy white, her eyes glittered with unshed tears, and her hands were trembling. Mr. Flint looked at her curiously. He had never seen Mary Lowry thus moved. A sudden memory revived in him: a half-forgotten, confused story of some love sorrow which had come upon Miss Lowry in early girlhood. Her strong emotion seemed to illumine the dim past for an instant, as a lightning flash illumines the darkness; but it was but for an instant. Mr. Flint lost the thread again when Mary, leaning back in her chair, said with her old quiet sweetness, “Surely there has been enough of estrangement and heart-burning. I do long for peace and goodwill.”

“Here's Sir Cosmo, ma'am, just arrived!” said James, bursting into the room in a manner unprecedented during all the years of his service.

“My brother!”

Mary rose from her chair and held out her arms as a tall figure appeared at the open door. The new comer stopped, hesitated an instant, and then advanced to meet Mary, who, running to him, hid her face on his shoulder and burst into tears.

Mr. Flint had got up from his seat, and, withdrawn a little into the shadow, gazed earnestly on the son and heir of his old friend. This was Cosmo Lowry then, whom Mr. Flint had last seen a brilliantly handsome youth of one and twenty; haughty, high-spirited, full of the petulant self-confidence of a spoiled child, the idol of a little circle, the inheritor of an old name and a good estate, an heir-apparent who enjoyed all the privileges, and was burthened with none of the responsibilities, of his position. Now, after nearly seventeen years of absence, what was the aspect of the Cosmo Lowry, who stood there within the walls of his old home once more!

Mr. Flint's eyes were keen, and Mr. Flint's brain was accustomed to make very sagacious deductions from the intelligence which his eyes brought to it, and this is what Mr. Flint saw: a tall, slender figure, almost too slender for its height, the effect of which was, however, diminished by a habit of hanging the



head forward; a finely moulded, pallid face, with heavy dark eyebrows, and eyes of a light, bluish gray,—the traditional Lowry eyes and brows, such as might be seen in many of the family portraits; dark thin hair plentifully streaked with gray, and let to grow somewhat long, in a straggling, careless fashion; a closely shaven mouth and chin—the jaw narrow, and somewhat retreating, the mouth well shaped, with the lips habitually drawn down at the corners, and two deep lines running from the nostrils on either side of the mouth to the chin. Cosmo was not yet thirty-eight, and he looked at least ten years older. He was carelessly, almost shabbily, dressed in coloured clothes, and he wore no crape band on the hat which he held in his hand. Thus much Mr. Flint's eyes told him during the few seconds in which he stood silently in the shadow. What Mr. Flint's brain thought of their report need not now be set forth.

After a short time Mary raised her face, and stood a little backward from her brother, holding both his hands. "You are changed, Cosmo," she said, rather sadly. "But that is no wonder. We must all be changed. It is such a long, long time since you were here!"

"Yes; I am changed, of course. I haven't been living under a glass case all these years. But you look wonderfully well-preserved, Mary. Life has gone easy with you."

Cosmo's voice was thin, and rather nasal, and he had a way of abruptly shutting his mouth tight, and giving a sniff through his nostrils at the end of each sentence.

"My life has been easier than yours, no doubt," answered Mary, gently. She released her brother's hands as she spoke.

Mr. Flint stepped forward. "I don't suppose that Sir Cosmo Lowry will remember me," he said gravely.

Cosmo looked round at him quickly. "Oh yes, I believe I remember you," he answered. "Mr. Flint, isn't it?"

Mr. Flint bowed, and was going to limit his recognition to the bow, but he caught Mary's eyes fixed on him appealingly, and, advancing, proffered his hand to the other man, who shook it in an indifferent, matter-of-course way.

"This seems to be scarcely a moment for offering congratulations, Sir Cosmo; but I may say that I wish you all happiness in your new relations."

"Oh! Mary has told you then?" returned

the baronet, looking not at Mr. Flint, but at his sister.

"Miss Lowry was so kind as to give me the news, knowing that everything which interests her interests me and my wife. Oh, I had nearly forgotten! Bertha bade me give you her kind love, Miss Lowry, and say that she begs you to let her know if there be any little service she can do for you in Elcaster. You know how glad she would be if you could employ her in any way."

"A thousand thanks and my love to her, but there is nothing I can tax her kindness for at present."

"Well, then, good night. I will not intrude longer on Sir Cosmo. He is probably tired, and you must have many things to talk over together."

"Good night, my dear, kind friend," said Mary, pressing his hand between both her own.

"I say," cried Sir Cosmo, who had looked on at this little colloquy in a dry, watchful way, "you'll be coming here to-morrow, I suppose, Mr. Flint?"

"If you and Miss Lowry desire it, Sir Cosmo."

"I shall certainly desire it. Of course I am

anxious to understand matters clearly as soon as possible, and I want to see Sir Rupert's will."

It was the first allusion he had made to his father since he entered the house. Mr. Flint made his stiffest bow, and this time did not hold out his hand as he answered, "I shall be able to be here about eleven o'clock to morrow morning, if that suits Miss Lowry's convenience. The business is, of course, as much hers as any one's. I wish you good night, Sir Cosmo." Then Mr. Flint went out and closed the door, leaving the brother and sister alone together.

Of all the account of the interview which Mr. Flint gave his wife one phrase that he happened to remember and repeat word for word seemed to anger her beyond anything else. "Well-preserved!" she exclaimed, fanning herself violently; "I never heard such an expression! One would think she was seventy! Mary Lowry, who is the handsomest woman in the county, and will be for the next twenty years to come—well-preserved, indeed!"

## CHAPTER IV.

THE contents of Sir Rupert's will, duly communicated to him on the following morning, were far from satisfying Sir Rupert's son and heir. Cosmo had arrived at Clevelenah very doubtful as to whether there would be anything for him beyond the entailed land. He left Clevelenah knowing himself to have inherited the whole of the landed property, and the greater part of Sir Rupert's money, the amount of which much surpassed his expectations ; and yet he was very, very far from being satisfied.

Two items in the will specially dissatisfied him ; the first was a bequest to his sister Mary of twelve thousand pounds over and above the sum secured to her by her mother's marriage settlement ; but the second item Cosmo thought, and scrupled not to declare, savoured of insanity. This second item was the bequest to Mary Lowry of the house called

Lowry Place, together with the gardens, shrubberies, orchards, paddocks, and so forth immediately surrounding it. Sir Rupert had been at some pains to set forth his reasons for making these provisions.

“Inasmuch,” he stated, “as I desire that my beloved and dutiful daughter Mary Hovenden Lowry should receive all the consideration due to her birth and character; and inasmuch as I consider that she has earned by years of self-sacrifice and devotion the right to be mistress in her old home so long as it pleases her to remain in it; and having, moreover, not the least confidence that she will receive becoming treatment from her brother, unless he be compelled by law to concede to her all the privileges which, owing to unfortunate family circumstances, have become peculiarly her due, I hereby will and bequeath,” etc., etc.

The whole of this clause Cosmo declared savoured of insanity. “The old man was in his dotage,” he said to Mr. Flint; and threw out a hint of his intention to dispute the will on that ground. But Mr. Flint met the hint with so steadfast and stern a front, that Sir Cosmo had been compelled to hold his tongue. Cosmo Lowry had not been violent. He was very seldom violent—so seldom that there

were persons who had known him for years and had never seen him blaze out into anger. But there is a subterraneous kind of resentment which keeps hot a long time; an ashen-grey heat as of fused metal from a furnace, which will consume whatever incautiously touches it. One mitigation, however, Nature had provided for the enduring quality of Sir Cosmo's wrath—a large alloy of indolence. To translate resentment into action—beyond the action of a bitter tongue—was an effort which his character and his habits combined to render extremely difficult to him; nay, in case of any sustained course of action, impossible. He could be negatively your enemy with very considerable persistence. That is to say, he could refrain from serving you, praising you, communicating with you, arguing with you, giving you a tangible reason for his animosity, or a chance of lessening it. But if circumstances threw you into juxtaposition with him, he could not afford the daily effort of active warfare.

Now, to be at enmity with Mr. Flint, in Mr. Flint's presence, on the score of his father's will, would, Sir Cosmo soon discovered, demand a considerable amount of aggressive force.

“ You will permit me to observe, Sir Cosmo,”

said Mr. Flint, "that had it not been for the very keen business sagacity of your late father—whom you were pleased just now to term a dotard—your income would now be a very different one from what it is. Up to the very last day of his life Sir Rupert attended to his affairs with the utmost clearness of mind. This is not my bare opinion or assertion. There are his books and papers open to your inspection. And I think, Sir Cosmo Lowry, that you would find it difficult to persuade any sane person that those books and papers had been kept by a man who was imbecile or doting."

"Oh, I dare say that Sir Rupert understood his own interests," returned Cosmo in his most nasal tones, and pointing each sentence with a sniff. "The master passion usually dies hard. But that don't prove, you know, that he was not weak on some points, and open to persuasion."

Upon this Mr. Flint became very angry, and expressed himself with an emphasis and vigour which overpowered any immediate attempt on Cosmo's part to keep up the controversy. Mr. Flint declared plainly that if the new baronet were not at that moment a beggar, or worse than a beggar, burthened with an empty title and an unsaleable bit of land,



it was entirely owing to the unselfish faithfulness of his sister Mary; inasmuch as it had needed all her "persuasion" (the word mightily offended Mr. Flint) to prevent the old man from leaving her all the property which he was free to dispose of.

"Oh, no doubt it's all very well, Mr. Flint," said the heir. "But since by your own showing Mary's influence in the matter was so great, you must allow that she has not done so badly for herself, whatever she may have done for me!" And with this Parthian shaft Sir Cosmo retreated.

But there was no quarrel between the brother and sister. Mary's heart was so full of a yearning desire for peace, and reunion, and affection, and she made such generously ample allowance for her brother's discontent and soreness of mind, that it would not have been easy for Cosmo to quarrel with her at that time. Moreover, despite all that he had said to Mr. Flint, he had a higher opinion of his sister Mary than of any other human being. Cosmo was not given to respect his fellow-creatures in general; nevertheless he respected Mary. But this did not prevent him from indulging in the malicious pleasure of annoying Mr. Flint—or even Mary herself, in a lesser degree—by utter-

ing insinuations which in his heart he did not believe.

Mary, to whom the contents of her father's will had been entirely unknown, was at first greatly moved and troubled by finding herself the mistress of Lowry Place. She begged Cosmo with tears to bring his young wife there, and to make it his home. "I shall consider it to be your rightful home, Cosmo," she said. "And you ought to live on your own land, among your own people; and Rosamond ought to learn all about the old place, and to love it."

"Will you let lodgings to us in Lowry Place, Mary?" asked Sir Cosmo with a sneer; and was considerably surprised by her at once replying with quiet dignity, "Yes, Cosmo; you shall come here as my tenant, if you prefer that to being my guest. And perhaps it would be the better arrangement of the two."

There was a point, then, beyond which it was not altogether safe to count on Mary's meekness! The discovery was unexpected. And it was vexatious not to have made it before uttering the sneer; for Mary seemed minded to take him at his word, and said something about asking Mr. Flint's advice as to a suitable arrangement.

"I don't know that my wife would like to

live in another person's house," said Cosmo, hoping, perhaps, that his sister would repeat her former words about Lowry Place being his rightful home. But she did not. She merely said, "If your wife knows that you pay me rent, she will understand that the house is yours and hers so long as the bargain lasts—at least all that part of it which it would suit me to let you occupy."

Decidedly there was a good deal in Mary's character which her brother had been quite unprepared for!

But they parted without a quarrel. When he was on the point of going away, she put her hands on his shoulders, saying, "Let us love one another, Cosmo, you and I! We have been friends in trouble and sorrow; don't let worldly fortune sunder us."

Cosmo kissed his sister kindly, if not tenderly, and promised to write to her immediately on his arrival at Lambrook, whither he was going to rejoin his wife. He would have to return to Clevenal before many days were over, as there were still some business matters which required his attention.

"Give my love to your wife, Cosmo," said Mary, "and bring her here very soon."

"Thanks," he answered. "You will have

to make a little allowance for her, you know; Mary. She is young and inexperienced, and will be shy at first with Miss Lowry of Lowry. But you are a clever woman, and will know how to put her at her ease !” And then he was driven away to Elcaster to the railway station.

There was no further talk of disputing Sir Rupert’s will on the ground of imbecility, or undue influence, or any other ground. “ Sir Cosmo has thought better of that,” said Mr. Flint to himself. Mr. Flint had not repeated to any one the hint which Sir Cosmo had dropped on the subject. It was not for him to hurt Miss Lowry’s feelings by telling her what had been said, perhaps in a moment of irritation. It must be owned that his reticence was not caused by any magnanimous thought of sparing Sir Cosmo, for whom, indeed, the lawyer had conceived a very strong dislike.

The will was duly proved, all proper formalities complied with, and Sir Cosmo Lowry of Lowry, ninth baronet, entered into the possession of his inheritance. This inheritance included a house in London, which Sir Rupert had never inhabited, but had been accustomed to let furnished during the season at a very profitable rate. Sir Cosmo wrote to his sister from Lambrook, saying that he thought of

taking up his quarters in the London house for the present. His wife had never been in London, and wished to see it. They could then think over matters, and arrange what was to be done as to the occupation of Lowry Place. Meanwhile, as circumstances required his presence at Clevenal for a day or two, he would avail himself of Mary's invitation to bring his wife thither to see her before they went to town. To this letter were added a few words in a neat, pointed, sloping handwriting, as follows :—

“ MY DEAR MISS LOWRY,

“ I am very glad to accept your invitation. I am very anxious, of course, to make the acquaintance of my husband's family, and I hope you will be able to like me, as I shall do all in my power to make Cosmo a good wife.

“ I remain,

“ Your affectionate sister-in-law,

“ SARAH LOWRY.”

Mary thought there was a pretty sincerity and simplicity about these lines, and was touched and pleased by them. She showed them to Mr. Flint, who could not deny that they impressed him favourably.

"I suppose she is quite young, this new sister-in-law?" said Mr. Flint.

"Cosmo says she is three and twenty, but looks younger, and is so inexperienced and girlish that most people take her to be still in her teens."

"Of course she's pretty."

"Cosmo did not say much about her looks. He was a little shy of talking of her. But I made him confess that she was very blooming, and had pretty blonde hair."

"Oh, of course she's pretty," reiterated Mr. Flint in a tone of conviction.

"Don't you like her letter, Mr. Flint? There is something so pathetic about those few words, 'I hope you will be able to like me.' Poor girl, she must feel shy and anxious at the thought of coming amongst strangers. I'm sure I shall love her!" said Mary impulsively.

"I'm sure she will love *you*," returned Mr. Flint, smiling. Indeed, the good man thought it was scarcely within the compass of human perversity not to love Mary Lowry.

But this security was by no means shared by the wife of Mr. Flint's bosom. That lady was inexorable, and could not be favourably inclined by any arguments towards the new Lady Lowry. Her love and admiration for Mary

were not inferior to her husband's, but she declined to make sure that their favourite would inspire similar feelings in her sister-in-law. Mrs. Flint was no whit moved by Lady Lowry's letter. "I wonder that you should be so soft, Samuel," she said. "There's nothing in the letter; nothing at all. Why, what less could she say? It's just the letter of any ordinary girl who has had half a year at a second-rate boarding school."

"At all events, Bertha, you are relieved of any doubt as to her being able to read and write. I remember you had some misgivings about it."

"Oh, she can write, I suppose. A nice state of things when one has to be thankful that Lady Lowry of Lowry knows how to hold a pen! Pretty? Don't tell me! A dairy-maid sort of thing. I know just what they mean by 'blooming.' It is a disgusting business altogether."

"Well, well, let us hope it may turn out better than we feared. And in any case, whatever comes of it, Cosmo Lowry ought to be blamed, and not the young woman. She didn't seize him and marry him against his will, I suppose."

"I don't know that!"

At this point Mr. Flint desisted from further attempts at altering his wife's mind on the subject—at least for the present. For he had long ago made the profound, if not wholly novel, observation that the too persistent opposition of a prejudice is apt to defeat its own object; and that the stronger the assertions into which our prejudice hurries us, the greater is the temptation to stick to them.



## CHAPTER V.

THE carriage was sent from Lowry Place to the Elcaster railway station to await the arrival of the express train one Saturday evening towards the end of August. And in due time it returned, carrying Sir Cosmo Lowry and his wife and a moderate quantity of luggage.

The sound of wheels on the gravel of the drive brought Mary Lowry out into the hall, and in a few seconds, amidst a little bustle of servants running to the door, and the barking of dogs, of which there were always several about the stables of Lowry Place, Sir Cosmo alighted, and handed his wife into his father's house. The hall was but dimly illuminated by a swinging lamp, and in the first minutes of their meeting Mary could distinguish very little of her sister-in-law's appearance. She only saw a figure somewhat under the middle size muffled in a long travelling cloak, and felt

a smooth, cool cheek under her lips as she kissed her, and bade her welcome.

"You would like to go to your room at once, would you not?" said Mary. "I told my maid to have everything ready for you.—I ordered dinner at eight, Cosmo," she added, turning to her brother. "No dressing, you know. Come down as soon as you can. You will find me in the library."

And in the library she sat waiting for some quarter of an hour, at the end of which time her brother joined her.

"Is your wife very tired, Cosmo?" she asked.

"Oh, I should think not. It isn't a very tremendous journey. I dare say she's hungry, though. I am! The food at the stations was too beastly for anything. Hulloo! Is this to-day's *Times*? I didn't know that you were so civilized in Clevenal as to have the *Times* every day."

"My father always liked to see it," answered Mary in a low voice. And then there was silence for a few minutes whilst Mary sat gazing at the fire, and her brother looked over the newspaper.

At length the door opened, and Lady Lowry came in. The library was well lighted with

abundance of wax candles, besides a couple of reading lamps, and by their light Mary saw advancing into the room a rather short young woman, with a plump, well-moulded figure. There was, perhaps, too great a stiffness about her waist, suggestive of tight stays. But her shoulders, bust, and throat were remarkably pretty, and the whiteness of the latter was well set off by the collar of black crape which encircled it. Nearly the whole of Lady Lowry's long black gown was covered with the same lugubrious material. She more than made up for Sir Cosmo's former neglect on that score by wearing very "deep" mourning, to use a mantua-maker's phrase. And, truly, if the heaviness of such apparel be taken as a measure of respect for the deceased, her veneration for the memory of Sir Rupert was profound indeed. But it was on her face that Mary's eyes were anxiously turned. It was a strikingly pretty face, although the features were somewhat blunt and insignificant. Its chief beauty lay in the colouring. The skin was of peach-like softness, fair and white save in the cheeks and lips, where it was tinged with a deep rose-colour. The eyes were large and vividly blue, and the hair of a bright pale brown.

Of the three persons present she looked the most unconcerned. Mary was undisguisedly agitated ; and although Cosmo made as though he were giving all his attention to his newspaper, yet it shook a little in his hand, and he glanced covertly at his sister from behind it. But it would have been a mistake to conclude from appearances that the young bride was at her ease. She was in reality suffering a good deal from nervousness. But her nervousness was not of a fluttering, flurried kind. It manifested itself by deepening the fixed roses in her cheeks, and brightening her widely opened round blue eyes, and in a little short, panting manner of speaking, which might have seemed merely abrupt to a dull or unsympathetic spectator. Mary Lowry was, however, neither dull nor unsympathetic ; and she took the stranger's hand to lead her to a chair near the fire, saying with a smile which had the inimitable sweetness of sincerity, "I hope you are not too tired to be ready for your dinner? Cosmo has just been confessing to being very hungry."

"Oh no, thank you," said Lady Lowry.

Her voice was pitched in rather a deep key, and was not disagreeable, although a little guttural.

"I hope you have found everything comfortable in your room?"

"Oh yes, thank you."

"We are accustomed to have fires here as soon as the days begin to grow shorter, and I told them to make a fire in your dressing-room, because, although it is not really cold, I think a fire looks cheerful and welcoming."

"Oh, it was very nice, thank you."

"How many hours have you been travelling?"

The bride glanced at her husband, who was apparently absorbed in the oracular wisdom of a leading article. "Cosmo," she said, "Miss Lowry asks how long we have been travelling? I forget exactly what o'clock we started."

"Eh?—Oh—At twelve, wasn't it? They lost such a deuce of a time at that junction place."

Sir Cosmo returned to his paper, and Mary, drawing near to her sister-in-law, and taking her hand, said softly, "My dear, you must not call me 'Miss Lowry.' I am Mary to you; and I shall call you Sarah."

"It's an awfully ugly name, isn't it?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, but it is. I know very well that

it's an awfully common name. But I didn't christen myself, you know; did I?" returned Lady Lowry, with a little guttural laugh.

Now, it must be owned that Sarah appeared to less advantage when she was playful than when she was serious. Indeed, it is a general observation which the judicious reader has doubtless made for himself, that not only what you laugh at, but how you laugh, furnishes a subtle indication as to many things which it is not to the advantage of all persons to have revealed. More than one wise-looking gentleman has been known to destroy the imposing effect of his presence by an unlucky cachinnation; and how many rosy lips have disenchanted our eyes and ears by parting in a giggle! The laugh of Sarah, Lady Lowry, had a suspicion of coarseness in it which was apt to jar a little on sensitive ears.

"Your name is none the worse for being common," answered Mary. "Is dinner served, James? Very well. Cosmo, I shall give Sarah my arm, and you must follow us." So the two women walked out to dinner together, under the watchful eyes of old James and the butler.

Lady Lowry had already been discussed in

the servants' hall. That was a matter of course. It was also a matter of course—being one of those mysteries which must be accepted without being understood—that within twenty-four hours of Sir Cosmo's first return home after his father's death, the fact of his having married a low-born person, the contents of Sir Rupert's will, and the words which had passed between Mr. Flint and Sir Cosmo on that subject, had become, under more or less distorted forms, the property, not only of the servants at Lowry Place, but of the whole population of Clevelen. In the village, stories of a very wild and incredible kind were rife. Such stories were eagerly accepted at the Elcaster Arms, and the humbler hostelry of the Barley Mow, in both of which places of entertainment men's mouths were wont to be employed in emitting gossip and tobacco smoke, and imbibing strong beer. To be sure the word "gossip," which I have used, is more usually employed to designate the idle talk of that sex which does not flavour its scandal with tobacco; but since it is written let it stand. Only I will add, in justice to these lords of the creation, that they swore a great deal, and used very strong abusive English—which redeemed their conversation from the reproach

of mere petty effeminacy. But in the servants' hall at Lowry Place a less violent tone prevailed. The servants there were nearly all elderly persons who had spent the best part of their lives in the service of the family, and in whose minds the Lowrys of Lowry Place represented the ideal of solvability, stability, and gentility. They had, too, more of old-fashioned personal attachment to their masters than would, perhaps, have survived the yearly London season to whose evil communications the good manners of many of my Lord Elcaster's servants were exposed. Even old Sir Rupert had been by no means so unpopular a character with his domestics and dependants as with his neighbours and equals. True, he was hard, short-tempered, and avaricious; but on the other hand he possessed some qualities which commanded their respect, and, even to some degree, their liking—he always knew exactly what he wanted, and insisted on having it done. The characters of children and inferiors generally are like weak limbs, never more easy than when they are forcibly braced up by external pressure, and this sort of support Sir Rupert had administered with no uncertain hand. As to Miss Lowry, all of them liked, and some of them loved her. Owing to all



these considerations and motives the domestics at Lowry Place were divided by conflicting tendencies, and the polity of the lower regions was in an agitated and turbulent state. They were, in the main, indignant at the introduction of a country lass, "no better born than one of themselves," if all tales were true, into the family whose antiquity and gentle blood was their only ground of self-assertion against the brand-new luxury and town-bred insolence of Lord Elcaster's people. And yet Sir Cosmo was the lawful husband of the country lass, and had made her "my lady"—and Sir Cosmo was the heir, and reigned in the place of his father. Again, some of these good people really wished to please Miss Mary—only they were inclined to do so by acting rather according to their notions of what she ought to like than by taking pains to be sure what it was she did like—a trait of human nature to be met with in other and politer circles. For certain Miss Lowry wouldn't be best pleased at such a match, they said; for she was a real Lowry, and had a dose of the family pride for all she was so gentle and affable in her ways.

Thus, when Miss Lowry and Lady Lowry entered the dining-room together, the sympathies of that silent, critical audience which

looks over our shoulders at table, and misinterprets our utterances with an ingenuity worthy of the most accomplished commentators, were altogether with the former lady. And yet the plump figure, rosy cheeks, and blue eyes of the bride were not without a softening effect on the two grave spectators in their new black coats. Lady Lowry's style of beauty, indeed, appealed to the admiration of the vulgar—I mean of the majority of mankind—more strongly than did Mary's.

There was not much conversation during dinner. Mary tried to converse easily and cheerfully, but her brother did not give her much assistance, and it was not to be expected that her brother's wife should give any. But the latter behaved with perfect decorum, so that Cosmo, watching her furtively, was moved to say to himself more than once, "By George, it's wonderful how she does it!" And truly, reader, Sir Cosmo's admiration was not wholly due to the partiality of a bridegroom. For you must understand that this young woman had never before in the course of her life sat at the table of gentlefolks, or been waited upon by any domestics of a higher sort than the rough country girl at her father's farmhouse, or the drudge of a servant-maid at the provin-

cial boarding-school she had been sent to. It is little to say that she satisfied Miss Lowry by the quiet propriety of her demeanour, for Mary had but a vague conception of the social circumstances of Lady Lowry's maiden days; and took it for granted in a natural, though perhaps unreasonable, way, that her sister-in-law should be unembarrassed by the mere material details of her new surroundings. Indeed, Mary did not give a thought to that part of the matter.

But let it be recorded, as testimony to Lady Lowry's success on this trying occasion, that the keen eyes which watched her from the sideboard could detect scarcely a solecism in her behaviour. One criticism, and only one, the butler made afterwards.

"She wasn't quite sure what to do with the fish knife," said he. "I saw her begin to eat the salmon with a fork and a bit o' bread, until she caught sight of Sir Cosmo, and then she took up the knife very neat and quiet, just as if she'd meant to use it all along."

"Well, perhaps she did," returned James. "And for that matter, I've seen Sir Rupert mash up his fish and potatoes, and eat it with a spoon."

"Oh, Sir Rupert! Ah, that's a very different matter. Sir Rupert 'ud have ate his fish with his fingers if it had come into his head to like it. But he wouldn't have cared a brass farthing what we thought about it. Now, Lady Lowry, I saw her give a little quick look out of the corner of her eye to see if I was noticing."

But whilst these profound observations were being made in the servants' hall, the subject of them was conversing confidentially with Miss Lowry in the library, Sir Cosmo having remained alone to smoke a cigar after dinner.

Lady Lowry appeared averse to speaking of her parents or her family, but, on the other hand, she was very communicative about the school where she had been educated. She called it a "seminary," and declared that the schoolmistress was a very genteel person, and most particular about the manners of the young ladies confided to her charge. "I assure you she couldn't bear anything low. And I'm sure I am under great obligations to her for the pains she took with my behaviour. Of course, you know, we could neither of us foresee that I should come to make such a marriage as I have done. But, as Mrs. Bolitho always used to say, when a

young lady has genteel manners she is ready for any society."

After this there was a short silence, which was broken by Lady Lowry saying, "I dare say you expected a regular wild woman of the woods. Didn't you, now?"

"I? No;—I don't quite know what you mean."

"Oh, I mean when Cosmo told you he had married a country girl."

"No, indeed," answered Mary, smiling; and she added, with delicate generosity, "You know I am a country girl myself."

"Yes; that's very true. But of course I know that the Lowrys are very proud of their family. Do you know, I didn't know a bit who Cosmo was when I first—when he began——"

"When you first were kind enough to love him?" put in Mary with a brightening face.

"Oh, well, of course he was so very particular in his attentions that I couldn't help seeing he had an attachment for me. Otherwise, I assure you, I should never have thought of him."

"But when you did think of him you thought kindly. Poor Cosmo! Your regard must have been very precious to him. You

know he had been so long cut off from affection and kindness——”

“Oh, I know that Sir Rupert behaved—however, I don’t wish to say anything against my husband’s father.”

“Not to me, please.”

“Oh, not to *any* one. I am fully aware how unbecoming it would be. You see I have put on mourning for the old gentleman. I wouldn’t omit any proper token of respect. I said so to Cosmo: ‘I shall wear mourning for your father, Cosmo,’ I said, ‘for I quite understand what is due to your family in my new position.’”

Mary gently tried to lead her sister-in-law away from the topic of her own acquaintance with the social proprieties, and asked sundry questions about her home, and the scenery around it, and so forth. But Lady Lowry professed a great contempt for her home, and begged it might not be supposed that she had spent much of her time there.

“A farmhouse is a very dull place,” she said. “Though, indeed, the house my father lives in is a manor house. It had a moat once, and belongs to this day to people of title. Still it *is* dull. I used to go on visits to Lambrook a good deal.”

When Mary innocently expressed some surprise that her parents were willing to spare her from home so frequently, Lady Lowry energetically declared that she was not so useful in her father's house as to be greatly missed from it. "Though Cosmo did first see me in the dairy," she said, very earnestly, "I only made butter to amuse myself."

Then there ensued a second, and somewhat longer, silence; and the conversation had grown fitful and constrained by the time Cosmo came in to have coffee, after which they all retired to bed on the plea that the travellers were tired.

The truth was, that Miss Lowry felt an unaccountable shyness stealing over her in exact proportion as Lady Lowry grew more at her ease. Perverse fate has these awkward turns in store sometimes for the most intelligent persons. Still, Mary was not hard on her sister-in-law, for she judged her rather with the heart than the head, and attributed her offences against good taste chiefly to a nervous desire to appear to advantage, and thus to do justice to her husband's choice. And here heart was undoubtedly in the right, to some extent: for if Sarah had had the least notion that simple sincerity would have

caused her to cut a better figure in Mary's eyes than genteel pretences, she would undoubtedly have adopted the former instead of the latter. But this is a kind of knowledge which not all minds are capable of receiving.

Sarah Lowry's character was perhaps as little complex as that of any human being can be. She had one ideal of conduct,—the Proper. The real object of her worship might have been defined as "That which seemeth good in the eyes of respectable people." Indeed, most things about her, from her waist to her principles, had been very early moulded into certain fixed forms; and she was almost entirely inaccessible to reasoning on abstract grounds. But she still had, of course, some capacities for growth and modification which circumstances alone could develop, and which the reader may behold in action if he accompanies the various stages of this history.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE next day was chiefly passed by Sir Cosmo in attending to business affairs, and in giving audience to a certain Mr. Stokes, who had been Sir Rupert's right-hand man in the management of the Lowry estates, and was thoroughly acquainted with all details concerning them. The present baronet was at once indolent and suspicious ; too lazy to take trouble to learn the particulars of leases, and tenures, and so forth, and yet keen to pry into any discrepancies which struck him. He worried Mr. Stokes a good deal on the occasion of this, their first interview. That functionary, indeed, declared afterwards, to a confidential friend, that he was mighty glad to hear Sir Cosmo was going to live in London : for that, though old Sir Rupert had been a hard man, he believed the new master wouldn't be so easy to serve as the old one had been. Sir Rupert at least knew his own mind, and stuck to it.

And whether things went wrong or right, if you'd only obey orders, Sir Rupert took everything else on his own shoulders. "Whereas," said Mr. Stokes, meditatively, "I'm afraid this 'un is one of that sort as won't neither drive you nor yet give you your head."

The hours occupied by Sir Cosmo with Mr. Stokes were employed by Lady Lowry in visiting every room in the house, and in walking through the gardens, with Mary. Lady Lowry had asked to be shown over the house, and her sister-in-law had very willingly complied with the request. It soon appeared that my lady was not minded to perform the task superficially, for she visited every nook and corner, from the garrets to the butler's pantry. "Of course, you know, I like to make myself acquainted with Cosmo's old home," she said. And the sentiment was one which Mary could sympathize with, even although its manifestation were carried out with unnecessary minuteness.

Mary had turned the little room which used to be her father's so-called study into a sitting-room for herself. She had altered and modified the furniture so as to make the room look cheerful and habitable, if not precisely like a lady's boudoir. But she had forborne to

remove one or two articles particularly associated with Sir Rupert: amongst them were the old-fashioned walnut-wood writing-table, and the pair of rusty horse-pistols over the chimney piece.

These latter, and the portrait of Childe Roland the hunter, shocked Lady Lowry's taste. She had been cautious and reserved in her utterances all the morning; although indeed the magnitude of the house, and the grandeur of the massive, old-fashioned furniture, had greatly impressed her. Lowry Place was by far the stateliest dwelling she had ever been in; and she felt, with an exultant swelling of the heart, that here were visible, palpable, undeniable proofs of the wonderful greatness she had achieved by marrying Cosmo Lowry. She had not much imagination, yet the spiritual pleasure of being called "my lady" was one which she thoroughly and intensely enjoyed. And now the sight and touch of the velvet hangings, Turkey carpets, and gilded mirrors, had given a new relish to this delight:—a solid, secure sense of the reality of all the fine things which had fallen to her lot. But nevertheless she knew better than to express her delight with the enthusiasm of an ignorant rustic. Not for

nothing had Mrs. Bolitho the genteel taken pains to inculcate the principles of polite behaviour on her pupil.

But Mrs. Bolitho's teachings, however much they might have blamed a too great zeal in admiring, had never been adverse to finding fault upon proper occasions. Indeed, there is something in the fact of finding fault—provided it be done with dignity—which implies a certain superiority in the fault-finder, and is thus by its very nature genteel. Such at all events was the notion which resulted from Mrs. Bolitho's precepts in the mind of her favourite pupil. Consequently it was with no uneasy misgiving that Sarah expressed her surprise—her *great* surprise—to find such things as a pair of pistols and the picture of a horse hanging in a lady's private sitting-room.

"Yes," answered Mary, smiling a little, "they doubtless appear odd to you. But I do not mean to have them removed."

"Really! Oh, but isn't that a pity!"

"Why?"

"Oh, because it *looks* so strange. What will people think, you know?"

"People! What people? My friends will understand it very well."

Sarah paused a little on this. "*I don't*

understand," she said at length, looking up with a certain stolid simplicity which was quite genuine, and which was, perhaps, the real foundation, the natural substratum, of the character which Mrs. Bolitho had been at such pains to polish.

"It is very simple," returned Mary. "My father valued those pistols very much, and liked to talk about them. They were carried by an ancestor of ours who was a soldier, in one of Marlborough's campaigns."

"A soldier?"

"Yes; Colonel Rupert Lowry. You saw his portrait in the dining-room last night."

"Oh, an *officer*!" corrected Sarah.

"But it is not for the Colonel's sake that I keep the pistols there. They are so inseparably associated in my mind with my poor father, that I should almost as soon think of turning Connaught away from his corner by the hearth here as of taking them down. As to Childe Roland, he is quite a historical character in this part of the country. There are few persons alive now who can remember his feats in the hunting-field, but all Clevelen parish will tell you stories of Sir Rupert's Childe Roland, if you like to hear them."

Lady Lowry listened attentively. She did

not even now quite comprehend why the rusty old pistols and the dingy old picture were allowed to disfigure Miss Lowry's boudoir. But she thought she should like to talk about "our ancestor Colonel Rupert Lowry;" and she resolved to refresh her memory on the subject of Marlborough's campaigns by a reference to Mrs. Markham's "History of England."

She then proceeded to ask various questions about the walnut-wood writing-table. Did Sir Rupert keep all his papers there? Did he always write at it? Was his will found there? Were there any secret drawers in it? Being satisfied on these points, she accompanied her sister-in-law into the gardens and shrubberies, which she thoroughly inspected, and came in to luncheon with an excellent appetite.

During that meal she had occasion to congratulate herself on her prudent reticence in the morning; for when she and Mary told Sir Cosmo how they had been employed, he said, "Queer old barrack it must look. I suppose nothing has been changed since I was here, Mary?"

"Not since you were born, I should think, Cosmo."

"The furniture must be fit for a marine

store dealer by this time," returned the baronet pleasantly.

"No," his sister answered. "It is, of course, very old-fashioned and out of date; nevertheless, when the great drawing-room is well lighted, and the covers taken off, and the mirrors polished, it has still a certain stately air of its own that pleases my eyes; like an antiquated beau of the old *régime*. What do you think, Sarah?"

Whereto Sarah replied that she thought the great drawing-room might be made to look very tolerable for a country house; especially if it were supplied with a dozen or so of anti-macassars in the new imitation point-lace stitch which she herself had recently learned, and would be happy to teach to Mary.

When Lady Lowry and her husband were alone together that evening for a few minutes before dinner in their own chamber, Sarah said, "Isn't it funny, Cosmo, that your sister should keep that worm-eaten old writing-table in her own room?"

"Ah! Does she?" answered Sir Cosmo carelessly. He was standing before the looking-glass brushing his thin locks with a couple of hair-brushes.

"Yes; and—— Did they show you that

letter your father wrote to Mr. Flint the day before he died?"

"No; what letter? Why should they?"

"Well, as it was about your father's will, I thought——"

Sir Cosmo wheeled round, hair-brush in hand. "About my father's will?" he said. "Who says so?"

"Well, nobody said so, exactly. But Mary let drop a word this morning——"

"Pooh! It's only your nonsense. You've got Sir Rupert's will on the brain, Sally."

And indeed it was true that Lady Lowry had thought and spoken a great deal about that document ever since her husband had told her its contents. She was more indignant at the provisions concerning Mary than her husband had been. And since she had seen Lowry Place with her own eyes, her indignation had increased. It even threatened to grow to such a height as to overshadow her enjoyment of the good things which Fortune had so unexpectedly given her. It seemed to her that to inherit the Lowry estates without being master of Lowry Place was a cruel position for her husband, deserving the deepest sympathy from all well-regulated minds. And the twelve thousand pounds



bequeathed to Mary over and above the settled money was another, although a lesser, grievance.

There are some minds whose vision magnifies injuries in proportion as it diminishes benefits. A very insignificant insect on a crystal lens will suffice to blot out all the stars from poor human eyes. And there are mortals who hold their own artificial tube to be the only proper medium through which to see anything; and would rather maintain the "spacious firmament on high" to be a dark, confused blotch than confess to a flaw in the apparatus through which they view it.

To be sure Lady Lowry's mental lens was now directed on matters much less sublime, and entirely sublunary. And, to say truth, so long as we keep in her ladyship's company I foresee that we shall not soar far into the empyrean.

"I wish, Cosmo," she returned, opening her eyes very wide as was her habit when she was earnest about anything, "that you would give up that trick of calling me 'Sally.' It *does* sound so bad. But as to the letter, you can ask about it for yourself. And, if I was you, I should. That Mr. Flint is going to dine here to-night."

"Flint? What a confounded nuisance!"

"Well, Mary told me that he had to see her on business, and would I mind his being asked to dinner, as he was such an old friend, and wasn't like company, because of course as I said to her it wouldn't be proper to have a party and us in such deep mourning," returned my lady, with a peculiar breathless emphasis, which together with the wide opening of her eyes were symptoms with her of a desire to be impressive.

"H'm!" grunted Sir Cosmo, and gave an unusually long sniff. Then, after having adjusted his cravat before the glass, he said, "It would be a pity to intrude on our grief, certainly. And now, perhaps, your ladyship will come down to dinner."

Mr. Flint was in the library with Miss Lowry when Sir Cosmo and his wife entered it. The greeting between the baronet and the lawyer was very stiff and ceremonious on the part of the latter, very cool and careless on the part of the former. But Sir Cosmo did not think that it would suit his convenience to quarrel with Mr. Flint just then; and Mr. Flint was fully resolved, for Mary's sake, not to quarrel with Sir Cosmo at all, if it were possible to avoid doing so. And

thus there was outward peace, if not cordiality, between them.

Mary went up to her sister-in-law when she entered the library, and taking her hand led her to where Mr. Flint stood making his old-fashioned bow. "Sarah," she said, "let me make you acquainted with my dear and valued old friend Mr. Flint."

Lady Lowry did not offer her hand—for this person, "dear and valued" though Mary might choose to call him, was neither a great man nor a rich man: was, in fact, a mere provincial lawyer who was paid for his services to the House of Lowry—but she made him a little salutation between a bow and a curtsey, and said, "How do you *do*?"

Grace of movement was not among the charms with which nature had gifted Sarah. And—perhaps because Mrs. Bolitho's efforts had been directed to higher matters—education had not supplied the defect. But, as it happened, the awkwardness of my lady's greeting disposed Mr. Flint favourably towards her, for he set it down to shyness, and assumed an extra gentleness of manner in order to put the stranger at her ease. So when Mary bade him give Lady Lowry his arm, they all marched in to dinner amicably enough.

During the meal there was sufficient conversation to prevent a sense of absolute constraint, but it was not of a nature to produce anything like intimacy or good fellowship. And perhaps such a degree of social cordiality as is implied in the phrase "good fellowship" would have been beyond the power of mortal to attain with such conflicting elements as were then assembled in the dining-room at Lowry Place. The talk went on somewhat after this fashion :—

Mr. Flint: "You have, of course, seen nothing of our neighbourhood yet, Lady Lowry? We flatter ourselves that Clevelen Woods are worth looking at in their autumn colours."

Lady Lowry: "Oh dear no! None of the gentry have called, of course, as Sir Cosmo and myself wished it to be particularly understood that we are here *strictly incog*. And I have not stirred out beyond the grounds, much less visited any of the seats of the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood."

Sir Cosmo: "What do you mean to do about the stables, Mary? They're in a deuce of a state. You ought to have some of those new patent mangers put up—if you keep the horses, that is to say. The fact is, there isn't

a beast in the lot worth his salt—except, perhaps, Bluestocking. And *she'll* only eat her head off this winter, for I suppose you don't mean to ride her to hounds. I should sell the whole box and dice of 'em."

Mary: "No, Cosmo; I will not sell the poor animals. They shall end their days here in peace. But I think you are a little mistaken in your estimate of them. My father was allowed by the whole county to be an excellent judge of horses. And he grudged no expense to keep the stables in good working order. I think you would find, if his horses were put up for sale to-morrow, that Lowry Place has not lost its old reputation in this respect."

Sir Cosmo (muttering half aloud with a bitter sneer): "Grudged nothing for the stables, eh? What consolatory reflection for his only son!"

It will be seen that dialogue of this kind was not calculated to raise the spirits or soothe the temper, and Mary got up to quit the table with a sigh of relief. But my lady preceded her out of the room with a very satisfied expression of countenance. She was cheered by the conviction that she had played her part with admirable propriety.

As soon as Sir Cosmo was left alone with Mr. Flint, he drew his chair close up to the latter, but with a look on his face which plainly showed that he had no convivial intentions in so doing.

"Mr. Flint," he said, unceremoniously lighting a large cigar, and beginning to puff at it, "what's this I've been told about a letter of instructions which Sir Rupert wrote to you a day before he died?"

Mr. Flint drew himself a little backward from the cloud of smoke which followed these words out of Sir Cosmo's mouth, and answered gravely, "It is impossible for me to know what you may or may not have been told, Sir Cosmo. But *I* can tell you that Sir Rupert wrote me no letter of instructions the day before he died."

"Wasn't there a letter found on his writing-table the next morning, addressed to you?"

"There was, certainly."

"Well, that's what I mean. If it wasn't precisely a letter of instructions, it was something of the sort. We needn't quibble about a word."

"I am not in the habit of quibbling, Sir Cosmo; and the letter you allude to was *nothing* of the sort you suppose."

"H'm! My informant was mistaken, then."

"Apparently."

"Would you mind telling me what the letter was about?" asked Sir Cosmo, after a short pause. He had not the least intention of allowing a feeling of pride to prevent him from obtaining the information he wanted. Sir Cosmo's pride—if he had any—was of a sort that never by any chance played into his adversary's hands.

"I have—or, rather, I had—only one objection to communicating the contents of your father's letter to you, Sir Cosmo: an objection founded on consideration for your feelings. But I am inclined to think that that was a superfluous sentiment; and, since you wish it, I shall have the honour to send you an attested copy of the document in question to-morrow morning."

"Oh, thankye. Yes; I should like to see it. And as to my feelings, no doubt you're right. Any consideration for them has long been thought superfluous at Lowry Place; and you haven't frequented it all these years without catching a little of the prevalent tone. No more wine?"

"Not any more. And as I am no smoker, and, besides, have a little business to transact

with Miss Lowry, I will ask your permission to withdraw."

And with that, Mr. Flint, taking the permission for granted, stalked out of the room with his face very red and his head very erect.

The next morning the promised copy of the letter was sent to Sir Cosmo. It was very accurate, and scrupulously indicated every passage where there were alterations or erasures in the original. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR FLINT,

"I knew you would bully me, and I can't stand being bullied so well as I did, for eighty-two sufficient reasons. So I didn't speak to you sooner about changing my mind. I have"—here a sentence was entirely scratched out—"But you would not approve my arrangements regarding my son, and so there's no use in wasting words about it. What a thorn in the flesh he has been to me you know partly. No human being knows entirely, not even Mary. However, I am not going to ask for sympathy at this time of day, and bygones are bygones. I have recently had one or two warnings that the end is near. The sooner the better. I'm nearly tired out. But before I go I wish to make one or two things plain



to you. It will be too late to scold me, or coax me. Come to-morrow, and dine if you can. Don't fail me. There is no time to lose, I can tell you, and you know I am not fanciful about myself. If Wobley holds in the same mind about the lease of his cottage, you can renew it for him on the old terms. He rang the bells of Clevenal Church the day Mary and I were married, and my wife always had a liking for him. You can tell him that I left word he was to have the lease renewed for Lady Lowry's sake. He's such a soft old fool, it may please him.—Yours, for a short time, but as long as he lasts,

“RUPERT LOWRY.”

Lady Lowry read this letter several times over, and discussed its bearing with her husband very earnestly. Sir Cosmo at first treated the whole matter with indifference. It was, indeed, at Sarah's express instance that he had spoken to Mr. Flint on the subject; and he now laughed at her for being, as he said, “so solemn and impressive” about it. But Sarah continued to be solemn and impressive, and by degrees she produced some faint reflection of her own earnestness in her husband's mind.

We hear a great deal of the effect of a strong mind on the minds around it, but the power of a dull mind is not so often recognized. The dull mind is apt, by its very nature, to be persistent, and has an ox-like inability to calculate what is within and what beyond its powers. On it plods, steady, unswerving, and obstinate, with its thick skull pressing hard against the yoke. It may be brought to a stand-still by sheer force of matter; but it never jibs. Such a mind, when brought to bear on a character like that of Cosmo Lowry, at once weak and violent, indolent and unscrupulous,—is an engine of very considerable power.

“I tell you what, Cosmo,” said Lady Lowry, “I’m as sure as sure can be, that your father meant at the last minute to alter his will in your favour. There!”

“Hah! Well, it isn’t worth bothering yourself about, any way, seeing that whatever he meant he didn’t do it.”

“I do think his *dying wishes* ought to be respected, Cosmo.”

Sir Cosmo laughed his little sneering laugh. “Well, Sally,” he said, “if those were his dying wishes, I think so too. Only unfortunately there is nothing on earth to show that

his dying wishes were not of an exactly contrary kind. And how about respecting them in that case?"

"Cosmo, I'll just ask you what those words mean, 'bygones are bygones'?"

"Flint says that if it hadn't been for him and Mary I should have been cut off with a shilling and the bit of entailed land."

"Mr. Flint may say what he likes. Look here what your father writes: 'You wouldn't approve of my arrangements regarding my son.' Now, we know very well that Mr. Flint wouldn't approve of any arrangement that didn't give your sister Mary the upper hand."

"H'm!"

"So Sir Rupert evidently *daren't* tell him that he'd changed his mind till the last minute. Poor old gentleman! It's as clear as crystal to me how he was worked upon. I do feel sure, Cosmo, that your father meant to make you amends at the last. And I do consider it a religious duty to carry out his intentions. There!"

"*Whose* religious duty, Sally?"

"Your sister Mary's," returned my lady at once, with an air of profound conviction. "Your sister Mary ought never to keep possession of this house, Cosmo. It's flying in the

face of—of—everything! And what *can* your sister Mary want with that twelve thousand pounds?”

“Why—you may find it difficult to believe, Sally, being so simple-minded—but the fact is there are worldly people who like being rich better than being poor!”

The sneer was entirely thrown away on Lady Lowry. That worthy young matron was never very quick to detect irony; and she had now worked herself up to a far too exalted pitch of morality to be assailable by such weak shafts. “It don’t matter what people *like*, Cosmo,” she returned; in a tone of virtuous severity, “they ought to do their duty. As to your sister Mary—it’s all very well to work High-Church-pattern cushions for the clergyman of the parish, but I know this: if I had this house and that twelve thousand pounds on my conscience as your sister Mary has, I couldn’t sleep in my bed!”

## CHAPTER VII.

THE business which had brought Cosmo Lowry to his native place was settled within a couple of days, and then he declared that he could not prolong his stay there, but must proceed to town forthwith. Mary suggested that Sarah should remain with her until the house in London should be ready to receive her. But with this suggestion neither husband nor wife seemed willing to comply. "Ready for her!" Cosmo exclaimed. "Why, what do you suppose she wants, or expects? The people the house was let to were satisfied with it, I believe. There are plenty of pots, and pans, and chairs, and tables, and beds in it. Sally has no pretensions to have a bridal abode new furnished for her. It'll be a deuced sight better place than she ever lived in before, except this."

Cosmo looked absolutely savage as he made this speech, which was uttered aloud in Lady Lowry's presence. The fact was, he had been

in a terribly bad temper for the last two or three days. He was keen-sighted enough in some respects, and his reason told him that Sarah was utterly wrong, and would make herself ridiculous, and him odious, if she followed up the notion she had taken into her head about Sir Rupert's intentions. But his prejudices, his greed, his smouldering indignation against the provisions of the will and his jealous dislike to see his sister made entirely independent of him, all took his wife's side in the matter, and the conflict within him worried and irritated him. In his inmost conscience he did believe Mr. Flint to be honest, and Mary to be high-minded : and he was constantly chafing at himself for entertaining this quite involuntary conviction. Grasping and shallow-hearted as Cosmo was, it may nevertheless be believed of him that he would not have acted unkindly by Mary had she been left with a bare subsistence. He might even, in that case, have displayed some generosity towards her. But the nature which is generous to others in adversity is common enough ; the magnanimity which can forgive prosperity belongs to rarer spirits, and Cosmo Lowry was not of them.

The tears sprang into Sarah's eyes when he spoke of her having no pretensions to ex-

pect new furniture. It was a kind of thrust calculated to wound her feelings deeply. "Oh, Cosmo!" cried Mary, looking at him in dismay. Then, checking herself, she turned to Sarah with a smile, and tried to make as though her brother had spoken in jest. But Lady Lowry first put her handkerchief to her eyes with some elaborateness of action, and then resolutely put her handkerchief into her pocket, with that air of self-sacrifice as who should say, "I *could* go on crying a great deal longer, but my principles are so rigidly virtuous that I won't," which some women are apt to affect under similar circumstances. "My dear Mary," she said, "I can make allowances for Cosmo. It is a wife's place to make allowances. And I know what he has to put up with. You must remember that his position is very different from what he had a right to expect." (Here Sir Cosmo thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and marched out of the room whistling tunelessly, and with his black eyebrows almost meeting above his aquiline nose.) "And whatever others may feel, it is not for *me* to make light of it."

Similar hints had puzzled Mary before, but now she thought her sister-in-law's meaning unmistakable. And she thought, too, that

these plain words explained several previous utterances of a more or less vague kind. Her natural generosity was touched to the quick; and taking Sarah's hand between both her own she said, warmly, "You mustn't suppose, my dear child, that Cosmo is anything but proud and happy in his new position. If you love him, and he loves you, he has drawn the happiest lot this earth can give. And if he were a prince he could have no more. You'll forgive a cross word that does not come from the heart, Sarah. You know we Lowrys are a hot-tempered race. You are fifty times gentler. But you must never, never think that Cosmo would be so base as to taunt you because—because your birth happens not to be so good as his. *Indeed* he didn't mean that. I'm afraid you have been fretting yourself on that score, lately: perhaps because Cosmo has been irritable, and you have not understood. But believe me, Sarah——"

"What on earth are you talking about?" cried my lady at length; her blunt astonishment getting the better of her good manners. "I declare I don't understand ten words of what you are saying. Of course I know Cosmo is very glad he married me! Why shouldn't he be? I am very much obliged



to you for the invitation, Mary, but I really couldn't stay at Lowry under present circumstances. If you will come and pay us a visit in Green Street we shall be delighted. I trust I shall always behave properly to my husband's family. And it is so much better to be on good terms. I think nothing looks so bad as a coolness in families."

When Lady Lowry told her husband of the invitation she had given to Mary to visit them in town, Cosmo signified neither approval nor disapproval of the measure, but merely asked what his sister had said. "She didn't say anything certain," replied Lady Lowry, "but I dare say she will come. It would be useful for me to have some one with me at first, who knows about the ways of a big house, and all that. I shouldn't like to make any mistakes; it would look so bad to the servants."

Sir Cosmo and his wife left Lowry Place without Sarah having ventured explicitly to suggest to Miss Lowry the religious duty of relinquishing her legacy in her brother's favour. And all hints on the subject were lost on Mary for the sufficient reason that she had no distant suspicion of Sarah's ideas on the subject of Sir Rupert's last letter. Mr. Flint did not tell her that he had furnished

her brother with a copy of it. Indeed, he kept the knowledge of that fact strictly to himself:—as he would have kept the knowledge of all facts likely to annoy Miss Lowry, had it been in his power.

The two or three weeks following her brother's departure, were employed by Mary in various business and domestic arrangements necessitated by her new circumstances; wherein she had the benefit of Mr. Flint's constant advice and assistance. Then there came a lull, and the old house seemed very forsaken and desolate to its solitary mistress. Mrs. Flint suggested that Mary should travel on the Continent, and spend the winter abroad. If not, there were, as she said, plenty of people ready and willing to make her welcome if she could consent to pay a round of visits amongst her country neighbours. But Mary finally decided on accepting her sister-in-law's invitation—which had been more pressingly repeated by letter—and arranged to arrive in London about the middle of September.

"You won't find a creature in town, my dear," said Mrs. Flint, who was always secretly planning and scheming to get her favourite to mix with the world from which she had so long been separated, and was full of splendid

visions as to a great match which Mary Lowry could, should, and would make some of these days. "Not a creature! If quietude is your object, you will be satisfied, you may live like a mouse in a hole."

"I shall, I hope, find one creature in town whom I am longing to see," answered Mary smiling.

And the truth was that the hope of seeing her niece Rosamond was her strongest, if not her sole, inducement to go to London. Cosmo had answered all her inquiries about Rosamond very coldly and carelessly. He had not seen his child for three years, and could only give an account of her at second-hand. Mary had spoken a few words about Rosamond to Rosamond's new mamma. "I hope you will love her," she said; "I think she must have a lovable nature. Her poor mother was very warm-hearted."

Whereupon Sarah had replied, in effect, that she hoped she should always behave properly to any one belonging to Cosmo: that a step-daughter of Rosamond's age was likely to be a trying and burdensome charge: but that she (Sarah) had been so completely instructed in all her social duties and moral obligations, that she did not feel much doubt of being able to

fulfil them in any possible relation of life. She, however, expressed a fear that her task with respect to Rosamond would be rendered the more difficult by reason of the child having been left so long in the care of her mother's relations, "who," said Sarah virtuously, "may be very well-meaning persons, but, from what I hear from Cosmo about them, I'm afraid they're not particular in the company they keep. Now, with young people it is necessary to be *most* particular. I'm sure Mrs. Bolitho's particularity with us girls was enough to wear her to the bone."

As soon as Mary had resolved to go to London, she wrote to her sister-in-law to fix the day of her arrival there. By return of post she received a letter, not from Lady Lowry, who, indeed, had no need to write again, but from her niece Rosamond. It was written in a large, free, though unformed hand, with great sprawling dashes here and there under the words that were intended to be especially emphatic. This was the letter.

"London, Nelson Place, Bloomsbury,

"September 13th, 187—

"MY DEAR DARLING AUNT MARY,

"Papa came here this afternoon, and told me that you were coming. I am so

immensely glad you can't think. I can remember mamma (my own dear mamma, I mean, for I shan't call Lady Lowry mamma, and I think it was too bad of papa to go and get married, and never tell me a word about it) talking to me of you when I was a tiny child, but I remember it quite well, and saying how good and kind you were. And even papa never says anything against you, although as Aunt Leonora says he sniffs at everybody. I am still at Aunt Leonora's. I didn't want to go and live in Green Street, with papa's wife, and leave everybody who is so kind and good to me here. And I won't give them up for fifty Lady Lowrys. Papa took me to see her after I made him promise that I should be brought back here the same day. And she talked a lot of stuff about gentility. But I told her that I was sure it could never be genteel to be ungrateful. And I don't mean to be ungrateful *whether or no*. And I'm sure you will say that is right, Aunt Mary, because you are a real lady, and no one can be a real lady who has a little mean, stuck-up spirit. I told Lady Lowry that *noblesse oblige*. But she didn't understand,—not even the words, I mean, for I am positive she could never understand the thing. But now you

are coming I will go to Green Street or anywhere else to see you. Aunt Leonora sends you affectionate regards, and can never forget your sweet goodness to her sister. That's just what she told me to say. Please answer this letter, addressing 'Care of Mrs. Northam Peppiat,' as above, because I shan't go to Green Street until the day you arrive. And I am to have Nona with me on a visit. She is a great friend of mine. I hope you will like her. Her real name is Enone. Good-bye for the present, dear darling Aunt Mary.

"Your very, very, ever affectionate niece,

"ROSAMOND LOWRY."

Mary was struck by the mixture of childishness and decision in this letter. The bold and resolute announcement of what the writer would and would not do seemed very astonishing and a little ludicrous to Miss Lowry of Lowry, who at nearly thirty years of age had been still living the life of a submissive child in her father's house. "Rosamond is barely fifteen," she thought to herself, wondering what could have been the kind of training which had resulted in such precocious independence of authority. "The child's heart seems to be sound," thought Mary. "And for

the rest, she will learn. But she must have a character of her own altogether. That open, fearless spirit is not like Isabel—nor like Cosmo either.”

Then she read the letter over again, and could not help smiling at the picture of Miss Rosamond lecturing her step-mother on the obligations of *noblesse*. Sarah had appeared in the life of Miss Lowry as a new and unknown species of human being, and she began to believe that her niece must also belong to a category quite outside the experience of such humdrum country gentlewomen as herself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THERE could scarcely be imagined a greater contrast than that between the shady woods of Cleveland, or the old-fashioned gardens of Lowry Place, and the scene on which the eyes of another daughter of the house of Lowry had habitually looked out every morning for three years. Smoke-encrusted bricks and mortar, grimy iron railings, and a vegetation clogged by the dust-laden atmosphere of the hugest city under the sun, mainly made up the still-life portion of the picture. The scene was populated by the ordinary figures of a London thoroughfare in the unfashionable district of Bloomsbury. But such as it was, Rosamond Lowry was very unwilling to exchange it for the superior gentility of Green Street.

In point of external griminess there was, perhaps, no advantage on the side of the Green Street residence which had belonged



to Sir Rupert Lowry. But every material fact is, we are told, as an external husk or envelope enclosing a spiritual significance. Now, Sir Rupert's house in Green Street—grimy though it might appear to the vulgar eye—was to one possessing real insight absolutely radiant with the brightness of several splendid phenomena; whereas the house of Captain Northam Peppiat, in Bloomsbury—neither more nor less grimy than the other, to the apprehension of the common herd—was really dimmed throughout by the spiritual influence of a class of persons whom the vernacular picturesquely and appropriately describes as “shady.”

The house in Green Street meant a baronet, an income, a carriage, a presentation at Court, immortality in the Red Book. The house in Bloomsbury signified a half-pay officer, a fluctuating subsistence, the Holborn 'bus, miscellaneous society, and a series of unenviable records in the red books of the butcher and baker. Nevertheless, Rosamond Lowry, as has been stated, was unwilling to exchange the latter dwelling for the former. And in order to explain—if I cannot succeed in excusing—so curious a perversity, it is necessary briefly to state who the persons were, and

what the circumstances that had led to this result.

John Northam Peppiat, commonly called "Pep" by his friends and acquaintances, was the husband of Isabel Neville's elder sister. He was generally spoken of by the style and title of Captain Northam Peppiat; but it was rumoured that he had conferred brevet rank on himself after having long waited in vain for such a recognition of his services on the part of the proper authorities. The fact was, however, that he had not so much arrogated the title as accepted it without protest, when it was generously bestowed on him by well-meaning acquaintances, whose knowledge of things military was more hazy than their general conviction that "Old Pep" was a trump. He had grown grey as a lieutenant of infantry, and, despairing of promotion, had retired on half-pay some three or four years after Cosmo Lowry's marriage. The two men had been brother-officers for a time, and had served together on one or two foreign stations. And when Peppiat retired from the army, poor Bell sadly missed her sister, and the soft-hearted, sweet-tempered brother-in-law, who was always ready to chat with her and cheer her when Cosmo was sulky, and who,

childless himself, was a slave and playmate for her babies.

Leonora Neville was thought to have done fairly well for herself in marrying Peppiat; for she was not a beauty like Bell, and had lost the first bloom of youth. She would at least have food and shelter secured to her for the rest of her life, and poor old Dr. Neville, with a tribe of portionless daughters to settle in the world, had come to consider the securing of even food and shelter for one of them as a success. Isabel's marriage had been deemed not merely a success, but a triumph. Dr. Neville did not live to see the sequel to the opening chapter of married life, in the case of his younger daughter, or he might have changed his opinion as to her good fortune. It was certain that Nora had never repented her marriage for an instant; whilst Bell had secretly bewailed hers with tears of bitterness. And yet Mrs. Northam Peppiat's path through life had not lain over rose-leaves. She had encountered at various times more of the roughnesses and humiliations of poverty than Bell had ever known. But they had not availed to sour her temper, nor even to cloud her spirits.

As to Pep, a more serenely cheerful per-

sonage did not exist than he. Pep was an Irishman by birth and family, and although it was forty years since he had revisited his native country, "the fresh verdure of the Emerald Isle was on his spirit still," as Bob Doery beautifully expressed it in a gush of after-supper sentiment. A good many persons had at different times discovered the "fresh verdure" of Pep's spirit. In less figurative language, he had been found to be gullible, and had been gulled accordingly. Still there are compensations to most misfortunes, and, inasmuch as Captain Northam Peppiat had no property to lose, the hollowest joint-stock company that ever was advertised for the delusion of mankind could not ruin him. The worst that could befall—and it had befallen more than once—was that he should be thrown into prison for debt, and restored to society through the channel of the Bankruptcy Court. "Devil a farthing the scoundrels could get out of *me*," he was accustomed to say, with some triumph in his tone. Pep always looked on the sunny side.

Of late years things had gone easier with him. Whether he had grown wiser, timider, or lazier, with the advance of time, it would be difficult to decide. But the fact was, that

he had latterly resigned the administration of their worldly fortunes into the hands of his wife; and that—possibly because she was deficient in that fresh verdure of spirit which so endeared Pep to his friends—the aforesaid fortunes had prospered better in her hands than ever they had done in his. Not that the position of the worthy couple was anything but humble, or their income anything but small, at the best. I will confess the humiliating truth at once, and get it over:—they kept a lodging-house in Bloomsbury. It was a big house, that may once have been inhabited by persons of wealth and fashion. Time and coal-smoke had tarnished it both within and without, but there were remnants of its former state still to be seen, in the high marble mantelpieces and stuccoed ceilings, encrusted with stiff garlands of attenuated leaves and flowers, and snaky true-lovers'-knots. Such as it was, however, lodgers were seldom lacking to occupy as much of it as it suited Mrs. Peppiat to let out at a weekly rent.

It will be remembered that Lady Lowry, mindful of the precepts of the admirable Mrs. Bolitho, had expressed a fear that the relatives of Rosamond's mother were not particular in

the company they kept, and it must be humbly admitted that the genteel Bolitho herself would have unhesitatingly pronounced against them on this score, could she have known anything of the lodgers with whom the Peppiats were usually on friendly and familiar terms. For the said lodgers belonged mostly to the class of persons who earn their bread by the exercise of their brains in the service of the public. Now, we all know that gentility is for ever divorced from incomes thus derived. Indeed, the very phrase, "to live by one's wits," is a proverbial reproach; and although in these levelling days, and amidst the corruptions of the metropolis, a property in wit is not only often lucrative, but is absolutely considered by some persons to be by no means disgraceful, yet such loose, tolerant, free-thinking notions have not leavened the great mass of society—especially of provincial society—and there are, let us be thankful, many Bolithos of higher and lower grades still left to inculcate the principles of true respectability on our children.

Rosamond, from want of any such training, was thoroughly happy with her aunt and uncle, and thoroughly content with the society which frequented their house. Before

going to live with them, the child had led a nomad sort of life as long as she could remember, wandering about the world with her father and mother, as the duties of the service took Cosmo from one place to another. On her mother's death she was sent to the care of her aunt, and Cosmo soon found that it would suit him better to let her remain there than to have her with him. A small yearly sum was paid for her board and education, and she continued to live with the Peppiats, sharing all their vicissitudes, for nearly seven years. In all that time she had seen her father very seldom. Father and daughter were, in truth, strangers to each other. But Rosamond had probably some acquaintance with her father's character, from seizing, with natural quickness of apprehension, on various hints dropped by the Peppiats about him, whereas of Rosamond's character Cosmo knew absolutely nothing.

Sir Rupert's death, and the second marriage of Sir Rupert's son, had been talked over at great length in the back parlour which was the usual sitting-room of Captain and Mrs. Peppiat. Both events excited the deepest interest in that household. "We shall lose Rosamond now," Mrs. Peppiat said to her husband in the very

first instant of receiving the news. And Pep had sworn that he would not give up the child to be domineered over by a step-mother, that Rosy should share his crust as long as he had one, that he and his wife had a right to her, inasmuch as they stood in the place of parents to her while Cosmo had been marauding about (Pep had some original methods of handling the English language, and declined to be trammelled by the mere dull, dictionary meanings of words) for his own amusement, caring nothing whether the child was alive or dead, that no power should force him to part with his darling Rosamond, and a great deal more of the like kind, which Mrs. Peppiat summarily and emphatically declared to be "bosh." But she kissed her husband, and called him a dear, warm-hearted darling for being so good to poor Bell's girl. "She'll have to go all the same, though, Northam," said Mrs. Peppiat. "What can we do for her in comparison with her father? It's only right and proper that Rosamond should live with her own people, and take up her own rank in life. She has been in the shade quite long enough."

And of course Mrs. Peppiat was right, and of course her husband had at length to admit that she was so. But it was a much more



difficult matter to bring Rosamond to reason on the subject.

Sir Cosmo, when he first went to see her after his arrival in London, was most disagreeably astonished by the young lady's disapproval of his second marriage, and determination not to leave her dear aunt and uncle to live with a step-mother,—both expressed with the utmost openness.

"Who has been putting this vulgar stuff into your head?" he asked, knitting his black brows, and drawing down the corners of his mouth.

"Nobody put it into my head, papa. But I love Aunt Nora and Uncle Pep better than anybody in the whole world," sobbed the girl.

"That's a dutiful speech to make to your father, young lady!" said Sir Cosmo, with a contemptuous smile.

"I'm very sorry, papa, but how can you help loving people who love you? and if I thought it really hurt you, I should be ever so grieved. But I know you don't mind my caring most for them, only you don't like me to say so," returned Miss Rosamond, hitting the nail on the head, not with any intention to be impertinent, but simply from a sheer, blunt truthfulness of nature, which Sir Cosmo

began to fear would cause him an infinite deal of trouble and annoyance.

As it was, he was puzzled how to act at the moment. He by no means intended to let Rosamond remain in Bloomsbury. That was, he knew, out of the question. But he could not help saying in his heart that it would be an uncommonly convenient arrangement, if it were but practicable. The prospect of a series of "scenes" between Sarah and this untamed young creature was intolerable to him.

He remained looking at his daughter in silence for a minute or two, and then said, "Upon my word, I have reason to be deeply obliged to Leonora and her husband. They've succeeded in making a fool of you, and an insolent fool!"

This shaft struck home. Rosamond dried her eyes, and checked her sobs with a resolute effort. "It is not true, papa," she said. "They have taught me nothing but good. And whatever I do or say wrong, is all my own fault. And Aunt Nora is always telling me I ought to be dutiful to you, indeed, indeed she is!"

The end of the interview was a compromise between father and daughter. Rosamond consented to go and visit Lady Lowry on

condition that she should return the same evening to Bloomsbury. "I must have a little time to get used to the thought of leaving them, if I am to leave them," she said. And at the words her lips began to quiver, and her eyes filled with tears. But the words were a concession, and her aunt recognized them as such, and assured Sir Cosmo that the child would come round and behave beautifully if he would have a little patience with her. "Pooh!" said Sir Cosmo, "a self-willed young baggage! You have spoiled her, Leonora. She must understand that I mean to be obeyed, and that I don't mean to be bothered." Nevertheless he consented to promise that she should return to Bloomsbury that evening.

Of the first interview between Lady Lowry and her step-daughter we have already had a glimpse from Rosamond's letter. Sarah's version of it was calmer and more judicial. "Rosamond has been very badly brought up," she said to her husband. "But of course you couldn't help it. Not but what it would have been far better to send the child to some genteel and inexpensive academy for young ladies than to let her remain with those Peppiats. And it wouldn't have cost you

more in the end either. However, gentlemen can't be expected to think of all those things. Rosamond may as well go back to those Peppiats for a few days. She would only be in my way for the present. You can make a favour of it to them, you know, letting them have her. And, I tell you what, Cosmo, she needn't return until your sister Mary comes here. She has got a notion into her head that your sister Mary is a kind of angel. And so I think we had better leave your sister Mary to manage her. It will save me a great deal of trouble just at first."

## CHAPTER IX.

MISS LOWRY was to arrive in London on the 17th of September, and it was arranged that in the evening of that day Rosamond should be conveyed to Green Street, there to abide permanently.

About eleven o'clock on the night which was to be Rosamond's last as an inmate of the Peppiats' household, a few of the more intimate frequenters of that household—a handful out of Pep's very heterogeneous circle of friends—were assembled in the back parlour in Bloomsbury, where Mrs. Peppiat was wont to dispense a homely supper with smiling hospitality. She it was who had privately asked one or two old acquaintances to drop in on that occasion as if by chance, with the object of cheering up the Captain, who was understood to be very low-spirited at the prospect of his niece's departure. We could scarcely have a better opportunity than

the present of becoming acquainted with a few of the choice spirits who frequented Pep's board. They shall, therefore, be introduced as they sit after supper in the brief interval between the removal of the cold beef and the arrival of the "tray:"—which word in Peppiat parlance served as a comprehensive expression for whisky, hot water, sugar, lemons, and clean glasses.

First, at the right hand of the hostess, sits Lewis Griffiths, whose water-colour landscapes may be seen on the walls of the chief annual exhibitions of such works of art in this metropolis, who is allowed by a few competent judges to be a painter of delicate power and exquisite fancy, but who, having fallen into the hands of an unfeeling and unscrupulous purveyor of art to the public, at the beginning of his career, has remained ever since, helpless as a fly in a spider's web, and is now, at fifty years old, poorer than a church mouse. He is withal the sweetest-natured, charitablest, most unselfish of mortals, and not only bears the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" with a serene mind, but positively bestows generous gifts out of his penury on those who are, if not poorer, at least feebler, than himself.

Next to him is Mr. Robert Doery, also an artist, but in a different line. Bob Doery is assistant scene-painter in a London theatre, has unflagging industry, a good deal of ability, and that supreme ability without which so many talents are of no avail in this world,—the ability to believe himself just a little more clever than he is. Bob is a Yorkshire lad, and is said to have walked all the way from the northernmost point of the West Riding to London without shoes or stockings to seek his fortune. When he hears the legend he smiles and does not contradict it. Only to a few friends whom he can trust he confesses that his poor old grandfather, who was stage carpenter to a strolling company of actors, had saved up money enough to apprentice him, when he was about fifteen, to an oil and colourman who supplied the scene-painters at a great London theatre: and that through this means he had gained access in the humblest capacity to the painting-room, had made himself useful, learned by watching others, and never shrank from turning his hand to anything. “As to the walking, and all that,” says Bob, confidentially, “I came by train, third class parliamentary, and I had one pair of worsted socks on my feet, and

another in my bundle, and stout shoes with nails in 'em. But I never contradict the barefoot story. People like it."

Close to Bob sits Mr. Cassius Demayne, a personage who has known many vicissitudes, many "ups and downs" in the world, as the phrase goes. He is now engaged as treasurer in a fashionable theatre, and adds to his income by his pen. Perhaps on the whole the "ups" have predominated over the "downs" in his life, and Mr. Cassius Demayne is at the present moment rather better off than might reasonably have been expected from his start in life, which was overshadowed by the debts and duns and disreputable adventures of a spendthrift father. But his pet delusion, fondly cherished and obstinately clung to, is that he has been the plaything and victim of blind Fortune, who has hurled him from some very brilliant social station which he ought to have occupied in right of his family connections, and flung him amidst circumstances and surroundings which he (being what he is) can only be expected to regard with ironical toleration at most. Cassius does not give himself airs in the usual sense of the phrase: that is to say, he never assumes to be above his company. But he



insists constantly on the fact that he is a waif and a stray, a vagabond, a fellow who has been familiarly acquainted with the very lowest of Poverty's motley brood. He shrugs his shoulders at any chance allusion to fashionable society, and says all that sort of thing is perfectly indifferent to him; he knows it, has gone through it, and dropped out of it. He declares that he is familiar with every back slum in Europe, professes that no degree of scoundrelism or disreputability can surprise him; and, in a word, affects to have fallen to depths so incalculably below his original place in the world, that his company might often reasonably consider themselves to be above *him* if they ever troubled themselves to take the matter seriously. But Cassius is not a bad fellow at heart. He is clever, too, in his way, and fairly well educated, always willing to do a kind action, and incapable of a dishonest one. Nor is he so guilty of conscious humbug on the score of his antecedents as might be supposed. It is, indeed, true that those antecedents are not magnificent. But Cassius, with all his ostentation of Bohemianism, is a Philistine to the marrow of his bones, and does in all probability genuinely believe himself to be innately superior to the

artists who surround him, by virtue of having had a grandfather who was a small squire and justice of the peace in an obscure country parish.

Close to him sits Captain Pep, with his handsome benevolent bald head shining in the lamp-light, and a smile moving the corners of his grey moustaches as he looks down on a stone jar of potheen just brought out of a cupboard by his better half. There is a gap between the husband and wife; an empty chair reserved for some late comer, but the circle is completed for the present by Mrs. Peppiat. She is a cheerful-faced, bright-eyed woman of five and forty, whose own practical and prosaic character does not prevent her from having the most curious delight in and admiration for, all that is poetical and romantic in other people. It is a peculiarity of Mrs. Peppiat's common sense that it never arrogantly assumes to domineer over *uncommon* sense; but goes about its daily business with adorable humility and simplicity. In any difference of opinion between herself and the Captain on points of domestic economy, she holds her own with the tenacity of conviction. But in her heart, and with her lips, she glorifies Pep's superior intellect, taste,

and culture, with the most devout praises. To be brief, Mrs. Peppiat unfeignedly confesses that the things about which she knows best are not all the things best worth knowing. And I have not, for my part, met with a great many persons in the world possessed of equal candour and humble-mindedness.

"And where's Miss Rosamond?" asked Bob, lighting a cigar at the signal which by established custom permitted that indulgence,—namely, the arrival of the tray with its jingling glasses and steaming jug.

"Rosamond is in bed and asleep, I hope," replied Mrs. Peppiat. "I never gave in to late hours for her."

"That's why she has got such a blooming pair of cheeks of her own," answered Bob. "I always think of wild flowers when I see her. She does credit to London smoke."

"London fiddlestick!" exclaimed Mrs. Peppiat, curtly. "London air is the finest in the world." She was a cockney born and bred, and nothing made her so impatient as to hear a word of disparagement against the Great Babylon.

"'Tis good, thick, substantial stuff to be sure," retorted Bob, with a grin. "None of your thin, clear, wishy-washy kind of air,

such as we have on our Yorkshire moors, ma'am ! ”

“ No,” said the Captain, whose mind had been fixed on his niece. “ Rosy is in bed and asleep. I should have liked her to sit up this one night—but however—— ” Then he heaved a great sigh. Then he proceeded to mix the punch on liberal and convivial principles. Then he distributed glasses round. Then he tasted his own, added a bit more sugar, took a longer sip, leaned back in his chair, gently stirring his punch round and round with an air of contemplative melancholy, and said once more, “ Rosy is in bed and asleep, bless her ! ”

“ Don’t be down in the mouth, Captain Peppiat,” said Bob Doery.

“ My dear boy, I can’t help being down in the mouth, as you call it. The child has been as dear to me as if she were my own.”

“ Yes, love ; but it’s all for her good that she should leave us, you know,” suggested Mrs. Peppiat, softly.

“ I don’t know that, by—— ”

“ Northam ! ”

“ By—George, I don’t know that, Nora ! ” and the Captain struck the table heavily with his doubled hand.

"My dear Pep, you have at all events every reason to think so," said Lewis Griffiths.

"Reason! no; that's just it! I haven't anything that can be called a reason at all. I have a lot of threadbare commonplaces about her taking her place in the world—what is her place? The best place for her is a place where she can be happy, and good, and innocent. She has been all three here; but I wouldn't answer for Green Street on any one of the points."

"Northam!" exclaimed his wife, "do think what you're saying, dear! Rosamond will be happy enough after a while. And I hope her goodness don't depend on her living in Bloomsbury!"

"That would be about the most singular condition to annex to virtue that I ever heard of," observed Mr. Cassius Demayne. He always spoke through his teeth, and with a fixed and wooden expression of countenance, originally assumed to convey a sardonic indifference to things in general, but which had become unconscious by long habit.

"Pooh! You know what I mean, Nora. I say," proceeded Pep, warming with the flow of punch and words, as was his wont, "that it's a—a—a—bominable humbug, to talk about

it's being all for Rosy's good to leave us—if by 'her good' anything else is meant than sheer worldliness."

The Captain spoke with a little hesitation, which was not exactly a stammer, but arose from a way his thoughts had of jostling each other in their haste to reach his lips whenever he was excited; and he played little rapid tattoos on the table-cloth with his spoon to emphasise his words.

"This Sir Cosmo Lowry's very rich, isn't he?" asked Bob Doery. One of Bob's salient characteristics was an eager, watchful, unwearying curiosity.

"*Very* rich? No," replied the Captain. "The Lowrys came out of Noah's ark, I believe, but they have never been amongst the wealthiest families."

"There is a scale of comparison for all things," observed Demayne. "Bob is probably not reckoning after the standard of the 'wealthiest families.'"

"How much has he a year?" asked Mr. Doery. This method of seeking information by means of a point-blank question was frequently employed by our young friend. And I recommend it to the inquisitive as being at once rapid, simple, and generally efficacious:

for it is much easier to parry an artful hint than a plain interrogation ;—a delightful illustration of the superiority of straightforward courses over crooked ones.

The Captain had no idea of parrying, and would have answered the truth with the best will in the world had he happened to know it. But Mrs. Peppiat was more reticent ; and, moreover, Bob's crudely-expressed curiosity often irritated her. She was about to make some tart reply, when the door opened and a tall big man came in, who was evidently the guest expected to fill the vacant chair.

" Ah, here you are at last, Major Maude ! I am so glad you've come ! " exclaimed Mrs. Peppiat. And she looked glad.

The new comer bent his great bulk, which loomed peculiarly large in that small back parlour, over his hostess's proffered hand. " Couldn't get here a moment sooner," he said. " Pep, how are you ? " Then he included the other three men in a general, friendly salutation.

" Will you have some food, Maude ? " asked the Captain. " There's some cold beef going."

" Oh yes, please, if I may. The truth is, I have had no dinner." And Major Maude proceeded to take off his great coat, revealing

a full evening toilet under it. He was a handsome, bluff-faced, full-bearded man of forty, with a frame of remarkable power, and a voice of remarkable gentleness. Indeed the excessive softness of his manner altogether was almost ludicrous in contrast with his person. Yet an unmistakable air of genuineness and simplicity pervaded all he said and did. His manner to women was especially marked by tender deference. If you could imagine an amiable lion who has renounced meat diet, frequenting the company of conies, hares, sheep, and such-like defenceless creatures, and being particularly careful to avoid hurting them, you would have some idea of Major Maude's behaviour in general society.

The cold meat was brought back, and Mrs. Peppiat ranged various condiments in front of her guest, and bade him help himself. "But how on earth did you come to have no dinner?" she asked.

"Well, oddly enough, through a member of your family—Cosmo Lowry."

There was a general exclamation of surprise. "We were just speaking of him," said Mrs. Peppiat. "What had he to do with your dinner?"

"You may be sure that whatever Cosmo



had to do with a friend's dinner, it wasn't *giving* him one," put in the Captain, drawing in his breath through his teeth.

"I stumbled on him by chance as I was coming out of my club. If I hadn't heard from you that he was in town, I believe I should scarcely have recognized him. He is greatly changed in seven years. But he knew me at once. As we were near my quarters, I made him step in with me and have a cigar. We were chatting, and the time slipped away ; and when he said he must go home to dinner, I found I had only just time to dress, and bowl down to St. Cecilia's Hall in a hansom."

"What was going on at St. Cecilia's Hall?" asked Demayne.

"A concert given by some old friends of mine, the Czernovic's. Concerts are not much in my way ; but I had promised to be there, and I wouldn't have failed on any account," replied Major Maude, very busy with the beef.

"So you saw Cosmo!" said Mrs. Peppiat meditatively. "Didn't it bring back old times to you?"

"Yes ; it brought back—all manner of things," said Major Maude, meditative in his turn.

“Eh! I never knew that Major Maude had been acquainted with Sir Cosmo Lowry!” exclaimed Bob Doery, as if he had made a very singular and interesting discovery. And he so plainly showed an intention of proceeding to catechise the Major thereupon, that Mrs. Peppiat grew fidgety.

Lewis Griffiths perceiving the state of the case with the sensibility to other people’s feelings which belonged to him, came to the rescue. He rose to go away, and said as he did so, “Will you come with me, Doery? If you don’t mind walking up as far as my lodgings, I will give you that sketch which you thought might be useful.”

“Oh! for the Enchanted Meads of Asphodel in the transformation scene? Thank you. Well, I——” with an instant’s hesitation, and a quick glance to see if there were any chance of his being asked to stay where he was—“I shall be very pleased to, Griffiths.”

Then Cassius Demayne also got up to take his leave.

“Why, what—what—what are you in such a deuce of a hurry for?” said the Captain, looking from one to another. “We’ve only just begun to spend the evening. Sit down again, Griffiths, and take your punch like a man and a brother!”

But Griffiths was staunch. And he and Demayne exchanged a look of irrepressible amusement at the resigned way in which Bob allowed himself to be taken in tow, and removed, with his curiosity still unsatisfied, leaving Major Maude and his hosts alone.

"Well, I wonder what flea has bitten Griffiths!" said the Captain, looking pathetically at the jar of potheen. "I'll put it to any unprejudiced jury if this is liquor to run away from!"

"Oh, he's the dearest creature in the world, is Lewis Griffiths!" exclaimed Mrs. Peppiatt.

"On my honour he'd be the cheapest creature too, Leonora, if he always cut his rations short in this fashion!"

"Oh, Northam, didn't you see? He saw that Bob was in one of his tiresome moods—poke, poke, prod, prod, with one question after another—and he took him off. And you know he really helps him in all manner of ways. That Italian street scene, that got Bob so much credit last season, was copied almost stroke for stroke from a picture Griffiths brought back from Verona, I think it was. And he never says a word about it."

The Major, having finished the solid part of his supper, was furnished with a tumbler

of punch, and Pep mixed a second for himself, "just to keep Maude company," as he observed. Pep's readiness to oblige a friend by this kind of companionship was inexhaustible.

"And now," said Mrs. Peppiat, settling herself in an arm-chair, "tell us about Cosmo."

There was not very much to be told, it appeared. Lowry had been shy and constrained at first; but this had soon worn off, and he had resumed his old manner.

"Cordial as a milestone, and warm-hearted as a flounder," said Captain Peppiat. "He didn't ask you to step home and take pot-luck with him, I'll go bail!"

"Well, not exactly, Pep; but it wouldn't have done to lug a great hulking fellow out of the streets, and present him at Lady Lowry's dinner-table without further ceremony."

"Why not? That's all balderdash, my boy. What, an old comrade, an old friend? Ask the Missis here, what she'd have done under the circumstances."

"Ah, but there's nobody like the Missis," returned Major Maude, smiling across at Mrs. Peppiat. "However, Lowry did ask me to call!"

"Did he, now? How overwhelmingly kind! Actually asked you to call!"

"Well, I hope you will go, Major Maude," said Mrs. Peppiat, "if it's only that you may see how Rosamond gets on, and let us know."

"Ah, to be sure, there's Rosamond," exclaimed Pep with a sigh. "Poor child, think of her in that house! It'll be like living in an aquarium!"

"You forget, dear Northam, that Mary Lowry will be there."

"H'm! Well, yes; I suppose she will take the chill off a little. At least if one may judge by her letters. I've never seen the lady myself."

Major Maude's face turned dark red under its bronze, and he made a sudden blundering movement that nearly upset his tumbler of punch standing on the table. "Is Miss Lowry in London?" he asked.

"Not yet; but she is expected to-morrow," answered Mrs. Peppiat. "Didn't Cosmo tell you?"

"No."

"Did he not mention her at all?"

"No."

"Just like him! He forgot her existence, I suppose," grumbled the Captain.

"Oh yes, I believe he did say a word about

his sister's being a rich woman now. But I didn't quite understand."

"And not being Bob Doery, you didn't ask for particulars," said Mrs. Peppiat. "That young man is a perfect gimlet sometimes, boring at everybody with his questions."

"What harm do his questions do? And to you, Nora, of all women in the world, I should think they would be harmless. We have nothing to conceal in our lives."

"Conceal! No; but it's one thing to say things of your own accord and another to have them pulled out by main force. I don't like being got the better of."

Maude had become very silent, and sat with one elbow on the table, and his hand shading his eyes.

All at once Mrs. Peppiat turned to him. "By the way," she said, "you must have met Miss Lowry! Didn't you go down to Lowry once on a mission for Cosmo to intercede with the old man, just after my poor sister's first child was born?"

"Yes."

"I thought I was not mistaken about Isabel telling me something of the kind when we were in Malta. And—oh yes, to be sure! I remember;—I remember."

What more she remembered Mrs. Peppiat did not say, but withdrawing her eyes from Major Maude, she turned them thoughtfully on the fire.

"You did that for Cosmo Lowry, and he meets you after seven or eight years, and 'asks you to call?'" cried Pep. "I tell you what it is, Maude, I'd see him—several stages nearer his ultimate destination than Green Street, before I'd cross his threshold!"

"Oh, I have no feeling of that kind;—none in the world!" returned Maude. "But I—I don't much think I shall go to Green Street. They won't want me, you know."

"Want you? Devil a bit! You're only an old comrade who has been kind to him. If there was anything in the world you could be, do, or suffer, to serve him, Sir Cosmo wouldn't scruple to ask it. But merely to see an old friend for friendship's sake—oh no; he certainly won't want you."

"No; I suppose not," said the Major.

But he did not seem altogether gratified by Pep's ready assent to his suggestion of not being wanted. Indeed, the words seemed to have struck a sensitive chord which went on vibrating for some time: for, although the talk drifted away to quite distant topics, such

as the concert of the Czernovic family, and the last new comedy, and so forth, yet Major Maude repeated two or three times, at various points of the conversation, and without any obvious bearing on the subject, such sentences as the following:—"No; it isn't likely that any one at Green Street should wish to see me, is it?" or, "A fellow can't thrust himself into a house where he is not welcome;" or, "I suppose, Pep, you don't think Lowry was sincere in asking me to call? Mere words of course, eh?"

And Mrs. Peppiat in vain endeavoured to check her husband's zealous assurances that not the smallest reliance could be placed on any of Cosmo's utterances, except such as expressed gall and bitterness.

When the Major had gone away, and whilst the sound of his firm, regular footsteps were still dying away along the deserted pavement, Leonora said, "I wish, Northam dear, that you hadn't discouraged the Major from going to Green Street."

"Discourage! I didn't discourage him."

"Well, I think he took it for discouragement, dear."

"And why the deuce *should* he go there? It won't be a lively house to visit at. I



should recommend it to any one suffering from a plethora of good spirits."

"No, I dare say it won't be a lively house. But, Northam, do you know what I think? I think Maude was once desperately in love with Mary Lowry."

"Desperately in love with—who?" cried Pep, incredulously and ungrammatically.

"Well, I do think so, Northam," returned Mrs. Peppiat, answering his tone and not his words. "I remember ever so many little things that poor Bell used to tell me long ago; and I watched his face to-night; and I put this and that together; and I'm almost sure, Northam."

"But what—what—how could he—he had no opportunity—no time to get a—a—acquainted with her!" stammered the Captain.

"Perhaps not; but, then, you know, dear, it takes much less time to fall in love than to get acquainted," returned worthy Mrs. Peppiat, uttering a tragic truth with the utmost simplicity and cheerfulness.

## CHAPTER X.

PEP's comparison of Sir Cosmo's residence in Green Street with an aquarium could not be taken in a physical or literal sense; for on entering the house one felt the atmosphere to be almost like that of a conservatory. There was a hot air stove in the hall, and although the autumn weather was bright, great fires were kept burning in most of the rooms all day. Lady Lowry had a cat-like fondness for warmth, and the temperature of her own chamber was almost tropical.

Notwithstanding Sir Cosmo's declaration that no new furniture was needful, my lady had contrived to have a considerable number of new articles purchased. She had, however, distributed them nearly all amongst two or three rooms:—the drawing-room, a small breakfast-room on the ground floor which she had appropriated to her own use, in imitation of Mary's little study at Lowry Place, and

her own bedchamber. Sarah was inclined to frugality, at the same time that she had a strong enjoyment of physical luxuries; and she conciliated these two conflicting propensities by taking nearly all the new furniture (consisting chiefly of thick hangings, rich carpets, and a variety of easy chairs) for herself, and leaving the rooms of the other members of the family pretty much as they were. A little exterior painting and cleaning had also been done to the house. But Sarah did not insist on its being much brightened up outside; gravely delivering her opinion that "that kind of dingy look was aristocratic."

She had retained some of the servants who had been employed in the house by Sir Rupert's late tenants, and had engaged one or two more herself, on the recommendation and with the assistance of some new acquaintances whom she had picked up since her arrival in town. One of these new servants was her own maid; and another of them was a personage who occupied a large share of Lady Lowry's attention, and caused her a good deal of concealed anxiety. He filled the post of butler, and was an insignificant, smooth-shaven, mean-faced little man of quiet

demeanour. But to Sarah he was the repository of deep wells of gentility ;—a store-house of recondite lore as to the manners and customs of the gods who dwell on the Olympian summits of society. For it was asserted by himself and supported by respectable testimony that Lobley had served in the family of a duke ! Lady Lowry's struggles to make a good figure in the eyes of this privileged mortal, and the charmed attention with which she listened to suggestions—deferentially uttered with bated breath—of doing this or that after the fashion approved by " 'is Grace," were a curious spectacle, and afforded much amusement in the servants' hall, where the sense of humour, if not subtle, was extremely hearty.

The gifted Lobley had no precedents from 'is Grace's practice to offer for the reception of Miss Rosamond Lowry. And Lady Lowry had her own reasons for not sending the carriage to fetch her stepdaughter. " It would never do, Cosmo," she said, " for the servants to know that Rosamond has been living in Bloomsbury, you know. I really don't think we can send the carriage for her." And Cosmo merely shrugged his shoulders, and said, " It isn't of the least consequence one

way or the other. If you don't send for her, Peppiat will manage to bring her somehow."

So Rosamond arrived in a cab with a couple of trunks on the top of it, and escorted by her uncle, about five o'clock on the evening following that recorded in the last chapter. The uncle and niece were shown into the dining-room, and left to wait there, whilst the footman went to announce their arrival to my lady. "And you had better," said Pep, "send a maid to attend Miss Lowry to her room at once." Lieutenant John Northam Peppiat spoke with the air of a man accustomed to be obeyed. Nothing short of strong indignation could now string up his easy nature to the pitch of resuming his old military habit of command. But Pep was in a glow of anger at a certain cool incivility which he detected in the servant's manner. And the tone he adopted in consequence was efficacious to send that languid young man off on his errand with a perceptibly quickened footstep.

The lamps were not lighted in the dining-room; but a dull red fire burnt in the grate, and its crimson glare struggled here and there on the walls and the ceiling with blue twilight shadows. Rosamond looked forlornly round

the sombre room. I wonder if Aunt Mary is come yet?" she said. It never occurred to her to ask for her father.

"No; her train is not due until six o'clock, Rosy," replied Pep. "You'll have time to put on your best bib and tucker, and be ready to receive her. I want her to see you looking your best. Although the best is not much to boast of, is it, Rosy?"

"No, Uncle Pep," returned the girl abstractedly. She could not reciprocate his attempt to joke off the disagreeable impression which weighed on them both.

They sat for three or four minutes in silence, listening to the ticking of the hot coals, and the creak of an occasional footstep overhead. The dreariness of this reception, the evident want of interest in her arrival, oppressed Rosamond's young heart. In her half-childish defiance of "papa's wife," she had made up her mind not to care whatever Lady Lowry might say or do. But she was quite unprepared for Lady Lowry's saying and doing nothing at all. Presently a woman appeared at the door, and announcing herself as Lady Lowry's maid, invited Rosamond to accompany her to her room. And the footman, arriving at the same moment, begged

Mr. Peppiat to go into the drawing-room, where my lady would be happy to receive him. Uncle and niece ascended the stairs side by side as far as the first floor, and then, before Rosamond proceeded to mount higher, she flung her arms around her uncle and whispered eagerly, "Mind you don't go away till I come down again. Promise now! I will make ever so much haste."

Sarah was sitting in an easy chair near the hearth when Pep entered the drawing-room. The room was well lighted by softly shaded lamps, and he could see the glitter of rings on her hands which lay folded on her black silk dress, whilst her head reposed comfortably against a velvet cushion. "I do believe the woman was sitting there doing nothing on earth!" thought Pep, looking at her, and then glancing round the room in search of some trace of occupation. He found none. There were books here and there, it is true, mathematically disposed upon occasional tables; picture-books with gorgeous bindings; "books fit for a drawing-room," as Lady Lowry had described the articles wanted, in giving her orders to the bookseller. There was also a grand pianoforte, and a canterbury with several gilt-edged volumes of music in

it. But they all looked as uninviting as the varnished fruit on the dishes of a doll's dinner-service, and as little intended for real consumption. The Captain was conscious of an odd sense of oppression under the conception of a sane human being sitting alone and voluntarily unoccupied. His own indolence was at least not of the blank and vacuous sort.

"How do you do?" said my lady, holding out her hand.

Pep made his salutations in due form, and seated himself opposite to her by her invitation.

"I have brought you my dear Rosy, Lady Lowry," said he. "It's a great wrench for us to part with her, as you can easily understand. But I hope she is exchanging my home for a better one."

"Oh dear me, yes!" returned Sarah. "Of course it is much better for her to be here. It stands to reason, you know."

Pep coughed, and blew his nose violently. He found Lady Lowry disagree terribly with his nervous system.

"I hope I shall manage to bring her in to my ways," proceeded Sarah. "Sir Cosmo tells me she is sadly self-willed."

"Cosmo knows very little about her!" cried Pep, bluntly. "Rosy has lived under my



roof for seven years, and I can assure you that she is both reasonable and affectionate."

"Ah, but you have spoiled her, you know. There's where it is!" said Sarah, and she shook her forefinger archly, and laughed a gurgling laugh. She was much pleased with her own condescending affability towards this needy personage who lived in Bloomsbury, and drove about in omnibuses.

The Captain abruptly changed the conversation. "How do you like London, Lady Lowry?" said he.

"Oh, well, you know, Mr. Peppiat, it can scarcely be *called* London just now. There is not a creature in town."

"Curious to see how soon that kind of jargon is picked up!" reflected Pep. "No dunce too big to learn that!" Then he replied gravely, "There are, of course, no real human beings left in London:—present company always excepted. But I observed a few thousand automatons moving about, as I came here; and they looked sufficiently like men and women to deceive an inexperienced eye."

On this Lady Lowry stared at him in silence for full half a minute, and she said afterwards to her husband that "she couldn't

make out that Mr. Peppiat; he talked so silly."

"Well, I won't quite say there's nobody in town, either," she observed at length. "For there are some friends of mine, the Percival Wigmores; most superior people."

"Indeed! Old friends?"

"Oh no; quite new ones. I made their acquaintance through the late tenants of my father-in-law (Sir Rupert Lowry of Lowry)," she added, in an explanatory parenthesis for Pep's instruction.

"Oh yes; I know who your father-in-law was, Lady Lowry."

"They left their cards, not knowing the other people had gone, and I happened to be coming in from a drive in the carriage, and met them in the hall. And they took a great fancy to me. Indeed, it was mutual. They're *extremely* superior. *He's* an Honourable."

"I beg your pardon,—a what?"

"An Honourable. Honourable Percival Wigmore."

"Is he? Well, that's very gratifying."

"Yes; because it sets one's mind at rest about their being proper people to know. Directly I cast my eye on the card I knew it was all right."

"What a good plan it would be," said Pep, musingly, "if all visiting cards were as explicit and veracious as to the quality of their owners."

"Oh, wouldn't it, indeed!" exclaimed my lady, utterly in the dark as to his meaning.

"Yes, it would be admirably convenient. There's no chance, though, of its being generally adopted. You could hardly expect a fellow, you know, to style himself the 'Dis-honourable Bill Blackleg,' or a lady to announce herself as the 'Disreputable Mrs. Dash.'"

"La! How dreadful. They don't, do they?" cried Sarah, completely bewildered; and uncertain whether the Captain were not alluding to some custom which prevailed amongst the queer society he frequented.

"No," said Pep regretfully. "No; they do not, so far as I am aware. The idea was merely suggested to me by your mention of your honourable friend's card."

"Oh, the Wigmores? Ah, they are most delightful," said Sarah, recovering her mental grasp on things, much as one might be glad to feel one's legs touch *terra firma* after being whisked along in an erratic balloon. "Dear Mrs. Wigmore has been so kind, and of such

use to me. Recommended me my own maid, and the butler—a perfect treasure. He has lived in the first families—in the family of the Duke of Belturbet ! ”

“ Has he ? ” said Pep ; and then added, with an air of considerable interest, “ I hope he liked ’em.”

At this point the interview was put an end to by the arrival of Rosamond, who bounded into the room, crying breathlessly, “ Oh, good Uncle Pep, you’re not gone ! ”

“ Rosy ! Don’t you see Lady Lowry ? ” said her uncle in a low, warning voice. He was nervously anxious that she should not discredit herself, and he was conscious that her stepmother was regarding them both with a critical and unsympathetic stare.

Rosamond went up to Lady Lowry’s chair, and offered her hand. Sarah turned her cheek to be kissed, and Rosamond, after an instant’s hesitation, bent down and kissed her. “ Well, now let me look at you, Rosamond,” said Lady Lowry, motioning the girl to stand a few paces off.

It was a very pleasant figure which my lady’s eyes rested on. Rosamond’s face was pretty without possessing the classic regularity of the Lowry features. She was tall, straight,

and blooming, with brown hair and bright hazel eyes. There was a straightforward honest look in those eyes which harmonized with the childlike candour of the fair open brow and the sweetness of the frank young smile. But it was not these traits which engaged her ladyship's attention.

"I think," said Sarah, after a short pause, "that you must have your dresses made a little longer. I dare say she has been growing fast, and that it has not been always convenient to keep renewing her frocks in proportion," she continued, turning to the Captain with that air of virtuously making allowances which is apt to irritate some ill-regulated minds. It is to be feared that Pep's mind was ill-regulated, for it certainly irritated him.

"She seems to me to look very nice," he said.

"Oh yes, her dress is very nice indeed. I am not sure whether the crape is *quite* deep enough for a grandparent; but we can ask all about that at the mourning warehouse. But I think, so tall as she is, she might really be put into long dresses at once. Girls of that age are so leggy."

Pep looked across at Rosamond, and, to his

considerable surprise, found her face beaming with unmistakable satisfaction. Was there ever a girl of fifteen who could take the promotion to long dresses with philosophical indifference? Rosamond, at any rate, was not such a one. A vision of sweeping draperies made her eyes sparkle and her healthy young cheeks flush with pleasure. "Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "I'm sure I ought to have long dresses at fifteen and a quarter!" Then, as a misgiving crossed her mind that there was some suggestion of a reproach to her aunt and uncle in the words, she hastily added, "I know Aunt Nora meant me to have them very soon; for she said herself, Uncle Pep, that I began to look like a daddy-long-legs. And I *do*, you know!"

Altogether this trivial incident brought about a better understanding between Lady Lowry and her stepdaughter than they had yet arrived at. And whilst Rosamond was enjoying the seductive picture presented to her imagination of herself moving over that thick drawing-room carpet, followed by a yard of silk which should rustle with "grown-up" dignity, Sarah plunged into a monologue or lecture on skirts, bodices, flounces, and trains, with much complacency. She had necessarily

been in the position, since her arrival in London, of one who has to learn from the experience of others. And, as she loved to speak, as it were, from an eminence, the opportunity of holding forth to a young person who had no pretension to know better than herself about the topic under discussion was very soothing and agreeable to her. Meanwhile, Pep sat by mute and low-spirited, trying to persuade himself that he was delighted to behold the stepmother and stepdaughter on such excellent terms with each other.

"Young things will be young things," said the Captain to himself, as he walked away from the door. Which truism was intended to rebuke a certain uncomfortable feeling of disappointment at the bottom of his heart, that Rosy had not shown herself more sorry to part with him at the last.

Meanwhile Lady Lowry continued to talk in her contralto tones, and with a deliberate slowness of speech, which somehow suggested an alarming power of going on indefinitely. Rosamond's youthful egotism was satiated long before her stepmother thought of relinquishing the subject of her dress. And then Sarah changed the application of her theories about mantua-making from Rosamond to her-

self, and set off on a fresh course without drawing bridle.

Fortunately Sir Cosmo appeared before Rosamond had had time to offend my lady by any show of inattention. Rosamond had hitherto only seen her father in very negligent morning dress, and she was struck by the favourable change in his appearance effected by a careful evening toilet. The well-fitting black coat displayed his slight, and still youthful-looking figure to advantage, and the ivory pallor of his finely moulded face was admirably relieved against the white cravat. Lady Lowry had insisted with indomitable perseverance that Sir Cosmo should dress for dinner every evening. The indolent, almost cynical, carelessness as to external proprieties and conventionalities which had grown upon him of late years offered an inert resistance to this arrangement that might have discouraged some persons. But my lady conquered by means of his very laziness; for, in a word, she bored him on the subject, until to comply cost less effort than to resist. And of almost any two courses of action, Cosmo Lowry was pretty sure finally to select the easiest.

“How nice you look, papa!” exclaimed



Rosamond with that complete *disinvoltura* which departs with the last years of childhood. She was still essentially a child.

"Oh, you're here, are you, missy?" returned her father. It was not a very affectionate greeting, but his tone was kinder than his words, and he bent to kiss his young daughter with some gentleness. It was a relief to him to perceive that so far all had gone smoothly between Rosamond and his wife. No one coming by chance into that luxurious drawing-room could have guessed what discordant elements lurked in the trio who occupied it in such apparent harmony.

"What time do you expect Mary?" asked Sir Cosmo, looking at his watch, as he stood with his back to the fire.

"Every minute. I sent the carriage to the station to meet her. Lobley went himself on the box."

A noise of rapidly approaching wheels and hoofs suddenly ceased at the street door. "Here she is!" shouted Rosamond, jumping up excitedly, and rushing to the door. "Rosamond!" exclaimed my lady; "pray do not behave so wildly! The servants here are not used to see that sort of thing. Cosmo, do call her back!"

But Rosamond was already half-way downstairs. "Oh, never mind her," said Sir Cosmo. "I suppose I must go down myself to receive Mary." And he too left the room.

"A nice opinion Lobley will form of that tom-boy!" was Lady Lowry's reflection when she remained alone.

Meanwhile Mary Lowry was entering her brother's house, to commence a new page in the record of her hitherto uneventful life.

## CHAPTER XI.

DURING the two first days of Mary Lowry's stay in Green Street nothing occurred to ruffle the even tenor of the hours as they glided past, monotonously enough, as regarded external events, but full of interest for Mary. She and her young niece had fallen in love with each other at first sight. Rosamond thought she had never seen so beautiful and sweet a woman as her Aunt Mary; and Mary was won by the warmth and ingenuousness of the girl's affectionate reception of her.

Lady Lowry was not jealous of their mutual regard. She did not particularly wish either of them to love her. It sufficed that they should pay her the deference and consideration which she deemed her due. And here—a little to her surprise—she found a staunch supporter in Mary, who by precept and example incited Miss Rosamond to treat her stepmother respectfully. And that young

lady's outbursts of petulance were in most cases effectually checked by a look of disapprobation from her aunt. But on the third day, there came a storm which clouded the domestic horizon.

Mary had resolved to go and visit the Peppiats; and, nothing doubting of Lady Lowry's consent, had promised Rosamond that she should accompany her.

"Perhaps papa will walk there with us," Mary had said.

"Oh no, he won't! At least—I don't think papa will care to call on Aunt and Uncle Peppiat. He never goes near them."

Mary was hurt to hear this. But she made no comment on it to Cosmo's child. "Well," she answered, cheerfully, "Lady Lowry offered me the use of the carriage this afternoon, as she will be engaged at home. So you and I will drive off together, and take your aunt and uncle by surprise."

To which proposition Rosamond responded by hugging Mary enthusiastically, and then whirling round the room to a step of her own invention, until she was out of breath.

But when, at lunch time, the project was communicated to Lady Lowry, the face of the latter seemed to be petrified into a kind of

stolid horror. What added to the shock was that Lobley himself was waiting at table, and heard the proposition made in the following terms: "Sarah, I want to drive to Bloomsbury this afternoon. I am anxious to pay my visit there."

And in Lobley's presence how was Lady Lowry to explain the impossibility of sending her carriage and servants on such an errand?

"Oh! To those good people—yes," said she, with a lumbering attempt to give Mary a hint of the true state of the case. "Very kind of you to think of them, I'm sure. Worthy souls, no doubt, I—— Yes; we'll—we'll talk about it by-and-by."

Mary was puzzled, but the truth began to dawn on her, and she refrained from pursuing the subject at that moment. But Rosamond, her cheeks flaming, and her eyes fixed defiantly on Lady Lowry, exclaimed, "'Those good people!' You don't understand who it is Aunt Mary is talking of. She is talking of my uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Northam Peppiat!"

"Rosamond, hold your tongue, if you please," returned my lady, unspeakably provoked. "I *quite* understand your Aunt Mary."

There ensued a dead silence, in which even

the soft footfall of Lobley was audible, as he moved from the sideboard to the table and back again. But when luncheon was at an end, and the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, Lady Lowry manifested her displeasure in very plain terms.

"Rosamond," she said, "you must understand once for all that I will *not* have allusions made to the people you have been living with before my servants."

Rosamond stood up opposite to her step-mother. "Do you mean to say that I am not to speak of my dear, good, kind Aunt and Uncle Peppiat, Lady Lowry?" she said, almost breathless with indignation and astonishment.

"You may mention them when we are by ourselves; but before the servants I will *not* allow it. You are so reckless in your language. The other day you began to talk of some common person or other—a sign-painter or something—by the name of 'Bob!' Now, Rosamond, you have not been taught better, and it may not be your fault. But you are now in a very different sphere"—(Lady Lowry did not often make such a slip, but she was flurried)—"and you *must* learn to behave as such."

Rosamond stared at my lady in genuine

bewilderment. Tears of vexation stood in her eyes, and her cheeks were burning. "I declare I don't know what you mean, Lady Lowry," she said. "I do not, indeed! Why on earth shouldn't I speak of my dear aunt and uncle? You don't know them; but I do, and papa does. You can ask him if they are not the very best, the very kindest—— Oh! is it because they're poor?" she cried abruptly, as a sudden idea illuminated what had been dark to her in Lady Lowry's utterances.

"Rosamond! You ought not to talk in that way."

"Well, I do feel ashamed of even thinking of such a pitiful, mean thing. Only I couldn't imagine any other reason. But if you will tell me it isn't true, I'll beg your pardon humbly with all my heart!"

"Now, Rosamond, we don't want any of that. Do be sensible, and leave off acting the silly. It may be all very well in those theatre people, but you're to associate with a different class now. Your uncle and aunt have their good qualities, no doubt. But the society they keep, and the style they live in, is—well, it's *low*; that's the long and the short of it. And in Lobley's presence alluded to it shall not be!"

My lady brought out this last sentence with immense dignity and impressiveness, and then leaned back in her chair as if she had clinched the subject. Her cheeks were nearly as red as Rosamond's, and her eyes very round and bright.

"Lady Lowry, I wonder you are not ashamed!" burst out Rosamond, when Mary interposed. She placed her hand on the girl's shoulder to check her, and said, very gravely and gently, "I fear, Sarah, that I was to blame in not ascertaining your wishes on the subject before I talked of using your carriage to go and pay my respects to Mrs. Peppiat."

"Respects! Well, I should think Mrs. Peppiat *would* be on the high ropes if she could hear you," said Lady Lowry with a short laugh.

"But," proceeded Mary, ignoring the interruption, "I had no idea that you would object to it."

"Of course not, because *you're* a lady," put in Miss Rosamond with a sob. Her aunt turned towards her with a look of more severity than the young lady had seen on her face before. "Rosamond, you shock me. I beg you to be silent," she said.

'Oh, you'll find out, Mary, that the sort



of training Rosamond has had amongst those people has made her very unmanageable," said Lady Lowry. "Cosmo told me as much beforehand."

Rosamond swallowed down a violent protest which rose to her lips, but the tears overflowed her eyes. It seemed to her so cruel that her father should have spoken unkindly of those who had ever been so staunch, faithful, and affectionate to him and his.

"The point under discussion was whether or not your carriage should convey us to Bloomsbury," continued Mary coldly. "That is easily arranged. I will go there in a cab. I suppose Rosamond may accompany me? I cannot think that my brother would oppose her doing so."

This proposition was little more to Sarah's taste than the former one had been. But she reflected that it would scarcely do to forbid Rosamond to accompany her aunt. Mary was Miss Lowry of Lowry, mistress of a fine house and a good income. Lobley would perceive the propriety of deferring, to some extent, to such a personage. The chief difficulty that perplexed Lady Lowry was the question whether or not it were a too plebeian proceeding for Miss Lowry and Rosamond to

drive about in a street cab. On certain points she admitted that Mary had the advantage of her from having been used to be a lady all her life. But Mary was only a country lady, after all. London ways were unknown to her. Now, Sarah had recently, as she considered, learned a great deal about town manners and customs from her friend Mrs. Wigmore; and, moreover, she had by nature so rooted a respect for her own opinion, that it needed much demonstration to induce her to distrust it.

"If you think it *proper* to go in a cab," she began in the tone of one deliberating.

"I told you I am going in a cab!" returned Mary haughtily.

"I *wish* you could be here to meet the Percival Wigmores. They are coming to take afternoon tea with me. Perhaps you could be back in time? I'm sure there is no need for you to stay long with those Peppiats."

"It is quite uncertain how soon I may return. Rosamond, will you get ready? I presume you do not oppose Rosamond's going?"

"Well, I suppose that going with you it can't do any harm."

Rosamond waited to hear no more, but

bounded to the door and raced upstairs with eager haste. Sarah shook her head as she looked after her. "Ah!" she murmured, "if that girl could but have had a couple of halves with Mrs. Bolitho, she might have had something like manners!"

"Sarah," said Miss Lowry, speaking with an air which she had never before assumed towards her sister-in-law, "you are entirely mistaken in supposing Rosamond to have bad manners. She is childish and impulsive, but she has all the instincts of a lady. She is neither vain, mean, nor affected. Trust me, you may set your mind at rest as to her outward behaviour. And she is very well educated for her age. I think that Mr. and Mrs. Peppiat have done admirably by her, and they deserve our deepest gratitude. At least, they deserve gratitude from Cosmo and from me. I do not pretend that you are bound to feel as I feel towards them."

And with that, Miss Lowry left the room.

"It's all very fine," said Sarah doggedly to herself, "but you won't convince me that it's lady-like to rush about the house like a Mad Bess o' Bedlam, and to be hail-fellow-well-met with a parcel of tag-rag and bob-tail, such as hangs about those Peppiats. No;

not if you were fifty Miss Lowrys! I'm not so ignorant of the world as all that."

You see there were some things which Sarah could learn: but there were also some things which she could not learn.

## CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT half-past four o'clock arrived Lady Lowry's dear friends, the Percival Wigmores. She received them in the little breakfast parlour which she had dubbed "boudoir," and which she had made very snug and comfortable.

Mr. Percival Wigmore was a smiling, silly, stout little gentleman, who took every means to counteract his tendency to corpulence except refraining from certain articles of food and drink which he liked. He braced himself in, heroically; and wore very tight clothes. He was rather bald, which also troubled him. And he was turned fifty, which troubled him less, although it was undoubtedly the most irremediable evil of them all. He was, however, an indefatigable dancer still; wore a flower at his button-hole throughout the season; and was never happier than when he was running on errands for some pretty woman of his acquaintance. His most intimate male

companions, as a rule, were lads of from eighteen to three and twenty. But he had found of late years that the youthful generation was become so portentously knowing, and so unspeakably *blasé*, as occasionally to cast a gloom over the infantine gaiety of his own spirit. And one ancient person—(his baptismal register declared him to be nineteen, and his tutor had only just succeeded in getting him matriculated at Christ Church after two failures)—who believed that in comparison with the profundity of his own knowledge of life the experience of Solomon was as the innocent freshness of a daisy, had nicknamed Mr. Percival Wigmore “Toddles.”

Mrs. Percival Wigmore was tall and lean, with a long face, sandy hair, and eyelashes of the colour of unbleached cotton. She had “taken up” Lady Lowry, as she said: and she had several sufficient motives for doing so. In the first place, Mrs. Wigmore was by no means rich, and she was not above availing herself of any advantages of fortune which her wealthier friends might possess;—from the loan of a carriage or an opera-box to a new pattern for trimming. Now, her wealthier friends were apt to display a detestable selfishness in the matter of keeping their good

things to themselves, and in slipping out of Mrs. Percival Wigmore's fingers, as it were, upon occasions when she desired to make use of them. In the second place, Mrs. Wigmore loved to patronize, and her opportunities for doing so were rare. In the third place, Mrs. Wigmore, being condemned by pecuniary difficulties to remain in London during this autumn and winter, when nearly all her acquaintances were out of town, had been rather at a loss what to do with herself, and had hailed Lady Lowry as a novelty offering the uncommon advantage of being at once amusing and profitable: for although no money passed between them, there were various ways in which (by skilful management) her ladyship might be made to pay. And, moreover, Lady Lowry was pretty enough to please and occupy Percival, on whose innocent flirtations his wife looked with a sort of indulgent, half-amused interest, such as one might feel in watching a little girl with a doll. She had not been long in discovering that Sarah, whilst willing to be patronized, must also be flattered. And she combined patronage and flattery in such judicious proportions as to please her friend and retain her own ascendancy.

"Are you all alone?" cried Mrs. Wigmore, sweeping into the boudoir, and seizing Lady Lowry's offered hand between both her own. "Now, that is too charming! I was saying to Percival as we came along that we couldn't expect to have you all to ourselves any longer."

Percival, with his glass in his eye, and a smile pervading his chubby countenance, replied in effect that Lady Lowry was not one of those flowers which are born to blush unseen, but that being intended by Nature for the appreciation of an admiring world, no friends could pretend to monopolize her sweetness in a restricted and intimate coterie. But Percival, grappling painfully with the difficulties of the metaphor, stumbled into such dark no-thoroughfares of parenthesis, and interspersed his sentences with so many colloquialisms of a wholly expletive nature and considerably below the dignity of the poetic style, as to be almost unintelligible to the fair object of his compliments.

"Oh yes, I am alone. Miss Lowry and Rosamond are gone to pass the afternoon with some people—very worthy people, but not quite in our set—who are connected with the family of Sir Cosmo's first wife," returned



Lady Lowry in her matter-of-fact way. "I did wish Mary to remain at home and have the opportunity of making your acquaintance. But she considered this visit an act of charity, and she didn't like to put it off."

"To tell you the truth, I am not sorry," replied Mrs. Wigmore candidly. "No doubt Miss Lowry is a charming person, and all that—delighted to make her acquaintance some day. But I shall enjoy having one more of our cosy chats all to ourselves."

The tea was brought, the servant dismissed, and the trio proceeded to make themselves very comfortable. Percival partook copiously of the strong, fragrant tea, and devoured large quantities of sweet cakes with a tender and sentimental air.

"And what, my dear," said Mrs. Wigmore, setting down her teacup, and sinking luxuriously into her cushioned chair, "what is going on about Lowry Place?"

"Well, I haven't had an opportunity of saying anything to Mary about it yet; but I suppose she will make some arrangement with Cosmo, and we shall have to pay a handsome rent to live in our own house. For really and truly, in a moral point of view, it *is* our own house. Don't you consider so?"

"Oh, I have no patience to think of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Wigmore, indignantly. "But is it absolutely necessary that you should go there at all? Couldn't you employ stewards and people to look after the estate?"

"No!" said Sarah, resolutely. "That wouldn't do at all. Cosmo must be at Lowry for some months of the year; I've made up my mind about that. As to farm-bailiffs and those sort of people, *I* know what—at least, I've always been told that they want looking after."

"Ah! well, perhaps you are right. But as to Miss Lowry, now—surely, *surely* she will not drive a bargain with her own brother!"

"Oh yes, she will," returned Lady Lowry, nodding her head emphatically. "She has got her lawyer to settle the terms."

"Bargain with her own brother! I never heard of such a thing."

"Oh, begad, I have, though!" put in Percival, earnestly. "Why, look here, my brother puts the screw on no end whenever I have anything to do with him. Brothers! Oh, that's nothing! I'd rather make a deal with anybody almost—for a horse, or anything, you know—than with Wigmore."

“This is an entirely different matter, Percival. Here a question of—of—of family sentiment is involved,” said Mrs. Wigmore.

It will be perceived that Sarah had been very confidential with her new friends. Her confidences, however, like those of a good many persons, were limited to confessing other people’s faults and shortcomings, which she did with much candour. She had been strengthened in her indignation against the terms of Sir Rupert’s will by the enthusiastic sympathy of Mrs. Wigmore. But she had not as yet confided to that lady her notion that Sir Rupert had at the last moment intended to alter his testamentary arrangements, and still less had she hinted the other notion, which was slowly taking shape in her mind, that Sir Rupert probably *had* altered them, and that his very last will and testament was yet to be discovered.

“And how is Sir Cosmo?” asked Mrs. Wigmore, in a manner which could not have been more expressive of indifference if she had prefaced her inquiry with “Oh, by-the-by!”

“Cosmo is very well, thank you.”

“I s’pose he’s at his club, eh?” said Percival. “Some men are so fond of goin’ to their club, don’t you know? I belong to a

club, but I hardly ever go there. Mine is such a stoopid club, somehow. There's never anybody but old fogies."

"No; I believe Sir Cosmo is at home," returned my lady. "But I never can get him to come to my boudoir for afternoon tea. He doesn't go much to his club, though, either."

"No, really! What does he do, then?" asked Percival.

"He passes hours and hours in his library. He studies a great deal," replied Lady Lowry, with dignity.

"No, really. What *does* he study?"

"Dear Percy, *please* don't be a bore," interposed Mrs. Wigmore, playfully. She perceived that Lady Lowry was greatly at a loss to particularize the subject of her husband's studies. And indeed at that very moment Sir Cosmo was seated in an easy chair, with his slippered feet reposing on another chair in front of him, smoking a big cigar, and perusing the *Field* newspaper.

"And now, my dear child, tell me, have you thought over what I was saying to you the other day? That affair, you know, that I said I thought might be managed?" said Mrs. Wigmore, drawing near to her hostess,

and patting the back of her hand in a manner expressive at once of familiarity and superiority.

“What?” asked Sarah, in her deep voice and opening her eyes very wide.

It was not easy to be on airily playful terms with our good Sarah: nor to establish with her a code of those mysterious hints—verbal hieroglyphics—in which some women love to communicate with their friends. If you did not say what you meant in the plainest terms it was ten to one that Lady Lowry would not understand you; and—which was much more inconvenient and disconcerting—she would bluntly declare that she did not understand you. Thus there was rendered necessary a prosaic and jog-trot explanation, in the presence, very likely, of exoteric beholders, for the dazzling and bewilderment of whom the verbal hieroglyphics were chiefly intended; and who were often surprised to find that the matter in hand was after all of a simple and every-day nature, patent to all and sundry.

On the present occasion, however, there were no exoteric persons, no profane vulgar, to be considered. So Mrs. Wigmore simply answered straightforwardly, “Why, about Dr. Flagge, the medium, you know. He would

give you a *séance* at your house if I asked him, because he is anxious, for various reasons, to oblige us. Otherwise, it is not altogether easy to have him."

"Oh!" said Sarah, slowly, "the spirit-rapping man? Well—I don't know, Mrs. Wigmore. I can't feel sure that it isn't wicked."

"Oh, it's all right enough, Lady Lowry!" exclaimed Percival, jauntily. "Greatest fun in the world! We had a *séance*"—(the Honourable Percival pronounced the word "sayuns")—"at the Dableys the other even-in'. They put the lights out, and the young Dableys kicked up no end of a row. Look here, they actshally crowned old Banbury St. Cross, who believes in it all awfully, with a wreath of artificial roses like they wear in the ballet, don't you know?—stuck it on the top of his wig, by George!"

And at the mere remembrance of this exquisite pleasantry, Mr. Percival Wigmore was overcome with ingenuous glee.

"Oh, but I shouldn't like anything of that kind," said Sarah, looking at him solemnly.

"No, no, my dear; certainly not!" said Mrs. Wigmore. "Percival, how can you be so absurd? You know it was all nonsense

the other night, got up by those Dabley boys. It is a very, very different matter with Dr. Flagge, as you very well know."

"Oh yes, of course; Flagge's different. It was—in short, sheer larking at the Dableys'," responded Percival, screwing his glass tightly into his eye with sudden gravity.

"You have no conception, my dear," continued Mrs. Wigmore, "of the excellent advice you get, or the *wonderful* things you see. I admit that some of these mediums are not exactly what they should be. And then—very naturally—they attract a low sort of spirits."

"Dooood low," put in Percival, "not an 'h' among the whole box and dice of 'em."

"But Dr. Flagge's spirits are of a different order."

"I don't think I should like to sit in the dark," said Sarah, doubtfully. "I should be sure to be frightened."

"Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of, Lady Lowry! It's awfully amusin'; really it is," said Percival. He had had some vague intention of once more attempting the poetic vein, and insinuating with graceful hyperbole that, wheresoever the sunshine of Lady Lowry's eyes beamed, total darkness could

not prevail. But he felt that it was scarcely possible to do justice to so bold and novel an image in an impromptu speech; and besides, he reflected that if any dark *séances* were arranged to take place in Green Street, he should have leisure to work out his conception, and a most favourable opportunity of uttering it when it was worked out.

"There is no absolute necessity for being in the dark, my dear child," said Mrs. Wigmore. "Percival, I wish you would allow *me* to discuss the matter seriously, if you are too frivolous to do so yourself.—It is true, dear Lady Lowry, that you don't obtain the higher and more remarkable manifestations in the light. But I am sure you will soon be so interested that you will lose all feeling of nervousness, and will enjoy the dark *séances* as much as anybody."

Sarah looked at her guest with her own peculiar, stolid simplicity. "I thought it was such a silly thing, spirit-rapping," she said. "I never imagined that the aristocracy took it up!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" exclaimed Percival. "As to silly things—look at Aunt Sally! Perfect rage at one time. Fellows are always wantin' somethin' to do, don't you know."



"Upon my word, Percival, *our own order* is highly obliged to you!" exclaimed his wife with sarcastic emphasis. To do her justice, she was not in the habit of making such magnificent speeches. But she felt that strong methods were necessary with Lady Lowry, and that delicate inuendos as to the birth and standing of the Wigmores would be lost on her.

"Well—and have you to pay this Dr. Flagge?" asked Sarah, after a pause of reflection.

"Y—yes; I believe he usually expects—*I suppose* it is necessary in most cases——"

"Oh, come now, Alexandrina," cried her better half, moved by repeated snubbings to assert himself, and not to pass for an utterly insignificant person in Lady Lowry's pretty blue eyes; "I do know about that! Look here, he's about one of the dearest of 'em all! And as to '*supposin*' it's necessary'—well, all I can say is, that if you don't pay him, the thing won't work. Because I know, the Petheringtons, they felt a delicacy about offerin' him money because he'd been introduced as a friend, or something, and they'd asked him to dinner; and as soon as ever Flagge got scent of it, the spirits rapped out,

‘Pay Obadiah ten guineas.’ I’ll declare they did, like a shot! And the Petheringtons paid ‘em too.”

“Ten guineas!” cried Lady Lowry, with a look of genuine consternation.

“Oh, my dear, you must not take all Percival’s rattle as sober earnest. (Do be quiet, Percy!) As to the fee, it could be arranged. The Duchess of Belturbet spoiled one or two of these people by giving them extravagant sums. But we’re not all Duchesses of Belturbet. And besides, in Flagge’s case, the thing is different. I know that if Dr. Flagge becomes interested in people, and finds them in earnest, he very often waives the money question altogether.”

“*Does* he?” ejaculated the irrepressible Percival. “Well, if Lady Lowry gets him to come here, and don’t pay him, you’ll see how it’ll be. That’s all I have to say. I shouldn’t like anything unpleasant to happen in Lady Lowry’s drawing-room, but if you go waivin’ the money question with Flagge, the fellow’ll turn cheeky as likely as not, and have to be kicked, or something.”

Finally, however, it appeared that Dr. Flagge—being still encumbered with a body which required to be clothed and fed—was

in the habit of making a charge for his services as a medium, which charge varied with varying circumstances. And Mrs. Wigmore expressed her conviction of being able to secure him dirt cheap for her dear friend Lady Lowry. "The fact is," she said, "Dr. Flagge isn't known yet. He's a most interesting creature. He lived for years amongst a tribe of Mexican Indians—or was it in Oregon? Well, no matter! I know he wore mocassins and wampum and war-paint. And for a long time after his return to civilization he couldn't endure to sleep under a roof. I believe he talks their language when he's in a state of trance. Of course nobody understands a word of it. It is *so* interesting! But he arrived when the season was over, and he is very anxious to get taken up by a good set next year. Now I have the power to help or hinder him as it happens; and he will strain a point to oblige me."

"I shouldn't like to go beyond a guinea," said Sarah, with much decision of manner. "And I shouldn't consider he was doing much of a favour at that."

And then Mrs. Wigmore undertook to negotiate with the Doctor on that basis. "That is to say," she said, "Percival will do it for

you. He is not a bad hand at a bargain. And if your fair ladyship will deign to employ him in your service, he will be in the seventh heaven. You see I am too magnanimous to be jealous, though I really believe I ought to be."

Sarah's cheeks grew three shades redder than usual. But she did not dislike the implied compliment. And although a year ago she might have deemed such raillery about married persons improper, yet her provincial prejudices were not so inflexible that they could not be made to yield to certain emollients.

When he took his leave Percival bent over my lady's hand with infinite gallantry, and said, "Now, do let me have the pleasure of settlin' it for you! I know how to *take* these fellows, don't you know? There's a great deal in that. And, look here, if you'd like a pug—nearly pure Dutch with a *leetle* strain of bull in him—I know where there's a regular beauty to be picked up—quite a lady's dog."

The Wigmores before they went away had fixed an evening on which the famous Dr. Flagge was to be brought to Green Street, to initiate Lady Lowry into the mysteries of

“spiritism.” The arrangement was one which Mrs. Wigmore had long had at heart. She was interested in these manifestations by a variety of feelings:—curiosity, the craving to be amused, and a dash of superstition. And not being able to afford to pay for them herself, it appeared to her an excellent inspiration to use Lady Lowry’s house for the purpose of holding *séances*. “It will be doing a favour to that little Lowry woman,” said she to herself; “for I do believe there is something in it!”

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE Peppiats' residence in Nelson Place on that same afternoon could not be said to be an abode of quiet. In addition to the external war in the street, the interior resounded with a variety of conflicting noises which, heard all at once, were bewildering to an unaccustomed ear. Mary Lowry, as she stood at the open door with her card-case in her hand, was unable to hear the servant's reply to her inquiry whether Mrs. Peppiat were within. But Rosamond ran forward, and pulled her aunt into the back parlour to which we have already been introduced. "It's all right; Aunt Leonora will be here directly," she said, and installed Mary in the most comfortable seat in the room.

It must be confessed that Miss Lowry felt a certain shock of surprise, and of something very like repulsion, at the sights and sounds around her. Everything was so utterly differ-

ent from aught that she had imagined beforehand. She knew that the Peppiats were poor. But she had not formed any clear conception of the conditions of poverty in a crowded London street. Mrs. Scarsdale, the naval officer's widow who lived at Clevelen, was also poor; but between her pretty cottage with its kaleidoscopic garden-beds, white muslin curtains, and pervading fragrance of lavender, and Number Five, Nelson Place, Bloomsbury, there was no sort of comparison possible. They might have been in different planets. The parlour in which Miss Lowry sat was clean. But a dingy hue overspread everything. The window looked out on a black brick wall, about six feet distant from it. Instead of the fragrance of lavender, the room was haunted by the ghosts of departed cigars. And a confusion of discordant noises was substituted for the chirp of birds and the peaceful murmur of the woods of Clevelen.

"What *is* going on, Rosamond?" asked Mary. "I never heard such a dreadful noise!"

"Oh, I suppose it is the lodgers practising. There must be some new people on the first floor. That growling noise is the German gentleman in the front parlour. He is learn-

ing the harmonium, and he always seems to play the bass notes more than any other. It makes Juno whine terribly when he pulls out that quivery stop—I forget what it is called. They have shut her up in the back kitchen, I know, poor doggie! But I can hear her protesting against Herr Schulze's music, can't you?"

"I scarcely know what I hear; but there seems to me to be a deafening confusion."

"I'll shut the door tight, Aunt Mary, and then it won't be so bad."

In fact, the shutting of the door muffled the sounds a little. And in a minute or so, the voices overhead ceased, thus causing a diminution of noise which almost seemed to be silence by comparison. And then Mrs. Peppiat came bustling into the room.

"My darling child!" she cried. "Dear Miss Lowry, how sweet and good of you to come and see us! I had some hopes that you would do so, although Northam did not encourage me in them."

"Of course I should come to see you. How could you doubt it?" answered Mary, taking Mrs. Peppiat's proffered hand.

"Well, I scarcely did doubt it. But I think it very, very good of you to come, all the same."



"She is good!" exclaimed Miss Rosamond decisively. "I believe that aunts and uncles are the best people in the world. Where is dear Uncle Pep?"

The Captain had gone out, but there were some hopes that he might return shortly.

"And who are the new lodgers in the drawing-room?" asked Rosamond.

"Why, you would never guess, Rosamond. The Czernovics! I was persuaded to take them, to oblige—somebody. They are only to be here for a week until they can find a house. And as my rooms were empty, I could not well refuse. But at this moment there is some one else with them."

"Not Nona?"

"Yes, Nona; I have just been upstairs to see her."

Rosamond jumped up in her usual impulsive fashion, and declared that she must go and see her too.

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Peppiat, looking doubtfully at Mary. "Perhaps Miss Lowry might not approve——"

But Mary at once declared that she should be quite sure to approve Rosamond's doing whatever her Aunt Leonora thought right. And the permission was given.

"I do not believe it can do the least harm, Miss Lowry," said Mrs. Peppiat when the girl had left the room. "Lady Lowry, I understand, is afraid of Rosy's keeping up connections that might not be suitable for her in her altered circumstances. But she forgets that there are two parties to that question. People who love the company of finer folks than themselves are apt to fancy that every one else is equally eager for it. But so far as I can learn—I wouldn't say this before Rosy, you know; it would not be right to do so, of course—but really, from all I hear, I think most of our friends would find Lady Lowry a much greater bore than she would find them!" And Mrs. Peppiat laughed good-humouredly. To be quite honest, this idea had not presented itself to Mary before. But she could not help acknowledging by a smile that it was not a wholly unreasonable one.

"As to any association with the Czernovics, that is quite out of the question. Rosy would be as likely to associate with Red Indians. But Nona is different."

Mary ventured to ask who the Czernovics were. They were, it appeared, a family of wandering singers whose nationality was doubtful. "Some say they are Moldo-Wal-

lachians," said Mrs. Peppiat. "They call themselves Russians generally. I believe the mother is Russian, and the father a German who has half Russianized himself. But they have wandered all over the world, and don't seem to belong to any place in particular. They are not bad people, poor souls. But you must not suppose, Miss Lowry, that I would ever have suffered Rosamond to be on familiar terms with such people, even if we had been so ourselves—which we are not. I need scarcely tell *you* that my husband, your brother's old comrade, is a gentleman. Perhaps the information might not be superfluous to Lady Lowry!" And again Mrs. Peppiat laughed, but this time a little more drily.

Mary was becoming by very rapid degrees completely at her ease. And it could not be said that she had been so in the first shock of entering the house. Mrs. Peppiat's manner had greatly reassured her; it was, so far as outward conventionalities go, neither better nor worse than the manner of the great majority of Mary's hitherto associates. If Mrs. Peppiat had been the wife of the Vicar of Clevelen, or of the member for the county, Mary was sure that no one would have detected any incongruity between her be-

haviour and her position. And then Leonora Peppiat had a hearty, cordial tone of voice, and a bright sincere smile on her homely features which made her very pleasant. There was much in Mrs. Peppiat's life and surroundings which, as Mary instinctively felt, might have availed to make a low nature lower still. But thorough honest-mindedness is a powerful antiseptic.

"I must try to tell you, Mrs. Peppiat," said Mary, "how grateful I am—we are, to you for your affectionate care of Rosamond."

"You find her a dear child, don't you? I was sure you would love her."

"And then you have had her so well educated. I wonder how it was possible——" Miss Lowry checked herself. But Mrs. Peppiat finished the sentence quite unconcernedly.

"How it was possible for us to afford it? Well, under ordinary circumstances, I don't see how we could have managed it; for we are—not wealthy, as you perceive. But we knew a great many professional persons who were all willing to help us. Music and foreign languages seemed to cost nothing at all. And I got a good governess to come and teach her English. Then Northam looked after the arithmetic, and so forth. So that

amongst us all Rosamond is not quite an ignoramus."

Mary had preached to Mr. Flint against pride of birth; and she believed that she had none. Nevertheless it did strike her as being a shocking and amazing thing that a daughter of the House of Lowry should have been educated by the charitable assistance of professional teachers: whereas if the case had been that of Mr. and Mrs. Peppiat's own child, her mind would have dwelt only on the good and pleasant aspects of the matter.

"It was very kind of your friends," she said. "But surely—did Cosmo know of this?"

"Well;—to say the truth, your brother never inquired into the details of Rosy's bringing up, Miss Lowry. He must have known, however, that the sum he was able to send every year was utterly insufficient to pay for the child's education—I do not speak of an education befitting Sir Cosmo Lowry's daughter, but *any* decent teaching at all."

Mary flushed red to the roots of her hair. "How good you have been, Mrs. Peppiat," she exclaimed. "How very good!"

Cosmo had not been without some twinges of wounded pride, caused by the same con-

siderations as those which presented themselves to his sister. But in him the twinges had operated to make him not only avoid the subject, but avoid the Peppiats altogether, as the easiest method of getting rid of an unpleasant sense of obligation.

“Nonsense, my 'dear!” returned Mrs. Peppiat. “Northam and I have looked on Rosamond as our own child. Northam has felt her loss very much, Miss Lowry. He is very tender-hearted. But it is a comfort to us both to know that Rosamond is in some measure under your care. For, although Lady Lowry may intend to do her duty, we fancy—you will forgive me for speaking so plainly—that she is a person of blunt feelings, and rather a coarse mind on some points.”

Oh, thou genteel and injured Bolitho, hadst thou but heard this; “Blunt feelings”—“Coarse mind!” The favourite pupil of a Bolitho! The wife of a baronet—a real baronet, whose name and age might be read set down in clearest print within the redbound pages of the “British Mythology!” But yet on second thoughts thou mayst be pacified, my Bolitho, and let gentility resume her sway over thy ruffled features. The assertion is made but by a person who let lodgings in

Bloomsbury, and we can afford to treat it with disdain.

Mary thought it prudent to change the subject of the conversation, and began to make some inquiries about the girl whom Rosamond called "Nona," and whom she had gone upstairs to see.

Mrs. Peppiat willingly narrated all that she knew of her history, which was briefly this :

The girl's real name was CEnone Balassopoulo, but as that appellation was found inconveniently cumbrous by English tongues, it was usually abbreviated to Balasso. Her father was a Greek merchant, her mother—well, much was not known about her mother, but she was supposed to have been a Hungarian opera singer, who passed under an Italian name. CEnone's infancy and childhood had been spent in wandering about Europe with her mother ; and the wanderings had extended even beyond Europe. Her mother died at Prague when she was still little more than a child, and, through some circumstances of which Mrs. Peppiat had only a vague knowledge, CEnone was placed under the care of the Czernovics to be brought to England. They had faithfully fulfilled their trust, and had put the girl into an excellent

school, in accordance with her father's instructions. He had furnished them with a sum of money sufficient to defray her expenses to England, and to last her a month or two longer. But when the first quarter's payment at the school became due there was some difficulty. However, some money did arrive before the schoolmistress had lost patience; and further sums continued to come at very capricious intervals. Signor Balassopoulo had been established in Odessa when last heard from, but was supposed to have migrated thence to Turkey in Asia. In short, his whereabouts was as uncertain as his remittances, and it was impossible to dun him, even by letter; inasmuch as communications addressed to "Signor Spiridion Balassopoulo, Turkey in Asia," could scarcely be expected to come to hand. Whenever the Czernovics did not hear from him for five or six months, they regularly made up their minds that he intended to abandon CEnone to her fate; and whenever a remittance did come, they as regularly remade up their minds that Balassopoulo was about to turn up with a fortune and make CEnone an heiress. These seesaws of conjecture, however, made no difference to the kindness of their behaviour to CEnone,



whichever alternative kicked the beam. Meanwhile, the girl had now been more than three years in England, and was become a really accomplished young lady. Rosamond had become acquainted with her at the house of a professor of music whom Enone assisted in giving his lessons.

To Mary Lowry the whole story was utterly astonishing. "And what would become of Mademoiselle Balassopoulo if her father were to desert her altogether?" she asked.

"I believe," answered Mrs. Peppiat, "that so long as the Czernovics had bit or sup, Nona would be welcome to share it. But she is such a wonderful musician that she will soon be able to earn her own living. She plays the piano remarkably already, although she is but seventeen. And good judges tell me that she bids fair to be famous. A strange girl, but interesting and clever. Would you like to see her, Miss Lowry?"

Mary said that she should like it very much.

"Then I will send for her. Or, perhaps—would you mind coming upstairs? The Czernovics would sing to you with pleasure, and their part-singing is really worth hearing."

"Oh, but I should not like to—to intrude! Would it not be taking a liberty to ask them?"

“Not at all! If that is your only objection, I can set it quite at rest. They are really half-civilized, you know, and not at all the sort of people I like to have in my house—you heard me tell Rosamond how they came to be here! But there is no harm in them, and they are good-natured and grateful. Do come. It will amuse you.”

So Miss Lowry consented to accompany Mrs. Peppiat upstairs. “What language do they talk?” she asked, as they paused at the drawing-room door; and added laughing, “You know I can’t speak Moldo-Wallachian!”

Mary felt quite shy at the prospect of meeting these people; though she was curious to see them too. This stately country gentlewoman of thirty would have been pronounced ludicrously inexperienced and babyish—or whatever words stand for these, in the current slang of the day—by any jury of fashionable schoolgirls.

“I don’t think they talk any language properly, but they understand most languages. I always speak English to them,” answered Mrs. Peppiat composedly. Then she tapped at the door, and opening it immediately afterwards, entered the drawing-room, followed by Miss Lowry.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE Czernovics, who called themselves in England the "Muscovite Minstrels," were a family of seven persons:—father, mother, two sons, and three daughters. When they appeared on the platform at St. Cecilia's Hall, they wore a very smart and picturesque costume, covered with fur trimmings and gold embroidery, or embroidery which looked like gold. But in private life, their attire was not only shabby, but, as regarded the male members of the family, peculiarly uncouth, from the fact that it was made chiefly by the hands of Papa Czernovic, who had picked up a little tailoring amongst other useful arts in the course of his chequered career.

Papa Czernovic was, indeed, at the moment when the ladies entered, seated cross-legged on the sofa, stitching away at a scarlet vest trimmed with black and gold, which was to be worn by his eldest son that evening during the

performance, and which needed some repairs. He was a little old man of a tough and wiry aspect, with a yellow, wrinkled face, a hooked nose, usually bearing traces of snuff about it, and a pair of keen grey eyes. Mamma Czernovic was fair and plump, and must have been very pretty once upon a time. She looked wonderfully meek and gentle, and had a little the air of an elderly Gretchen who had married and settled, and almost forgotten the sorrows of her youth. The sons were both tall young men, fair and light-haired, with fox-coloured beards, and cunning grey eyes like their father's; and the daughters were plain, untidy-looking girls from fourteen to five and twenty, queerly muffled up in loose jackets, and wearing large coloured cotton handkerchiefs tied round their throats.

They had all been standing near the piano-forte looking at some sheets of music which lay on it, but they turned round when Mrs. Peppiat and Miss Lowry entered, and made a gesture of salutation. Papa Czernovic stuck his needle into his sleeve, and, springing nimbly from the sofa, wrapped his dingy flowered dressing-gown round him, and bowed over and over again.

“So glet, dear lady! So glet, indeed, ja!”

said Papa Czernovic. By which he meant to express that he was very glad to see Mrs. Peppiat. Then from the end of the room advanced Rosamond, leading a young girl by the hand. "Aunt Mary," she said, "this is Nona."

Mary's glance met a pair of large dark eyes fixed on her own. Very wonderful eyes were CEnone Balasso's :—large, liquid, luminous, and shaded by long, jet black lashes. They seemed to occupy an enormous space in the thin, sallow face they were set in. Other beauty her face had none. There was a strange look in it, like the look of age; and yet it had, of course, none of the lines of age. It was, perhaps, not so much a look of having grown old as of never having been young. Beside Rosamond's fresh, blooming cheeks CEnone's looked like parchment. She had fine teeth, small, square, and perfectly even; but she rarely showed them. Her figure was tall, and well-proportioned enough, but lean even to haggardness, and her long, sinewy, flexible fingers looked almost claw-like.

"You are a great friend of Rosamond's, I hear," said Mary, taking her hand kindly.

"Yes; I am very fond of Rosamond. She has been good to me," returned CEnone,

speaking in excellent English and with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. Her voice was low and a little veiled, and she spoke without smiling:—again in curious contrast to Rosamond, whose frank young face was sure to dimple all over as soon as she began to talk.

Mrs. Peppiat, meanwhile, was casting an anxious and unquiet eye over the furniture. “Dear me,” she said, “I must scold Martha, Mrs. Czernovic. Your carpet wants sweeping sadly. And that table is so dusty that one might write one’s name on it!”

Mamma Czernovic, perceiving that she was being spoken to, smiled very sweetly, and made a little humble, deprecating gesture with a plump white hand, which would have been decidedly whiter for the unstinting application of soap and water. One of her daughters translated the gist of Mrs. Peppiat’s observation into the Russian dialect, which was Mamma Czernovic’s native tongue. Whereupon she smiled again, and repeated the gesture, precisely as before. But her husband was more communicative of his sentiments. “Ach, no, no, *not!*” he cried, shaking his head many times. “De dost not do us no harm so lang als dey leaf it quiet.

But ven dey shweeps it——ach Gott, it comes in your voice!” And the old gentleman gave a lively dramatic representation of one coughing and choking in a cloud of dust.

“I must send Martha in with a broom and a damp cloth before they’re up in the morning. That’s the only way,” said Mrs. Peppiat to herself. And then, having made that mental resolution, she refrained like a wise woman from entering into a controversy on the subject, and proceeded to prefer her request that the Czernovics would be so very obliging as to sing something for Miss Lowry, who was a dear friend of hers and the aunt of Miss Rosamond.

They all at once consented with the utmost good-nature, and stood up in a row at the end of the room, just as they were accustomed to stand before the public at St. Cecilia’s Hall.

“Do you like de lusty or de melancholish melodies?” asked Papa Czernovic, when they were all ready.

Mary, rightly interpreting this as an inquiry whether she preferred to hear a merry or a sad song, replied that she would leave the choice entirely to him. And, after a word or two of consultation amongst themselves, they struck up a part-song of a wild, pathetic

character, with a long-drawn refrain in the minor key.

It was a very remarkable performance. Their singing seemed to be entirely untutored, and yet at the same time extraordinarily certain. There was that sort of savage element in it which results from a power of accurately doing anything, combined with an utter incapacity for reasoning about it. By dint of singing constantly together, they had attained an absolute perfection of accord; and their voices—fresh, sonorous, and always exquisitely in tune—rose, and sank, and swelled, and fainted together, as if they had been parts of one instrument, moved by one will. Mamma Czernovic retained some high soprano notes which were strangely sweet and thrilling, and reminded Mary, she scarcely knew why, of the clear piping of a solitary bird on a wide moorland.

Mary was touched by the singing, even to tears, and thanked the singers with such sweet graciousness as to win all their hearts. They sang another song,—a merrier one this time, although it had a touch of pathos in it too, as all their tunes seemed to have. And then they sang another and another, being evidently delighted with the effect of their music on this



beautiful, elegant lady, who sat listening to them with parted lips and glistening eyes, as self-unconscious as a child.

Mary's thoughts wandered back to Clevenal, while her senses drank in the sad, sweet melodies of these foreign singers :—to Clevenal, and its grand old woods, and the peaceful, pastoral landscape beyond them. A vague sad yearning filled her heart. It seemed as if those wild notes were uttering aloud some voiceless sorrow of her own past youth. And even as she felt thus, a name was whispered close behind her, which made her heart give a great bound, and startled the blood into her cheeks,—“ Vincent Maude.”

She did not move for an instant, but when she did turn her head it was with her usual serene dignity. And now her face was quite pale. The voice by which the name had been uttered was the voice of Enone Balasso, who had been holding a whispered conference with Rosamond. The Czernovics were still singing, and the two girls, interpreting Miss Lowry's movement as an intimation to be silent, broke off their talk.

When that song came to an end, Mary thanked the singers many times, and declared that she could not think of trespassing any

further on their kindness. Upon which Papa Czernovic said simply, "Ah! you hef enough?" and seated himself cross-legged on the sofa once more to finish his stitching.

Then the ladies took their leave, and went downstairs again, accompanied by CEnone.

"And what did you think of the Czernovics?" asked Mrs. Peppiat. "Queer people, ain't they? Quite a new experience for you, Miss Lowry. But their singing is remarkable, is it not?"

"It was delightful," answered Mary. "Most sweet and touching. And I am very much obliged to you for giving me the opportunity of hearing it."

"You are fond of music," said CEnone, with her serious air, and in a tone of assertion, not interrogation. "I can always tell immediately when any one is really fond of music, or only pretends to be so."

"How can you know?" asked Rosamond.

"How do I know whether you are fond of me or not?"

"I suppose you love music very much, Miss Balasso?" said Mary.

"I am not sure that I love it as some people do. It is not my life. I think I like it as one might like hashish," was Miss Balasso's singular and unexpected reply.

"I am afraid the pathos of those Russian songs has been too much for Miss Lowry," said Mrs. Peppiat. "She looks quite pale. Now you must have some tea, Miss Lowry. It will be ready immediately. You won't faint if I bring the kettle to be boiled in the parlour? No; I thought you would not. There's a good clear fire here; and, for my part, I think it is pleasant to hear the kettle singing on the hob. Trouble? My dear Miss Lowry, if you knew the pleasure it gives me to have you here! And then, if I can coax you to drink a cup of tea, it may make you stay until Northam comes home. How grieved he will be if he misses your visit!"

And so good Mrs. Peppiat bustled in and out, and brought the tea-kettle with her own hands. And Rosamond, jumping up to assist her, was bidden to go and unlock the store-closet, and get out some marmalade. "You have not forgotten where the marmalade lives, Rosy?" said Mrs. Peppiat.

"I should think not, Aunt Nora! I am intimately acquainted with its address. The damson jam family used to reside in the same house: but I'm afraid they have all departed this life. May I see?" And Rosamond ran off with a beaming face, jingling the keys.

Cenone did not offer to help in the prepara-

tions, but sat still, with her eyes fixed on the fire. When Mrs. Peppiat and her niece had left the room, CEnone turned her eyes on Mary, and said, "Those people upstairs—the Czernovics—are not relations of mine."

"No; so I understand," returned Mary, in some surprise.

"They are barbarians, you know: but faithful in certain things as barbarians are."

"They have, at all events, been faithful in their friendship to you, have they not?"

"Friendship is not the word. But they have been faithful. Old Czernovic would cheat you in a bargain without remorse. But he did not touch a penny of the money entrusted to him for me. He is the most civilized of them all, and has something more of education, but—I believe he is a Jew." CEnone made a slight gesture expressive of intense disdain, and a little disgust. After an instant she resumed, "I am not ungrateful. I see that you are thinking me so. I would do anything I could for those people; but I wished you to understand the real terms I am on with them. They have good points, but they are barbarians; and I"—drawing herself up, and looking full at Mary with her great solemn eyes—"am a Greek."

Mary raised her eyebrows with a smile. "I fear," she said, "that we must all pass for barbarians in your eyes, more or less."

"You are laughing at me," replied CEnone quietly. "And yet you would think yourself superior to the wisest and most virtuous Red Indian who ever lived, merely because you happen to be born an English woman. So I feel to these Russians because I am a Greek. And I have more excuse:—for they are not very wise, nor very virtuous."

That such pride as this girl evidently nourished should have grown up and thriven amid the circumstances of her condition, was very amazing to Mary Lowry. It was a phenomenon of which she had no experience. The girl's manner was entirely free from insolence or temper. It was grave, and full of the quietude of conviction. But there was something which stirred the womanly fibres of Mary's heart in hearing such lofty words from the lips of this meagre, frail, forlorn young creature, floating like a straw on the current of the great rushing London life, and dependent on the forbearance and charity of strangers for the bread she ate, and the shabby gown she wore. It seemed to her strangely piteous.

"My dear child," she said, gently, "I did not mean to laugh at you."

Enone's eyes filled with tears, and she took Mary's hand and kissed it suddenly. "You are good," she said. "You have a noble heart. Ah, you don't know how many people I meet,—women; all women! Charitable, religious ladies!—who are angry if they find I am not so humble as they think all poor persons ought to be. I could be humble to you; but to them,—never!"

Again Mary felt a thrill of pity, as she saw the slight form straighten itself defiantly, and the thin hands clasp each other with tremulous force. She had been slowly gathering up her resolution to ask the girl a question. And yet she felt almost relieved when her purpose was frustrated by the return of Mrs. Peppiat at this moment, followed by Martha bearing the tea-tray, and by Rosamond laden with little glass dishes full of sweatmeat.

"Here's marmalade, Aunt Mary!" she cried. "Home made! And the last surviving member of the damson jam family! And,—Oh, here's Uncle Pép!" And hastily setting down the glass dishes, at the imminent risk of celebrating the occasion by a copious libation of damson juice, Rosamond rushed

towards a gentleman who appeared at the door, and hugged him enthusiastically.

“Halloo!” cried the Captain’s jovial voice, “what do you call this? Assault and battery? My pet! How did you come here? Are these your West End manners, miss? I expected you to make me a curtsy, and say, ‘How do you do, Mr. Peppiat?’ instead of flying at your poor old uncle like a—Banshee, or a cat-o’-mountain, or any other ferocious wild animal!”

“Northam!” said his wife. “Here is Miss Lowry.”

Then the Captain, with a joyful exclamation of surprise, turned to greet Mary. His welcome was as warm as Leonora’s had been, and he was profuse in his thanks to her for having come. And they all sat down to the tea-table very amicably. Pep was in the highest spirits at the sight of his Rosy, and laughed and chatted away with the gaiety of a boy; or, perhaps with the recollection of the Honourable Percival Wigmore’s languid and melancholy young friends in our mind, it might be more appropriate to say “with the gaiety of a vivacious elderly gentleman.” Pep had an irresistibly winning manner when he chose to make himself agreeable. And he did

choose to make himself as agreeable as possible to Miss Lowry, whose visit gratified him immensely. He even coaxed the grave CEnone into showing her white teeth once or twice, and crying, "Oh, Captain Peppiat, what nonsense you say!"

"Look here, Uncle Pep," observed Rosamond, laying hands on a substantial slice of bread; "Aunt Nora says that if I devour so much bread and jam here I shall spoil my appetite for dinner. But I don't mind that a bit. I'd much rather have tea in Nelson Place than dinner in Green Street."

Mary began to be somewhat of Miss Rosy's mind on this point. Dingy and shabby as Number Five, Nelson Place, had appeared to her when she first saw it, some glamour was stealing over her eyes which brightened it. Here were harmony, cheerfulness, honesty, activity, affection. At Green Street there were soft carpets, rich meats, obsequious servants, stagnation, and—Lady Lowry. Nevertheless, to Green Street and Lady Lowry it was necessary to return.

When Mary asked if a cab could be got for her, the Captain declared his intention of escorting her home. And, despite her protests, he persisted in his intention. "Ah,



now, Miss Lowry," he said, "you wouldn't have us pass for savages, letting you go home alone! You won't refuse me the honour of escorting you? If you don't mind walking five steps, there's a cab-stand within three minutes of this."

Mrs. Peppiat drew Mary on one side, and said to her in a low voice, "You won't be offended, dear Miss Lowry, if I don't return your visit? To begin with, I have never been invited to go to Green Street—— Stop! That's not all! One must take some account of what is fitting in the eyes of the world, if it's only for the sake of other people. And how could I come trotting into Lady Lowry's drawing-room at odd hours with my gown tucked up and an umbrella? Northam gets angry when he hears me talk so; for he is the most unworldly creature——! But one cannot behave as if life was a fairy story. I wish one could. But one can't, and there's an end of it. I only wanted you to understand that I have no rancour or enmity in my mind towards Lady Lowry, and that if I don't come to see you, it is not because I am sulky with her. Dear me! people needn't feel unkindly towards each other because they don't exchange visiting cards half a dozen times in the season. I have given up all that sort of thing."

"All the worse for you, Mrs. Northam Peppiat," said her husband, who had caught the last word or two. "As to not 'feeling unkindly,' it is well known that the exchange of visiting cards tends to soften the human heart. 'Emollit mores,' as my old school-master used to say before giving us a taste of the birch. And the increased asperity which I have lately observed in you is no doubt entirely owing to your having given up that social interchange of—pasteboard. Miss Lowry, if you are ready, your slave awaits you."

"Good-bye, Nona dear," cried Rosamond, and kissed her friend heartily. "You are to come and stay with me in the holidays, you know. Papa *promised!*"

Enone smiled faintly, and made a little silent movement with her head. Then Mary and Rosamond and the Captain went out together into the dusk of the street, where the gas lamps were beginning to show in long lines of yellow dots, stretching into misty distance. The Captain drove with them to the door of Sir Cosmo's house, and stood bare-headed on the pavement to help them to alight, but he would not enter the house. "Another time, another time, my dear Miss Lowry," he said.

“Pray make my compliments to my lady. God bless you, Rosy!” and he walked off briskly before the footman had closed the door.

“What a charming visit you have missed!” said Lady Lowry, when she met her sister-in-law in the drawing-room before dinner. “The Percival Wigmores stayed more than two hours. And they have been telling me the most interesting things.” And her ladyship commenced relating some of the exploits of Dr. Flagge as described by the Wigmores. But she did not at that time say anything about her intention of having that mysteriously gifted being in her own house. As to the way in which Mary and Rosamond had been spending the afternoon she said no word; and, indeed, seemed not to give it a thought.

Presently Sir Cosmo came in and stood by the fire, and his sister thought it proper to tell him where she and Rosamond had been. He showed but a very tepid interest in the circumstance. “Been to see Nora and Northam, have you?” he said. “Ah! Well, how are they getting on? A musty fusty kind of den they live in, don’t they? A quarter past eight! Sarah, I wish that cook of yours could

be taught to be punctual." And then at dinner, in the presence of the ducal Lobley, any such low subject as the Peppiats was taboo, by my lady's explicit command. It was curious to note how my lady's wishes—slowly sometimes, but always surely—got themselves obeyed by Sir Cosmo. He had a better education, better breeding, better brains than his wife:—but she conquered him.

When Rosamond went into her aunt's dressing-room to bid her "good night," as she had now taken the habit of doing, Mary shook her rippling, golden brown hair over her face at the looking-glass, before she said, "Oh, Rosamond, by-the-by, I thought I heard CEnone mention the name of an old friend—an old acquaintance—a—some one whom I knew a long time ago:—Mr. Vincent Maude."

"Do you mean Major Maude? His name is Vincent. Oh, did you know him long ago, Aunt Mary? Oh, do you know, he has been so good to Nona! The Czernovics got into some dreadful trouble or other in a country town, and Major Maude helped them. I think he took them out of pawn! Well, if that's not right, I know he gave them some money. And that's how he came to know Nona. And just the other day he told Miss Cribb—that's the

schoolmistress—that he would pay the two quarters that are owing for Nona, and make himself responsible for the rest if Signor Balasso didn't send any more money. Nona adores him. He is such a big fellow, like an elephant—only very good-looking! Just fancy your knowing Major Maude! I wonder why he doesn't come to see us. He lives in London now. I shall get Aunt Nora to tell him——”

“No, no, Rosamond. Get Aunt Nora to tell him nothing about me. It is long since we met, and I dare say he has forgotten all about me.”

“But I wasn't going to say anything about *you*, Aunt Mary!” returned Miss Rosamond, with her usual ingenuous honesty. “I should like to see him for myself. Ah, wait a bit, if Nona comes to stay here he is sure to call. You will see if he doesn't! And then I shall say, ‘We are much obliged to you, Major Maude! You never came near us before; so we are quite sure that you only call to see Nona, and——’”

“Rosamond, Rosamond, what possesses you to chatter so, child?”

“I don't know, Aunt Mary,” replied Rosamond, laughing, “but I suppose I got tipsy

with joy at seeing Aunt Nora and Uncle Pep. I feel as if I could go on talking all night ! ”

“ But I don’t feel as if I could go on listening all night. So good night, darling.”

“ Good night, Aunt Mary, dear. And—only this one word!—you will help me to make papa keep his promise about having Enone, won’t you ? ”

## CHAPTER XV.

It may be doubted whether, after all, the acquisition of his father's wealth had added many enjoyments to Sir Cosmo Lowry's life. During the seven or eight years of his widowhood, and after having left the army, his natural indolence had been undisturbed by any external calls of duty. He spent his days in lounging. He lounged over a cigar, over a novel or a newspaper, and, in summer, over his fishing-rod. Perhaps he put more heart into his fishing than into any other occupation. It was chiefly in pursuit of this sport that he had taken lodgings in the farmhouse of Sarah's parents; and, being there, he had lounged into love with the farmer's pretty daughter.

Cosmo's love was but a sluggish sort of sentiment, and he might never have been stimulated by it to take the serious step of marrying Miss Sarah Bloxham. But the

matter was not left solely to the arbitrament of Mr. Lowry's tepid inclinations. Miss Sarah Bloxham, although by no means of a passionate temperament, nor at all likely to play Juliet to an ineligible Romeo, possessed a fine fund of obstinacy,—a quality which, spiced with a little spirit of contradiction, has been known to be at least as powerful an agent in marriage-making as Cupid,—and she was bent on “being made a lady of.” Would Cosmo have married her had he known how imminent his father's death was? He had said to himself many a time much as Sir Rupert's neighbours had said, “My father is tough, he will live to be ninety.” Meanwhile, there was the farmhouse with its profuse, if coarse, hospitality over and above such accommodation as was set down in the bond; there was the pleasant stream, with its store of fish; there were peace, quiet, deference earned without any such effort of self-restraint as Cosmo must needs have made amongst his equals; and there was a very pretty young woman who adored him. Cosmo was not so fatuous as to suppose that, had he appeared at Lambrook Manor Farm in the guise of journeyman tailor, Miss Sarah Bloxham would have fallen a victim to his personal



charms. He knew that his birth and family were metal more attractive to this country damsel, with her fresh, rosebud face, than any conceivable perfections of mind or body. But he had no objection to being adored because he was the heir to a baronetcy. It seemed to him as good a reason for that kind of adoration as another, and it was an attraction which could be exercised without the smallest trouble on his part.

With respect to his feelings towards her, Sarah's little airs amused him. Her apings of fine ladyism, her *naïf* belief in the maxims of Mrs. Bolitho, her assumption of superiority on all points of polite demeanour over her parents, coupled with her ready submissiveness towards himself, tickled his vanity with a double pleasure:—the pleasure of being flattered, and the pleasure of feeling himself acute enough to see through the flattery. Of course all this would not have sufficed to make Sarah Bloxham into Mrs. Cosmo Lowry if she had been lean, sallow, or squinting. But her plump, well-turned figure, pink and white skin, and turquoise-blue eyes, belonged to the style of prettiness to which Cosmo was most susceptible; and, lastly, there was a slippered ease about his intercourse with Sarah which.

to a man of his temperament, was perhaps the most seductive charm of all.

Certain it is that when, within six weeks of his marriage, he received the tidings of his father's death, he felt no regret at having newly bound himself. Sarah had already gained considerable influence over him, and she had put no yoke on his neck which was hard to bear. Even when he found himself heir to the greater part of his father's money he still did not repent his marriage. It is true that Lady Lowry's exigencies grew with her prosperity. The slippered ease of Sir Cosmo's body was limited to certain rooms and certain hours. Starched cravats and tightly fitting coats were rigorously insisted on at all times and seasons made and appointed for such solemn observances. But there remained a slippered ease of mind which the baronet was always free to enjoy. No straining after a high standard of honour, no shackling scruples of delicate veracity, no open-hearted confidence, no troublesome attentions of observant courtesy, even, were among the things which Sir Cosmo's wife demanded of him.

And her intellect was as easily contented as her morality. Sir Cosmo professed to hate

“your clever women,” and, had he spoken the whole truth, he might have declared his distaste for “your clever men” also—only that a too pronounced sentiment of that sort might have been taken amiss by the few gentlemen whom he did select to consort with at his club. For although, to do them justice, their emptiness of mind was considerable, still openly to attribute that sort of vacuum to a masculine head has not as yet come to be considered distinctly complimentary even in the most fashionable circles. And the mention of his club acquaintances brings us back to the consideration mooted at the beginning of this chapter, namely, whether the acquisition of his father’s wealth had really added many enjoyments to Sir Cosmo’s life. He liked lounging at the Junior Georgic, to be sure, and listening to the gossip that was rife there. But he did not like it better than he had liked lounging in the Bloxham’s best parlour with a meerschaum and a novel; or being a triton amongst minnows in the coffee-room of the Blue Boar at Lambrook. And he certainly did not like it nearly so well as sitting on the banks of a trout-stream with his line and his rod on a summer afternoon. But summer would not last all the year round. And being in London,

it was something to have a focus which gathered all one's idle impulses to one point, without the trouble of choice or decision, and this purpose his club served.

But he was not a sociable man, and he made no intimacies. He had been a fine horseman in his youth, and inherited something of his father's love for horses. But he did not ride now. If he had been down at Lowry he would have ridden, he said. But what was the use of keeping saddle-horses in town? He read the sporting papers, but he never risked a penny on a racehorse. And he had not touched a card since he had been able to afford to lose at play. He was neither an epicure nor a glutton; so that his dinner was not that central point of interest in his day which it is to some persons. Perhaps the only pleasure procured for him by his inheritance which he could not have enjoyed without it was a sense of power. He had the government of his money. It was his to do what he would with.

Among other advantages which his *més-alliance* offered, from Sir Cosmo's point of view, there was the very great one that he was cramped by no marriage settlements. He gave a sufficiently liberal allowance to his wife for her private expenditure; nor did he refuse

her any of the indulgences which his fortune amply sufficed to procure for her. Nevertheless, avarice and a love of hoarding were growing on him. And if he had had his father's energy, he might have become a miser. But the firmness needful to a man in Sir Cosmo's position for thoroughly carrying out such a tendency was beyond Sir Cosmo's force. He merely achieved a reputation for being stingy, without enjoying the solid fruits of stinginess. However, although he had neither the strength of will, the courage, nor the shrewdness of Sir Rupert, and could not hope to emulate his father's more daring and sagacious speculations, yet he began privately to make little peddling investments here and there, and enjoyed the secrecy of them as much as the dividends.

Percival Wigmore was also a member of the Junior Georgic; but he and Sir Cosmo did not often meet there. Percival's airy juvenility was apt to be oppressed by the tone of elderly dulness which reigned in those luxuriously fitted rooms. Almost the sole use which he made of his club was occasionally to dine at it : and this Sir Cosmo never did.

However, one afternoon, a couple of days subsequent to Miss Lowry's visit to the Pep-

piats, it chanced that Wigmore and Sir Cosmo met in the smoking-room of the Junior Georgic Club. The baronet was no favourite with Wigmore, who found him, as he ingenuously expressed it, "such a dry kind of stick, with such a sneerin' way with him that you can't make out when he's chaffin' you, and when he isn't." Still, they exchanged greetings in a manner which might have led a stranger to infer that a considerable degree of intimacy existed between them. Then they smoked in silence for awhile. Presently Wigmore said, "I say, Lowry, you know a man called Maude, don't you? Vincent Maude? He was in the —th, I think. Big man. Good-looking fellow."

Sir Cosmo had turned sharp round at the beginning of this speech, and fixed his eyes on the speaker, drawing his heavy eyebrows together as he did so. "Yes," said he, when Wigmore paused, "I know Maude well enough. What about him?"

"Oh—a—nothing! Only—he knows you," returned Wigmore in a helpless kind of way.

He was apt to be confounded by an obvious expectation on the part of his interlocutor that his words were to lead anywhere in particular. Indeed, the ostentatious manifesta-

tion of such an expectation had been known on divers occasions to send him floundering into a verbal Slough of Despond. Whereas if he were let to amble on at his own sweet will, it was generally found that some meaning—fainter or clearer—lurked on the misty horizon of his mind, and that he would finally make his way to it, albeit by an erratic course.

“H’m! Yes; not improbable!” said Sir Cosmo, with a very pronounced sniff.

“I mean, you know, he was talking about you the other night.”

“H’m! I shouldn’t have thought I was a very interesting topic for Maude to talk about.”

“Oh no, it wasn’t by way of an interesting topic, you know,—I mean that he happened to say that he knew you.”

“We hadn’t seen anything of each other for years, until I met him accidentally in Pall Mall the other day. We’ve dropped out of each other’s way. People do.”

“Jove, yes! It’s quite extraordinary how you come across people, and then, very likely, —never come across them any more. I’ve experienced that sort of thing myself. Gad, the people I used to be intimate with when I was a boy, and the stories about ’em,—

marriages, and different family rows of all sorts,—would fill a book! And now, I give you my word I don't even know what's become of half of 'em." And Percival sent forth a puff of smoke with a sigh, and an air of soft regret.

"Probably dead by this time, most of 'em," returned Sir Cosmo, coolly.

"Dead?" repeated Wigmore, in a tone almost of indignation.

"Well, I should think it likely. People who were married and had histories when you were a boy! The years go by, you know. I could count up lots of deaths amongst the people I knew when *I* was a boy, even."

Decidedly Sir Cosmo Lowry's conversation was not imbued with that youthful buoyancy of spirit which Wigmore loved in his male associates. But worse than that, he had an unpleasant tendency to prosaic literalness, and an ill-natured delight in insisting that two and two made four whenever any other result of their combination would manifestly be more agreeable,—in Percival's own forcible phrase, "a d—d nasty way of pinning a fellow,"—which were felt to be offensive, and excited a good deal of resentment even in the breast of the mild-tempered Percival Wigmore. That



manly breast was well and artistically padded by an experienced tailor. But where is the tailor whose paddings will avail to shield our *amour propre* from a stab? Even a good share of obesity will not do that! Else had our gentle Percival gone scatheless from an onslaught of Sir Cosmo's piercing tongue. For the padding in question was meant less to supply the defect of concavity than to dissimulate the opposite defect of a too great convexity in other portions of Mr. Wigmore's frame, and to lead the eye gently onward, as it were, without any too startling or sudden change of outline. But as it was, he was penetrated by the conviction that he was being sneered at, and—unkindest cut of all—sneered at on the score of his age!

He would willingly have made some sharp retort. Several severe things dimly floated in his mind,—sarcasms and epigrams in a nebulous and inchoate condition. But all that he managed articulately to utter was, "Oh! Ah, well, people will die, you know."

"Some won't. That's the worst of it!" returned Sir Cosmo, carelessly. And Wigmore felt as a tyro with the foils might feel on contending with some rapid master of fence:—that is to say, he not only had a

confused sensation of being in constant danger of a hit, but a more confused sensation of uncertainty as to whether he had been hit or not.

There was a pause, broken at length by Wigmore's saying, "Maude seems a very good fellow. I took to him, rather."

"Did you? No doubt he was delighted."

"I don't know about his being delighted, but he seemed an uncommonly pleasant fellow. I met him at—— Oh, by-the-by, that reminds me!—I've made it all right about Flagge."

"What's Flagge?"

"Fellow that calls himself Dr. Flagge, you know."

"Oh! A doctor? I thought Flagge might be a racehorse."

"No, no; I don't go in for racehorses. Never did. I hate bettin'. Never could understand what amusement fellows find in it. No; this is Flagge the medium. My wife has taken the thing up a good deal, and as Lady Lowry said the other day that she'd like to have him——"

"Have him! What for?"

"Why, to give a performance at her house. Mrs. Wigmore would blow me up if she heard me say 'performance.' She swears it's all done by the spirits."

"What! You don't mean to say that my wife is going in for any of that tomfoolery?" cried Sir Cosmo.

"Oh, I thought you knew," said Percival, puffing away contentedly at his cigar. Lowry's evident annoyance was not displeasing to him; neither was the circumstance that he was in Lady Lowry's confidence on the subject, whereas Lady Lowry's husband was not.

"Spirits! It's all rot and humbug," said Sir Cosmo. "A pretty sort of spirits!"

"Whatever it is, it's uncommon good fun," replied the other. "It amuses me awfully. I don't mind saying so. And, as I told Lady Lowry, I'm sure it will amuse her. I quite thought you knew, you know."

"And the next thing will be that this fellow will expect to be paid for his swindle," said Sir Cosmo.

"Oh no, that was the *first* thing! No mistake about that! But I've arranged it. Mrs. Wigmore has the power of being useful to Flagge among our people, and he'll do the thing reasonably for Lady Lowry. I hadn't a notion that you didn't know, you know."

And then Mr. Percival Wigmore sauntered out of the smoking-room with his usual jaunty

air, and incompletely restored good humour. Nor was he so malicious as to rejoice in the idea that he had sown dissension between Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry by his revelations on the subject of Dr. Flagge. For in truth he did not believe that any serious dissension would result therefrom. Lowry would be "riled." Well, Wigmore did not pretend to deplore that. Serve him right! But he would not be able to tyrannize over my lady. She was sure to get her own way in the long run; and was not likely to suffer any acute pain of mind from her husband's disapproval of her proceeding.

Wigmore had not seen Cosmo and Sarah together half a dozen times. His observation of his fellow-creatures was neither acute nor profound. Yet in some mysterious way the conviction was irresistibly borne in on his mind that Sarah was not at all under the dominion of her husband; and that Cosmo was to a very considerable extent under the dominion of his wife.

Sir Cosmo, on the contrary, went home in a very cross temper, and expressed to my lady his opinion that Dr. Flagge was a swindling humbug, and the Honourable Percival Wigmore a meddling ass.

"Oh no, he isn't, Cosmo!" returned Sarah, not speaking sharply or hastily, but with a slow weighty air of setting her husband right as to a matter of fact. "He is most obliging, and entirely the gentleman."

"Entirely the brainless, grinning idiot! What do you want to have this beastly fellow, this Flagge, here for?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't see a little of this spirit-rapping, since everybody else does. I thought, myself, at first that it was rather silly. But Mrs. Wigmore says the Duchess of Belturbet quite believes in it. And so does she herself. And she is a most highly accomplished woman, and moves in a most exclusive circle. And as to religious grounds, Cosmo——"

"Oh, bother religious grounds! That's not the question. You'll be having the house overrun with these people."

"I assure you, Cosmo, I should never think of demeaning myself by familiarity with low persons. And if you think I don't know how to behave myself, I suppose you'll allow that Mrs. Wigmore does."

"Mrs. Wigmore be——"

"Cosmo!"

"And you'll have to pay, you know."

"Not much. Mr. Wigmore has arranged it for me."

"If you want amusement, why don't you go to the play, or to see a good conjuror? Deuced deal cleverer than these mediums; more amusing, and not a regular take-in."

"I don't much approve of theatres, Cosmo. I don't feel sure that they're not wicked,—except, perhaps, the Italian Opera."

"Fudge!"

"No, Cosmo; it isn't fudge, since you choose to use such a vulgar word. I don't say that there mayn't be immorality in some operas, but the music does take it off."

One of the advantages which my lady possessed over the clever women whom her husband disliked was a certain invincibility in argument.

Sir Cosmo thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked to the window, frowning and whistling. Presently he said, without turning round, "When do you want to have this foolery?"

"The Wigmores are to bring Dr. Flagge here on Wednesday evening, at half-past nine o'clock. I've just had a note from Mrs. Wigmore."

"Now, mind this, Sarah, I won't be dragged

into this to save the whole tribe of Wigmores from being roasted alive. I shan't come into the room. You had better understand that clearly."


"I can tell the Wigmores that you have a prior engagement."

"Prior fiddlestick! Tell 'em I'll neither be made a fool of nor pretend to be made a fool of."

With that Sir Cosmo stalked out of the room into his own den—a little room with a few books in it—which my lady spoke of as "the library." There was a sense of defeat upon him. But it was not a very bitter or humiliating sense of defeat. One result of my lady's peculiar argumentative invincibility was to leave the vanquished with a comfortable sense of superiority to the victor. And to be able to smile with pitying contempt at Sarah's feminine inability to understand reason made amends to Cosmo for Sarah's feminine pertinacity in getting her own way. And then, too, it was a satisfaction attained without the least expenditure of energy.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THERE had been a good deal of discussion between Lady Lowry and her friend Mrs. Wigmore as to who should, and who should not, take part in the *séance* to be given by Dr. Flagge at the house of the former. As Mrs. Wigmore had pointed out, it would cost no more to have six or seven people than three or four, and it was a pity that Dr. Flagge's gifts should be wasted on too small an audience; besides that, "the power"—what power was not distinctly stated—was supposed to be greater in a large assembly than a small one. But then, on the other hand, the conditions imposed by Dr. Flagge, or by the spirits through Dr. Flagge, were more stringent than those of the showman's bear, immortalized in Goldsmith's pleasant comedy as an animal that never danced to any but the genteelest of tunes. Dr. Flagge's





spirits liked genteel company, truly; but they required something more. Inquirers of the right sort they did not object to. Serious and tender souls, who could not be suspected of practical joking, were very welcome. Even the frivolous, so long as their frivolity did not take the form of interrupting the utterances of the medium, or contravening his rules and regulations, were by no means shut out. But your honest, irksome fellow, anxious to be convinced, and to that end insisting on tests impossible to be granted; your stubborn sceptic, and—worst of all!—your hostile person, who had made up his mind that it was “all a trick,” whose sole aim throughout the proceedings was to find out how the trick was done, and who was capable of striking sudden and surreptitious lucifer matches at a moment when profound darkness was pronounced to be indispensable for the production of the phenomena, or of springing from his chair and making unexpected dashes at the medium—all these, when known, were rigorously and implacably excluded. Of course, there was difficulty in ascertaining beforehand which individuals came under either of the above categories. Often this was impossible to be ascertained; and some risk had to be run of

admitting inharmonious elements that might possibly spoil the whole affair.

However, Mrs. Wigmore was sufficiently acquainted with the nature of Dr. Flagge's conditions to undertake the responsibility of making up the party, if Lady Lowry would permit her to do so. "There will be you and our two selves," Mrs. Wigmore had said, in talking the matter over, "three. Miss Lowry four. Rosamond you won't allow to make one? Hem! pity! Young persons often have an immense deal of mediumship. However, if you think it best—— Well, four. I think we might have half a dozen. Flagge couldn't object to that. We ought to get a couple of men. Don't you know anybody?"

Lady Lowry was not at all willing to admit that she did not know anybody. So she rejoined with a very creditable imitation of the phrases she had heard from her dear friend, that not a creature of her set was in town at that dead season of the year. And she added that she did not think it much mattered whether they had any one else present or not.

But Mrs. Wigmore was of a different mind. Why else had she taken any trouble about getting the medium to go to Lady Lowry's

house, unless that she might enjoy the entertainment herself, and, if possible, bestow a little patronage by permitting a friend or two to enjoy it also ? The friends were not forthcoming just now ; although in the season she might have been solicited for her interest to get an invitation. But her own enjoyment was still to be considered. There was to be a supper after the *séance*. This arrangement was necessitated by the extreme exhaustion from which Dr. Flagge suffered after exerting his mediumistic powers. The spirits had, indeed, been known to particularize the special viands which were to be furnished for Obadiah's refreshment, after Obadiah had had a long sitting. But in the present case that matter was to be left to Lady Lowry and her cook. And having thrown out a skilful hint of the sort of repast provided on such occasions by the Duchess of Belturbet, Mrs. Wigmore had no doubt of securing an excellent supper. The whole affair might really be very enjoyable, if only they could get another man or two, to relieve the humdrum nature of the party. But it would not be at all amusing to have no cavalier but Percival. Percival would be devoted entirely to Lady Lowry. But even if he were not, Mrs. Wigmore was not without

some wifely regard for Percival, but she did not find Percival amusing.

She blinked with her white eyelashes, as she cast up a perplexed glance to the ceiling, and tapped with her gloved fingers on the chimney-piece, near which she stood in Lady Lowry's boudoir. All at once her eyes fell on a visiting-card, carelessly thrust into a crevice between a large mirror and its frame.

"What's this?" she cried, pouncing on it. "Why, my dear creature, this is the very thing! Here's our man! Percy knows him. Percy will make him come!"

"What? Who?" asked my lady, very wide-eyed. Rapidity of any kind was confusing to my lady. She was not apt to pounce on anything herself; least of all on a half-expressed meaning.

Mrs. Wigmore explained; the card bore the name of Major Maude, *ergo* Major Maude might be invited to take part in the *séance*. Percy knew him; had in point of fact met him at a *séance* where Dr. Flagge was the chief performer. Lady Lowry knew him. He was a thoroughly nice person, and the very individual they wanted on the present occasion.

"But I *don't* know him!" returned my lady, still very wide-eyed.

It turned out on inquiry among the servants that Major Maude had called a few days back, had asked for Sir Cosmo, and on being told that Sir Cosmo was out, had said that he would not disturb my lady, but had left cards and gone away.

Sarah now remembered having heard her husband make careless mention of a Major Maude whom he had known long ago, and whom he had met again recently. And she remembered, too, that Rosamond had spoken of him as frequenting the Peppiats' house. This latter circumstance weighed heavily with Sarah against inviting him to hers. But the acquaintance of the Honourable Percival Wigmore inclined the balance in his favour. Besides, Mrs. Wigmore was very urgent about the matter, and finally persuaded Lady Lowry to send him an invitation.

"Isn't it rather unceremonious?" said Sarah, dubiously.

"Why shouldn't it be unceremonious? He's an old comrade of your husband's, he told Percy. No need for ceremony. Want of ceremony from a lady to a man is complimentary."

"I'm not sure," said Sarah, "that this Major Maude frequents the sort of society I

quite like. I think I have heard of his visiting rather queer sort of people."

"My dear child, men do visit all sorts of queer people! One can't help that. He'll be in very good society when he's here. Besides, if you don't like him for any reason, or for no reason at all, you can easily drop him next season, you know."

"Yes; I can drop him," said my lady, meditatively. "At least—that depends. Is he *quite* the gentleman?"

"Oh, I suppose so; as much as most people. Why?"

"Because if he *is* quite a real gentleman, it will be easier to drop him. Only then I mightn't want to!"

However, the note was written, and sent. And Mrs. Wigmore received *carte blanche* to bring a sixth guest at the last moment if she could find one.

Major Maude read Lady Lowry's little note with a beating of the heart which, it may be safely said, that pointed handwriting had never before caused in any human breast. He had held long debate with himself before calling in Green Street. Why should he go there? He had asked that question of Peppiat. Peppiat had declared that there

was no reason at all why he should go there; and he had almost acquiesced in Peppiat's answer. But in interrogating himself he had framed the question a little differently, and asked, why should he *not* go there? Clearly there was no reason why he should not, and—in brief, he was dying to see Mary Lowry! Which statement, if openly made, would have modified his friend Pep's answer. But one's friends are sometimes provokingly dull about guessing one's wishes.

When he had screwed his courage up to the point of paying an afternoon visit in Green Street, it did not suffice to carry out his secret desire. For on being told that Sir Cosmo was not at home, but that my lady was within, he had not ventured to ask if Miss Lowry were also within, but had left a couple of cards and walked away. Even as he turned the corner of the street he repented his cowardice, and was wroth with himself for not having at least made the effort to see Mary. But it was too late; he could not go back again and tell the footman he had changed his mind! He smoked more cigars than usual that evening, and went home and sat in his rooms by himself, with a book of which he did not read ten lines. Well, and

what was it all about? What was he making himself such a fool for? he asked, thinking half aloud, with sundry interjections and much violent expelling of tobacco-smoke from his mouth. A middle-aged fellow like himself, who had been knocking about the world all these years, to behave like a schoolboy with the first down on his lip, and grow low-spirited and romantic about the airiest dream, the merest mirage of a memory! He was ashamed of himself, he said. But there, he did himself injustice. Such humility and tenderness as dwelt in Major Maude do not belong to the fledgling stage of manhood.

Then, after a few days, arrived Lady Lowry's note, and Major Maude read it with a beating heart. The note did not at all specify what was the nature of the entertainment to be offered in Green Street on the following Wednesday evening. Mrs. Wigmore had wished that this information should be given, but Lady Lowry had resisted her wish. "I don't like to put down anything about the medium or the spirits in black and white," said my lady. "It has such a silly look. Talking is different." And in truth she was minded not to commit herself too fully to the patronage of Dr. Flagge, about



whom she entertained some [secret doubts, notwithstanding Mrs. Wigmore's eloquence. So the note merely set forth that Lady Lowry requested the pleasure of Major Maude's company on Wednesday evening, the 5th of October, at nine o'clock precisely.

It chanced that Percival Wigmore had no opportunity of seeing Maude before the evening fixed for the *séance*. They did not belong to the same club, nor frequent the same haunts, and Percy was not inclined to take much trouble to hunt him up, and make sure of his coming merely to please his wife. Indeed, he was just then too much occupied in doing commissions for Lady Lowry to have much leisure for the service of any one else. Lady Lowry had declined the pug, but expressed a wish to have a pair of love-birds, which the gallant Wigmore undertook to procure for her. She also wanted some old china, and a Japanese screen to stand behind her chair in the dining-room, and she had heard of a nurseryman in some distant suburb who would contract to supply her house with plants and flowers on reasonable terms; and she was discontented with the livery-stable keeper from whom she hired her horses, and desired to find some one to replace him; and, in

short, was as expert in giving trouble to any one who would take it for her, as if she had been a fine lady all her life.

Thus Maude was ignorant whether he were invited to hear music or sip tea, to be received uncereemoniously as a friend of the family, or to make one in a crowded reception. But all that mattered little. The central fact, the real meaning which that perfumed note contained for him, was that he should see Mary Lowry.

It was only ten minutes past nine o'clock when he reached Sir Cosmo's door. The note had said "nine o'clock precisely," and although under ordinary circumstances he might have taken a considerable latitude in interpreting that sentence literally, yet on this occasion he was careful to be punctual. If he arrived very early he might have Mary Lowry all to himself, for a few minutes, before the other people came! As he walked upstairs his pulse was quickened to a degree which surprised himself, and it was a positive relief to him to find the drawing-room empty when the servant threw the door open. "I thought my lady was here, sir," said the man, looking round. "I know they've done dinner."

"Don't disturb Lady Lowry," replied Maude. "I will wait."

The man inquired his name, and then withdrew, leaving Maude in the drawing-room. As soon as he was alone our big Major did what nine persons out of ten would have done in his circumstances—he looked at himself in the mirror over the chimney-piece. Then he put his hand up nervously to his cravat, and passed his fingers over his bronze-coloured moustaches, and wondered whether Mary would know him, or whether he had grown so old, and weather-beaten, and burly as not to be recognized for the same individual, who had appeared at Lowry as a slim lieutenant of infantry eleven years ago.

As he so stood he heard the door open, and the rustle of a dress upon the carpet. He turned round with an apology upon his lips. “I beg ten thousand pardons for being too early, Lady Lowry.”

But it was not Lady Lowry. It was Mary herself. She, too, stopped in surprise, and for an instant they stood silent opposite to each other. The instant was long enough to assure him that the woman before him had gained more than she had lost of feminine beauty in the years which had passed since they last met. The indescribable evanescent freshness of early girlhood was no longer on

her face ; yet face and form were undoubtedly more beautiful than they had been at nineteen. To Maude's eyes that pale, pure face, with its halo of bright hair, seemed to shine above her black dress with a radiance like the radiance of a star at twilight. All the pathos of the past years—gone for ever with their treasure of happiness that might have been, all his chivalrous worship of her womanly purity, of the angelic whiteness of that life beside which his own seemed to him so smirched and earthy, welled up in his heart, and were nearly overflowing at his eyes. He felt as if he could have cried like a woman, or fallen on his knees before her, or done any extravagant thing. But what he did was so little extravagant that Mrs. Bolitho herself might have looked on approvingly. He took her proffered hand with a bow, and said, "Miss Lowry, I—I thought I might have the pleasure of seeing you this evening. I dare say you would hardly have known me, it is so long since we met."

"Lady Lowry told me she expected you, so I was prepared. But I should have known you without that," answered Mary, with that divinely simple sincerity, that gracious sweetness, which seemed to make trivial things

sound noble from her lips. "She seemed so calm, so serene, so infinitely far away from such turbulent emotions as made poor Vincent Maude feel fevered, and fluttered, and awkward! And yet, if he had but known it, her heart was beating so fast and strongly that she could scarcely breathe, and she was fain to sink into the nearest chair.

"I—I thought—I fancied you didn't know me at first," said Maude. "Because you—you—seemed so surprised."

"I thought the room was empty when I entered it," she answered smiling. "Won't you sit down?"

"I'm afraid I'm absurdly early. But Lady Lowry's note said nine o'clock precisely. And I suppose I have got a little of a soldier's habit of punctuality."

(Oh, Vincent Maude, thou art a truthful man, and an upright, as men go, but the soldier's habit of punctuality had very little to do with thy early appearance in Green Street on that memorable fifth of October!)

"No; you are not too early. My sister-in-law will be here immediately. She is superintending some preparations for this performance that is to come off. You have seen this sort of thing before. I never have.

And I dislike the idea of it, and a little disapprove it, and yet I am going to be present."

"What is the performance?" asked Maude. But he was thinking very little of the purport of his question, and a great deal of the music of that silver-sounding voice that made a bridge like a moonbeam across a dark chasm of years.

"Did you not know? I thought you were invited as a special adept in these mysteries! A certain Dr. Flagge is to come here to-night."

"Oh, Flagge! Yes; I have seen him, and others of the same sort. They do very inexplicable things undoubtedly. And so you really—you did—you really did recognize me directly?"

"Yes; I might ask you the same question, if I did not know that common gallantry would compel you to answer in the affirmative."

She smiled, but her lips were not quite steady, and she dropped her eyes when they met his.

"No; not to you. Common gallantry may do for common people, but that's not a feeling that could prompt any speech of mine to you."

The clear serenity of her face was troubled for an instant, and then vanished all at once

like bright frost-crystals in the sun. Tears suddenly rolled down her cheeks, and she dropped her face into her hands.

"Miss Lowry! What have I said to grieve you? Mary, for Heaven's sake, don't cry."

His words were not eloquent, but his tone was. For a few seconds that seemed like many minutes, he stood beside her dismayed and anxious, watching the golden tendrils of her hair that strayed from her bent head over her hands, and longing to take those hands in his, and kiss them, with a yearning tenderness of sympathy in which passion was almost quenched.

Mary at length looked up, and shook back her hair, and wiped her eyes.

"I cannot tell what overcame me," she said. "I don't know myself! Pray do not be distressed. I suppose the troubles and the changes I have undergone lately have weakened my spirits. And there are times when the slightest touch will upset one's fortitude. If any one had been rude or unkind to me, I should have been stoical. But just a tone of—of—kindness, of sympathy, seemed to set my nerves vibrating like the chords of an instrument. Do forgive me. Indeed, I am astonished at myself."

And, indeed, so she was. Such loss of self-possession had never happened to her before. She had not been conscious beforehand of any danger that she should so lose it. And the break-down appeared to her like an unexpected assault from without, rather than a defection of the forces within.

Before Maude could speak again, the door was thrown open, and Lady Lowry swept into the room. Her ladyship's presence did not tend to restore Major Maude's equanimity, but it had an instantaneously calming effect on Mary, who said in a tone so nearly like her usual tone as to be taken for it by my lady's not very sensitive ear, "Sarah, let me present to you Cosmo's old friend, Major Maude."

And if there was an odd look about Miss Lowry's beautiful eyes, her sister-in-law did not observe it.



## CHAPTER XVII.

"I must apologize for having disturbed you so early, Lady Lowry," said Maude, when he had made his bow. "But your note said 'nine precisely,' and I look upon a lady's commands as law."

Sarah smiled very graciously. She thought Major Maude's appearance satisfactory. He wore a hot-house flower in his coat, and had "quite the look of an officer." That was her mental summing-up after the first rapid scrutiny.

"Oh, I didn't mean you to take it so strict as all that, you know. I allow a half an hour's grace," she replied, and gurgled her little laugh in her throat. It has been recorded before in these pages that playfulness was not the mood which most advantageously exhibited our Sarah's social training.

"I am very sorry to have been so awkwardly literal," murmured the Major, furtively watch-

ing Mary, who sat with half-averted head, holding a hand-screen between herself and the fire, so as to throw her face into shadow.

"No; I don't see that there's anything to be sorry for," said my lady. "I did want people to be pretty punctual, because we shall begin directly Dr. Flagge comes. I don't know whether Miss Lowry has told you?"

Maude explained that Miss Lowry had told him Dr. Flagge was expected. Then Lady Lowry launched forth into a statement of her views on the subject of spiritism, which—as she began by disclaiming all experience of it, and put herself at once into a position of complete irresponsibility whatever might happen—were of a somewhat vague nature. But my lady's utterances were intended rather to display her own wisdom, piety, and knowledge of the world, than especially to elucidate the topic in hand.

While she was still in the full flow of eloquence Mrs. Wigmore was announced, and appeared in a very juvenile toilet, and in excellent spirits. With Miss Lowry she had already made acquaintance. And Major Maude being at once presented to her, she greeted him with an air of the greatest cordiality.

"Percy and Dr. Flagge will be here immediately," she said, turning to Lady Lowry. "Percy dropped me here, and then drove on to Dr. Flagge's lodgings. He always expects one to send for him on these occasions, you know. But I wouldn't tease you to send your carriage for him, so Percy undertook to convoy him."

"Oh, I don't think I should have liked to send the carriage for him," returned Lady Lowry, shaking her head decisively. "And I should think he might well afford a cab out of what I pay him."

Mrs. Wigmore's dear friend and *protégée* was not altogether so pliable as might have been wished. Every now and then she displayed odd traits of stubbornness. And the points which she chiefly selected for self-assertion were unfortunately questions of good taste, as to which argument is futile, and teaching inefficacious.

"I suppose Major Maude has been recalling all sorts of old stories of the days when he and Sir Cosmo were comrades in arms," said Mrs. Wigmore, with the view of turning the conversation.

"No," replied my lady naïvely, "we have been talking about the spirit-rapping."

And, indeed, it had never entered her head to show the smallest interest in her guest's past acquaintance with her husband. She had not invited him on any such grounds. And, being occupied herself with the approaching *séance*, she simply talked about that, as she would have talked about her cook, of her health, or her furniture, or whatever filled her mind for the time being. My lady was not in the habit of frittering away her attention on things which did not personally interest her.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Wigmore. "You have seen a great deal of it, Major Maude, haven't you? Percival has talked so much about you."

Major Maude rather wondered how Percival had managed to extract the materials for much talk about himself from the one or two interviews which constituted the whole of their acquaintance. "I really know very little about this *soi-disant* spiritism," he began.

Mrs. Wigmore interrupted him. "*Soi-disant* spiritism!" she cried; "oh, fie. I thought you were a confirmed believer. Isn't that too bad of Major Maude now, Lady Lowry?"

Sarah did not know what *soi-disant* meant, so she sagely refrained from expressing an opinion as to whether Major Maude's epithet

were, or were not, too bad. "I tell you what," she remarked, looking at her watch, "I am not at all pleased with this medium for being so late. When people are engaged and paid, they ought to keep to their time. And really, if ladies and gentlemen can be punctual, I should think mediums might!"

"My dear creature, you mustn't scold Flagge when he comes," exclaimed Mrs. Wigmore in a tone of voice that was almost unaffected, so greatly was she moved by the fear lest my lady should blunderingly spoil the entertainment which she (Mrs. Wigmore) had been at some pains to arrange. "If you say one crooked word to him, you'll put him out, and we shall have no *séance*. These people do get spoiled a little, of course. But you know some allowances must be made for a man like Flagge. He is very delicate, and quite extraordinarily nervous. No doubt all that is connected with his peculiar power, somehow or other."

"I don't see why so much allowance is to be made for him. He's paid!" replied Sarah.

Then Mrs. Wigmore, sitting down close beside her, poured a variety of whispered anecdotes into her ear, all tending to show that persons of the highest rank and fashion

set the example of immense tenderness and toleration for the caprices of such individuals as Dr. Flagge. But Sarah was not easily mollified. And it took a great many instances from the practice of that social luminary, Her Grace the Duchess of Belton, to induce Lady Lowry to promise that she would receive the medium graciously, and refrain from saying a word to him about the terms of his bargain.

It wanted but a few minutes to ten o'clock when he did arrive, under the escort, it might almost be said in the custody, of the Honourable Percival Wigmore.

Dr. Flagge was a very slightly built man, under the middle size. He was thin almost to emaciation, and his features were sharp and prominent, and his face marked with strong lines. The top of his head was bald, and the fringe of sandy hair which surrounded it wildly dishevelled. His age was probably not above five and thirty. He wore black trousers, a black frock coat, and a black velvet waistcoat, cut very low, so as to display a quantity of shirt front, in which several ruby studs glistened. And his shirt collar was very large, and was turned down almost on to his shoulders over a black silk neckerchief.

"This is Dr. Flagge, Lady Lowry," said Wigmore. His rubicund rotundity of visage, and the smiling self-contentment of its expression, were in strong contrast with the medium's haggard, parchment-coloured face. Dr. Flagge advanced two steps, stopped suddenly, ducked his head forward, and, seizing Sarah's hand, greatly to her surprise and discomposure, bent over it and touched it with his lips. "Lady, I greet you," said Dr. Flagge in a nasal voice, and with a peculiar inflection, which I can only describe as the patiently argumentative tone which we adopt in combating some self-evidently unreasonable proposition. Indeed, if Dr. Flagge merely observed that it was a very fine day, his tone sounded to English ears like that of a man who should say, "Despite all your obstinate assertions to the contrary, the facts of the case prove me to be right in declaring it to be a fine day. But I am not angry with you; only somewhat weary and worn in spirit."

My lady was so utterly taken aback by his unexpected salutation that she stood dumb before Dr. Flagge, with very red cheeks and very round eyes. Mary Lowry was relieved to find that it was not considered necessary to go through the ceremony of introducing

Dr. Flagge personally to each member of the company, for she felt a decided repugnance to submit to his method of saying "good evening."

Wigmore meanwhile greeted Maude as effusively as his wife had done, and said in a loud voice, "I was tellin' Lowry the other day that you'd been talkin' about him. Nothin' like old friends, is there? Awfully delightful meetin' old friends, isn't it, Miss Lowry?"

Miss Lowry smiled a little, and bowed in a manner which might be taken to give a general assent to the proposition that meeting old friends was indeed awfully—not to say fearfully—delightful.

Percival had been greatly struck by Miss Lowry's beauty when he was first presented to her, and, for a moment, had wavered in his allegiance to my lady. But Mary was not found on better acquaintance to possess the social fascinations of her sister-in-law. "Miss Lowry's an awfully handsome woman," Percival had said to his wife, "but she ain't exactly my style. Awfully civil, and all that, you know, but she always seems somehow to be thinkin' a fellow a fool."

"You have no experience of these mani-



festations," said Dr. Flagge, addressing my lady, but taking in the rest of the company with the corner of his eye.

"No; I've never seen any spirit-rapping."

"The phenomena are by no means confined to raps," returned Flagge, "although raps seem to be a favourite mode of communication with some spirits. Out in the wilder regions, and among the virgin forests of our great western lands, I have had manifestations by rapping which would seem to come from the stems of twenty or thirty mighty pines at once."

"Jove, how queer!" cried Wigmore. "Like a lot of woodpeckers, eh?"

"It has been at times," continued Flagge, unheeding the interruption, "like a choir of gnomes, making the hollow rock reverberate within some mountain mine."

"Could other persons hear these tappings besides yourself?" asked Maude.

"Yes, Major; some could. There were limitations. It depended on a man's psychological conditions, Major; and perhaps also on the physiological."

"Couldn't we begin?" said Sarah. But she did not speak with as much peremptory decision as might surely have been legiti-

mately exercised towards a person who was paid. Dr. Flagge's manner had impressed her. So had his ghostly appearance, and his use of long words.

"If Dr. Flagge thinks the conditions favourable?" said Mrs. Wigmore, sweetly.

Flagge smiled a sad, superior smile. "I am but an instrument, lady," he said. "A son of the wilderness, a pipe for these spiritual voices, an *Æolian* harp for these phantom fingers."

"Oh my!" whispered my lady under her breath to Percival, "if he goes on like that I shall get so nervous. I always was nervous from a child. And going upstairs in the dark, or the rushlight burning low in the middle of the night, or anything of that sort, would so upset me that the faculty ordered Mrs. Bolitho to have a night-light in the room I slept in. It was charged as an extra, of course. But these things are constitutional, and you cannot help them."

"Oh, don't be nervous," said the gallant Percy, reassuringly. "I've seen this lots of times, and nothing ever happens. I mean nothing to be frightened at, you know. You sometimes get a knock on the head if you bully them. But I don't believe ladies are ever hit."

"I wonder you ain't frightened yourself, Dr. Flagge!" said Sarah, looking at him with feigned jocosity and real anxiety.

"Fear is not an accompaniment of these manifestations, lovely lady," replied Dr. Flagge. "There is an exaltation, and a soaring height of soul that gyrates in the empyrean like unto the lark at sunrise, and is conscious of nought but fluttering ecstasy. Now, if you'll be so kind as to show me the locality, we'll fix the party in the most convenient form for securing the phenomena. The phenomena ain't a-going to display themselves without we *do* so fix 'em, as I guess you already understand."

"Oh!" said my lady, staring her slow, puzzled stare, "you want to arrange the *séance*, do you?" (N.B. My lady had modelled her pronunciation of that word on Percival's, and said "*sayuns*" firmly.)

"It isn't me, lady. It's the spirits. I've got to conform to their conditions, and unless I do so, pretty smart and slick, they're apt to show displeasure. You do not use that word 'slick.' But I am an untutored child of nature, and was raised among the Appanawchees."

"But 'slick' ain't an Indian word, is it?" said Percival. "I always thought it was

regular Yankee slang. At least"—catching a severe look from his wife, and feeling vaguely that he had said something *mal-à-propos*, "there's slang everywhere, of course. There's lots of slang in London. Look at Billingsgate, you know!"

"I thought we'd have the '*sayuns*' downstairs in my boudoir," said my lady. "It's handier for the dining-room afterwards, and quieter and more out of the way than the drawing-room. And I've had a table taken in on purpose."

Dr. Flagge professing that to the best of his belief the spirits would be quite satisfied to manifest themselves in the boudoir—possibly being moved thereto by the hint of supper to come implied by the mention of the dining-room—the party proceeded downstairs.

The order of their going was a little confused and straggling. Sarah's society education had not yet reached the point of enabling her to marshal her guests with certainty and firmness. She looked appealingly at Mary to help her when the movement to leave the drawing-room was made. And Mary, responding quickly to the appeal, had said to Wigmore, "You will be kind enough to go first, with Dr. Flagge, and show him the way,

will you not, Mr. Wigmore? You know the house." Then she stepped back, and motioned Mrs. Wigmore to pass before her, and they all went downstairs without further ceremony.

Sarah had her misgivings that the matter had not been managed with due observance of etiquette. She inclined to believe that they ought to have marched downstairs two and two—a lady and a gentleman, arm in arm. But then she reflected that perhaps the presence of a person who was paid neutralized the operation of those social laws which she was so anxious to conform to, and which were clearly made for the superior classes.

All proper preparations had been made for Dr. Flagge in the boudoir, thanks to Mrs. Wigmore's zeal. There was a table of sufficient size for six persons to be comfortably seated at it; and on the table, beside the lamp which was now lighted, there stood a couple of wax candles and some matches. By Dr. Flagge's directions, the lamp was removed to the chimney-piece, and turned down so as to cast but a dim light over the room. Dr. Flagge then begged Lady Lowry to lock the door lest there should arise the suspicion that any accomplice of his might

slip in when the room should be in darkness. But this my lady absolutely declined to do. "I really couldn't," she said; "I have such a horror of locked doors. If the house was to take fire——! Just think of our all being shut in here!"

Percival expressed his opinion that he and Maude would be able to burst the door open by their combined exertions, but this prospect did not reassure my lady.

"Besides," she said, "how could any one get in, unless the hall-door was open? And I'm sure that's fast shut enough, for I am very particular that the servants should see to the fastenings every evening, and so is Lobley."

So the door was left unlocked. Nothing now remained but for Dr. Flagge to arrange the place which each person was to occupy. He placed Lady Lowry on his right hand, and Major Maude on his left.

"You can catch a hold of me, Major, when the lights are extinguished, and make sure that my hands don't move," he said. "And you, fair lady, can do the like. Just keep your fingers on my coat-cuff. That will suffice to convince you that the manifestations ain't produced by any movement of mine. P'raps the

Honourable Mrs. Wigmore will set next the Major, and Miss Lowry next to her, and the Honourable P. Wigmore between her and the Lady Lowry, thus completing the circle."

They seated themselves in accordance with these directions, placing their hands on the table before them.

"There is no need to extinguish the light entirely, until the spirits give warning to do so. And it isn't favourable to the phenomena to give the mind too anxiously to thinking of 'em. Jest sit still, and carry on a cheerful conversation on indifferent topics, won't you?"

This recommendation was, however, not so easy to comply with under the circumstances as Dr. Flagge appeared to think. And, indeed, at any time, the categorical command to carry on a cheerful conversation would be apt to quench the spirits and extinguish sociability. But Percival proved himself equal to the occasion. And although the result of his elastic good humour could not be said to be precisely "conversation," but was rather in the nature of a fragmentary monologue, yet this seemed to satisfy Dr. Flagge, who occasionally threw in a word or two to help him whilst the others sat waiting with their hands on the table.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"At the Petheringtons' the other evening," said Percival, "they brought a guinea-pig."

"Who brought a guinea-pig?" asked my lady.

"Oh, the spirits."

"Spirits brought a guinea-pig! How did they carry it?"

"Bless you, a guinea-pig ain't difficult to carry! I'll undertake to come here with a guinea-pig in every pocket of my coat, and you shan't know anything about it."

"Oh no; *please* don't!"

"Percy!" exclaimed his wife severely.

"But," persisted Sarah, "spirits haven't got coats and pockets."

"Well, I don't know. I think the newest kind of spirits *have* clothes of some sort. Haven't they, Dr. Flagge? They photograph them with sheets and things on, you know."

"There is a power of materialization which



some spirits have developed to a very amazing extent," said Dr. Flagge. "Ha!"

"What's the matter?" cried Sarah, giving a violent start; for the Doctor had uttered a half-suppressed exclamation, and appeared to be agitated by a strong shudder in his back and shoulders.

"Nothing! It's the power gathering and manifesting itself. The influence is overwhelming at times. Out West I have known it raise me in the air, to a height of from twelve to twenty feet."

"Oh, I *wish* you could be raised in the air now!" said Mrs. Wigmore, enthusiastically.

"Well, it has not yet happened to me since my arrival in Europe. I expect I am not yet acclimatized. The electrical conditions in our Western hemisphere are very different from what they are here. That's a well-known scientific fact. Yes. Ouf!" and again Dr. Flagge shuddered strongly.

"Oh, dear, I hope it won't keep on like this!" said my lady, whose rosy cheeks had grown several shades paler than usual. "Don't you feel nervous, Mary?"

"Not in the least," answered Miss Lowry, composedly.

Something in her tone displeased the

medium, who cast a quick venomous glance at her.

"Well, your nerves must be made of cast iron," returned her sister-in-law.

"It appears to me that these proceedings are more trying to one's patience than to one's courage," said Mary, quietly.

"Oh, but the power's gatherin' rather quick to-night, Miss Lowry," said Percival. "We haven't been sitting at the table above twenty minutes; and very often they have to wait an hour and a half; haven't they, Maude?"

"I can't say that I have ever waited an hour and a half," replied Maude. "But, as I told you, my experience of these things is very small."

At this moment a loud crack was heard, which appeared to proceed from the centre of the table.

"Here they come!" cried Percival, gleefully. "Don't be frightened, Lady Lowry!"

Lady Lowry *was* frightened; and gripped Dr. Flagge's wrist with a force of which she was quite unconscious.

Crack! crack! crack! sounded from the table, and similar cracks seemed to come from the wall of the room behind Flagge. "Are there any spirits present?" asked the

medium. A shower of taps and cracks was taken to be a reply in the affirmative.

"How charming! It's going to be a most interesting *séance*," said Mrs. Wigmore, earnestly. "*Isn't* it interesting, Miss Lowry?"

"Well, possibly there is some defect in my character which prevents me from appreciating it. But so far, to say the truth, it has not particularly interested me."

"Oh, but it will!" returned Mrs. Wigmore aloud; whilst to herself she said, "What a nuisance that icicle of a woman is! Ten to one she'll put Flagge out of humour!"

"Are the spirits satisfied with the present arrangement of the party?" asked Dr. Flagge.

Taps were heard in reply, which, by a pre-arranged code of signals, signified "No."

"No? That is strange, considering you placed us yourself, Dr. Flagge," said the Major.

"Not more surprising to you than to me, Major. But it is a frequent phenomenon that the medium is more astonished than anybody else dooring the manifestations.—The spirits are *not* satisfied, then, with the present arrangement?"

"No!"

"What do they require us to do?"

Confused scratchings and tappings, and a sound of scuffling which could not be interpreted into any intelligible communication.

"Perhaps they wish us to change our places?" suggested Mrs. Wigmore.

"Oh, I shouldn't like to move!" said Lady Lowry, to whom it seemed that there was some sort of security and protection in her firm clutch of the medium's coat-cuff.

The spirits—almost as though they had politely waited to ascertain her ladyship's wishes—now expressed by raps that what they desired was not a change of place on the part of any of the company.

"This is very extraordinary!" said Dr. Flagge, looking round. Then he shuddered more violently than ever, and muttered, "The power is in remarkable force this evening. I expect we are a-going to have some very uncommon spirits."

But, whether common or uncommon, the spirits continued to express dissatisfaction; and declared, in answer to repeated interrogations, that no manifestations worth witnessing would take place unless certain changes were made in the arrangement of the party. At length it was made out that there was a person present whose influence was hostile to "the

power." And unless that person withdrew, "the power" would withdraw, and the whole entertainment be made null and void.

"Who can it be?" asked Mrs. Wigmore.

"Ask them yourself, lady," said Dr. Flagge. "I very often have a presentiment, or psychological antipathy to certain persons whose influence disturbs the developments. But I can't say I feel it on the present occasion, nor can I guess which of us has got to be excluded."

"I can guess," said Mary Lowry, in a very low tone. But Wigmore, who sat next to her, caught the words, and in his usual ingenuous fashion exclaimed aloud, "No! Can you? I haven't a notion myself. I hope it ain't me! —or you, you know!"

Mrs. Wigmore proceeded to make the inquiry which the medium had desired her to make. But to the question, "Who is to be excluded?" no intelligible answer could be obtained. At length the form of the inquiry was altered, and the name of each person present was mentioned with the interrogation, "Is it this one?" Then it appeared that Miss Lowry was the obnoxious individual, and that the spirits unanimously black-balled her.

"Oh, I say! That's too bad!" exclaimed

the good-natured Percival. "Oh, come, Flagge, I should think, if you ask 'em, they'd think better of it. The idea of turning Miss Lowry out!"

But Mary, stifling a disposition to laugh, begged that neither Dr. Flagge nor the spirits might be incommoded on her account, and rose to leave the room with perfect equanimity.

"You see," said Dr. Flagge, looking swiftly round the circle to observe the effect of this proceeding, "these things are entirely beyond my control; and not only that, but very often they are quite contrary to my wishes. It might have been the fair Lady Lowry herself, for what I could tell. But something is a-whispering to my inner consciousness that her influence is benignly favourable to the manifestations, and that she has one of those pure and poetic souls with which an elevated order of spirits love to communicate."

Crack! was heard from the table.

"Is any spirit here to communicate with one of the party?"

"Yes!"

"Will the spirit indicate the individual by rapping out the first letter of the individual's name?"

Twelve distinct taps were heard.

“L!” said Mrs. Wigmore, who had been counting the letters of the alphabet breathlessly. “It’s for you, my dear.”

“Oh, dear, I wish they wouldn’t!” said Lady Lowry, in a tremulous voice.

The spirit, however, being politely requested to rap out his own name, twelve raps were again heard.

“L again! Oh, I say, this is some mistake, you know——” Percy was beginning, when the table indignantly repudiated the notion of its having made a mistake by shoving itself with some viciousness against his waistcoat.

“Oh, please don’t make it angry!” said Sarah.

“Fear not, fair lady. This spirit is a very powerful and uncommon one, I can feel; but its sentiments towards you, ma’am, are of a very fine natur’. Spirit, we’ll trouble you to rap out your name in full, and do it as spry as possible, follering me as I repeat the letters of the alphabet. If you have any lengthy or transcendental communication to reveal, we’d better go ahead at once.”

In compliance with these somewhat uncereemonious injunctions, the spirit announced himself as Sir Rupert Lowry, and declared that his chief motive in visiting them that

evening was to bestow his blessing on his daughter-in-law, in whom he took an affectionate interest. Being asked, by Major Maude, why he had banished his daughter Mary from the room, the spirit boggled a little, but finally stated that she was of an incredulous turn of mind, and would not have believed in his presence manifested by raps. Being further asked whether this were not rather an additional motive for endeavouring to convince her, and convert her to spiritism, the spirit faintly rapped out "conditions not favourable," and was mute thenceforward; nothing that could be said by any of the party succeeding in eliciting a reply from him.

Lady Lowry was greatly impressed by all this. Her fears had considerably calmed down;—a result to which Percival's *nonchalant* method of treating the supernatural visitants, somewhat as if they were a troop of performing dogs, which had to be alternately coaxed and threatened,—contributed not a little. Besides, although our Sarah was subject to unreasoning tremors on certain occasions, she was not capable of much awe; and of imagination she had scarcely more than sufficed to secure her sanity. "I wonder if he would answer any questions," she said to



Dr. Flagge. That gifted being declared that he thought it highly probable, judging by certain ineffable sensations which had flooded his being during the spirit's presence, that Sir Rupert would be a constant visitant to my lady, and that he would doubtless respond to her demands with the greatest affability. "I *should* like to ask him something," returned my lady, thoughtfully.

After this a variety of spirits announced themselves one after the other. Several of them came for Mrs. Wigmore; and the name of an old schoolfellow of hers, who had been dead many years, was spelt out almost correctly, to her great marvelling and excitement. "I protest to you, I had almost forgotten poor Elizabeth's surname myself," said she to Major Maude, who had been sitting very silent since Sir Rupert Lowry's advent had been announced. "I had really! And no one here could *possibly* have known it, could they now?"

"They began wrong, though, you know," said Percival, not incredulously but reprov-ingly, with his air of keeping the performing dogs in due order. "Began to spell Harland with a B! Barland, you know, eh? And it wasn't until you made a long stop at H that they got it right."

Oddly enough, these flippant and sceptical utterances of Percival's did not appear either to ruffle Dr. Flagge, or to render "the conditions" unfavourable. And one might almost have been driven to conclude that the flippancy in some way atoned for the scepticism, and that so long as you were content to find the proceedings diverting, the spirits benevolently forgave a little disrespect.

At length the signal was given for the lights to be extinguished. By this time my lady was able to face the prospect of being in the dark for a minute or two with comparative heroism. Wigmore was directed to hold himself in readiness to light the candles on the table as soon as the signal should be given. And then the lamp on the chimney-piece was put out. After a second or two Mrs. Wigmore declared that something had fallen on her hands. And the candles being lighted, several bouquets of violets were found to be lying on the table. This phenomenon was greeted with rapture by the Wigmores and Lady Lowry. And then the spirits announced that the "conditions" did not permit them to remain any longer, and they took their leave with a polite "good night" to the company.

"Is that all?" asked my lady.

"The manifestations appear to have ceased for this evening, lady," said Dr. Flagge, leaning back in his chair with an appearance of great exhaustion.

"Oughtn't you to have a glass of wine at once, Dr. Flagge?" said Mrs. Wigmore, with much solicitude. "I know dear Lady Lowry will forgive me for suggesting it."

"Oh! well, but supper will be ready in a few minutes," said my lady. "However, if you will kindly ring the bell, Major Maude, I will tell my butler to bring a glass of wine."

This, however, Dr. Flagge declared not to be necessary. And, indeed, he did appear to recover himself with great rapidity.

"Well, now, *wasn't* it interesting?" asked Mrs. Wigmore.

"Oh yes," replied Sarah. "It was very queer. How those flowers came there I can't make out. But"—turning full upon Flagge with an unflinching stare of her bright blue eyes—"do you think it's really done by the spirits? Because,—how is one to know for certain that it's spirits?"

"Lady, communications are made which could not come from mortal sources. Facts of the most extraordinary kind are stated, utterly unknown to the persons present. For

example, the communication from your late father-in-law was quite a surprise to us all. I know not if any individual present was personally acquainted with the baronet?"

"Maude! You must have seen the old boy, eh?" said Percival. "Tough old file, wasn't he? I knew some people from his part of the world, and they used to tell no end of queer stories about Sir Rupert. Regular screw, you know, if Lady Lowry won't mind my saying so."

"Well, Major," said Dr. Flagge, "were you not taken aback by the communication?"

"I must own that I thought it a very strange communication for Sir Rupert Lowry to make," answered Major Maude, drily.

"The modifications undergone by spirits after removal from this earthly sphere are very curious," said Dr. Flagge. "Their utterances sometimes are quite different from what they would have been under the conditions of terrestrial existence."

"I wish," said Lady Lowry, "that I'd asked him for some sign or token to know him by."

"What sort of sign, lady?"

"Oh, I don't know,—anything about Lowry Place, the furniture, or the name of his old

dog, or something. Look here, Dr. Flagge, I think you'd better not mention anything to Miss Lowry about her father having said that, you know. She mightn't like it, you know."

"Lady, I do not feel like holding converse with Miss Lowry. There are magnetic currents of sympathy and antipathy, and I am not drawn towards her. Rather contrary."

"It seemed almost," proceeded my lady, whose mind was boring on at one thought, after its usual persistent manner; "it seemed as if Sir Rupert had something to say that he didn't want her to hear, didn't it?"

Mrs. Wigmore looked curiously at her friend. "What *could* that be, my dear?" she asked. "What an odd idea! But it did seem like it, to be sure! What put it into your head?"

"Oh, never mind!" returned my lady, nodding sagaciously and mysteriously. "Here's Lobley. Supper, Lobley? Very well. How shall we go—will you, Mrs. Wigmore——?" My lady hesitated, and looked to Mrs. Wigmore for assistance. That lady was equal to the occasion. "Now, I'm going to run off with Major Maude and show the way," she said, with charming playfulness. "And I

shall seize upon Dr. Flagge, also, for my left-hand cavalier. Dr. Flagge despises all such conventionalities, I know. Well, they *are* very stupid, but *que voulez-vous?* Percy, give Lady Lowry your arm." And she sailed away between Major Maude and the medium.

Lady Lowry reflected that it was very nice to know so well how to manage these little social matters. But she did not give an absolutely unconditional admiration to Mrs. Wigmore's method. It was a little too trivial, —too easy,—she thought: especially as regarded Flagge, who ought to have been made distinctly to feel the difference between his position and that of the rest of the party. Sarah had for some time past been coming to the opinion that, for the precepts of true gentility, Mrs. Wigmore could not be put into competition with the accomplished Mrs. Bolitho. Of course Mrs. Wigmore was familiar with the fashionable world. But Sarah became daily strengthened in the conviction, that on all abstract questions of propriety she herself knew quite as well as her mentor.

"I declare," said Mrs. Wigmore, unfolding her napkin and looking round on the company with raised eyebrows, "that I am positively hungry! Absolutely *hungry!*"

This surprising statement was accepted very much as a matter of course, by the others,—who, possibly, were hungry too :—but Dr. Flagge considerably offered a scientific explanation of the singular fact, in the following lucid terms: “There is, without doubt, an amount of nervous exhaustion consequent on the materialization required by the spirits to enable them to manifest themselves to our senses by means of raps, tips, cracks, scratchings, or other physical developments. The vital currents, specially in such delicate and sensitive organizations as the organization of our fair friend the Honourable Lady Wigmore, are apt to be disturbed by the psychological conditions being strained to their highest development. I have known a case among the Appanawchees, of a young boy of some fifteen years of age who was a trance medium, and was taken possession of for hours at a time by the spirit of one of their deceased chiefs,—a remarkably powerful man, of furious passions, and overflowing with the wild and pictorial eloquence of our Western prairies. This boy would keep right on talking in his trance condition under the influence of the chief for as long as three hours on end. He would then fall forward on his face exhausted,

and foaming slightly at the mouth ; and on recovering his consciousness would eat four or five pounds of fresh buffalo-meat without apparent injury."

"Jove! I'd rather keep that young shaver for a day than a week, eh? But it's astonishin' what a lot boys will eat. I remember when I was at home for the holidays once, I ate a whole apple-pie for breakfast;—good big pie, you know, not one of those tart things that they make at the pastry-cook's. But I never went on talkin' for three hours at a stretch. Never got the chance!" said Percival.

"Where is Miss Lowry?" asked my lady of the faithful Lobley, who was in attendance behind her chair.

"Miss Lowry sent her love to you, my lady, and begged you would excuse her. She did not feel inclined to come to supper. That was the message her maid brought, my lady."

"Oh, dear, what a pity!" said Mrs. Wigmore, not looking very much distressed, however. "But—do you know?—I fancy Miss Lowry did not wholly approve of our *séance*. It may be merely my idea."

"Some persons," said Dr. Flagge, who had attacked the supper with extraordinary



voracity, "are apt to take offence if the spirits exclude them. I have known instances in which such a circumstance has made people utter unbelievers in the phenomena. It is one of the singular developments of human nature'."

"It appeared to me," said Major Maude, in his gentlest tones, "that Miss Lowry was rather glad to get away than not. I should scarcely think that Miss Lowry would consider it worth while to be offended with the spirits."

The Major spoke gently, as I have said; very gently. Yet there was something in his voice and his face when he spoke of Miss Lowry which warned three of the persons present that they had better refrain from pursuing the subject. The fourth person was serenely unconscious of any reason for doing so. And, indeed, it has been already stated in these pages, that Lady Lowry apprehended only those shades of feeling which could be expressed to her either in plain words or plain actions.

"Oh, as to that," said her ladyship, "Mary can take offence sometimes fast enough. She is so high and distant sometimes in her manners, that, as I tell her, she'll never make

friends. She's not very young, you see ; and has lived moped up in the country, and got a lot of old-maidish notions. I try to rub a little of the rust off sometimes. As I say to her, all the world isn't Lowry Place, nor Lowry Place isn't all the world."

"Every one has not your *savoir vivre*, my dear," said Mrs. Wigmore, with an almost undisguised sneer, and looking at Maude for sympathy and approval. The Major, however, kept his eyes on his plate, and there was a chilly pause. However, the food and the wine soon raised Percival's spirits to a point at which no social awkwardness had any more power to quench them. And even Dr. Flagge, although he got rid of his food in a quick, sharp, unenjoying fashion, like a carnivorous animal that lives by its wits, seemed to become more cheerfully loquacious after it ; and related many surprising stories of his friends the Appanawchees for the entertainment of the company.

The supper was good, and the wine was good, and Dr. Flagge declared his conviction that Lady Lowry might, with a very little practice, become a medium herself, so favourable was her influence to the "power" and the "conditions" and the "developments,"

and all the other circumstances on which the visits of the spirits depended. All this was very satisfactory, and Lady Lowry professed herself on the whole much gratified with the *séance*. It was past midnight when the party broke up. Mrs. Wigmore offered to drive Dr. Flagge home, and Percival declared he would walk with Major Maude, and enjoy a cigar.

They walked and smoked in silence for some five minutes after leaving the house. Then Maude said, as if he were pursuing and uttering aloud a train of thought, "It's incredible how she can stand her!"

"Eh?" said Percy, luxuriously puffing at a fragrant cigar.

"That woman. I had no idea she was as bad as that, you know. I understood that she was a farmer's daughter, but a farmer's daughter might be a very good, amiable creature."

"Who?"

"Lady Lowry."

"Oh! Oh, I like Lady Lowry. She's an awfully pretty woman. And she really is very nice. I don't see but what her manners are as good as the rest, eh? After all,—manners, you know—well, what does it mean? Everybody has manners of their own! And she

does pretty much what the other women do : wears the same sort of gowns, and does her hair up with horse-hair stuffin', you know. Oh, I think she's an awfully nice little woman. Skin like a peach. No pearl-powder, eh ? ”

After that Major Maude said no more about Lady Lowry, but listened, or at least was silent, whilst Percival poured forth a stream of champagne-inspired talk until they parted.

## CHAPTER XIX.

SIR COSMO professed the most hardened disbelief on hearing the account of the *séance* from his wife. "Pooh! Stuff! Flowers? I've seen the conjurors do a great deal better than that, Sally. Did he bring out a bowl of gold fish swimming in water from his coat pocket? No; of course, he didn't! I've seen that done, though, in full gaslight; none of your dark sittings. As to his raps and taps, it's too silly to talk about. My father came to give you his blessing? H'm! Sir Rupert Lowry wasn't a beautiful character, but at least he didn't go about the world distributing cheap blessings, like an Irish beggar. Faugh!"

This was the kind of answer which Sir Cosmo made to Sarah's speeches about the medium, and the spirits, and the rest of it. But Sarah was not frightened away from the subject. "Well, Cosmo," she said, "it's all

very easy to talk, but just look here; the spirit of Sir Rupert said beforehand that Mary was of an incredulous turn of mind, and wouldn't believe in his presence as manifested by raps; those were the exact words. Well, and this morning I told Mary of the communication from her father (leaving out the unpleasant part), and—what do you think?—She *didn't* believe it; not a word of it!”

“And what the deuce do you imagine that proves?”

“It proves that the spirit was quite right so far, at all events, Cosmo. The spirit said she wouldn't believe, and she didn't believe. And what's more, she said she shouldn't have believed if she had been there!”

“H'm! Well, it seems you have faith enough for all the rest of the family. I'm surprised to find you so soft, Sally! I thought you only wanted to amuse yourself, and I never imagined you would let yourself be gulled into believing their humbug. Take care of your pockets, that's all!”

But the fact was, that Sarah's interest in spiritism had been suddenly and powerfully stimulated by the communication purporting to come from her deceased father-in-law. Nothing else could have so completely aroused

her attention, or come so near to convincing her of the reality of the alleged facts. She had not previously connected Dr. Flagge's mediumship with any chance of obtaining a clue to a discovery she had set her heart on making;—the discovery, namely, of Sir Rupert's real meaning and intention in writing that letter to Mr. Flint. She had not given up the thought of it for one instant. She kept the idea in her head of "finding out something"—what, she knew not—and she read the copy of Sir Rupert's letter over and over again, until she could have repeated it by heart.

And now a new incentive arose to spur her intent. Lady Lowry had hopes of presenting her husband with an heir. That the heir should be born at Lowry Place was her fixed intention. And that Lowry Place should be hers, her own rightful home, the undisputed property of her husband, and the heritage of her son, by the time her son should be born, was, perhaps, at this period the strongest desire she had in the world. To be sure her child might be a daughter! That possibility did cross her mind, but it did not by any means weaken her desire that the child should see the light in the ancestral home of all the

Lowrys. Time did not reconcile her to the fact of Mary's being the mistress and owner of the old place. Nay, as the months passed by, the fact appeared to grow harder to bear. It was too bad that a single woman should rule in Lowry Place, filling a position which was rightfully hers as Lady Lowry. And then, as Sarah began to learn a little what was the scale of expenses in their London establishment, the twelve thousand pounds bequeathed to Mary became an object of constant covetousness to her.

The income which Cosmo had roughly calculated they would have to spend had at first seemed to her inexperience to represent boundless wealth. But a short time sufficed to convince her that she was not so rich a woman as she had thought herself. Although there was "nobody in town," yet she saw enough to convince her that she need not hope to cut a distinguished figure in London society by means of her wealth. The great fortunes which she heard commonly mentioned took her breath away at first. She had had no conception of the enormous riches of London. She began to think herself positively poor by comparison, and, moreover, she found herself almost insignificant. Let us not do



her the injustice to insinuate that she underrated her own intrinsic merits, or the grandeur of her husband's family. But she began to perceive that the "claims of long descent" were apt to be obliterated in London by the effulgence of a hundred thousand pounds per annum. It was becoming clear to her that the proper sphere for the social greatness of an ancient family to have full play in was the neighbourhood of the ancient family's ancestral home. The Lowrys of Lowry were big people down at Clevelen, and would continue to be big people there on their own ground, let come what millionaires there might to compete with them. Sarah figured to herself the joys of rolling into Elcaster in her own carriage, the obsequious civility of the shopkeepers, the eager politeness with which her distant and patronizing bow—she always pictured herself as being very distant and patronizing to her provincial acquaintance—would be returned by the wives and daughters of the doctors, lawyers, or clergymen, with whom she might condescend to be on visiting terms. She had seen something of the sort at Lambrook when the ladies of the county families rumbled into the town in their old-fashioned coaches, and were the cynosure of

all eyes as they alighted at the mercer's in the High Street. She would have a handsomer carriage, newer liveries, and more fashionable clothes than those Lambrook magnates. All sorts of little economies could be practised in the country which were impossible in town, and the money thus saved could be expended in dazzling Clevenal and Elcaster with the latest French bonnets and other marvels of millinery. But for the realization of these visions it was necessary to live at Lowry Place, and that Lowry Place should be her own.

Two days after the famous *séance* Enone Balasso arrived at Sir Cosmo's house to pay her promised visit to Rosamond. Lady Lowry made no opposition to her coming. When Mary began to speak to her about it, in fulfilment of her promise to Rosamond, my lady interrupted her, saying, "I have considered the question already, and I see no objection to the young person coming. No doubt she is of low origin, but then she is a foreigner, and that makes such a difference! And I understand she has been educated at a very genteel academy for young ladies, and she plays the piano well, so I can make her hear Rosamond practise for an hour every

morning. I suppose she must dine at the table with us? To be sure, we shan't have company."

Sir Cosmo was not consulted on the subject, but when the visit was announced to him as being settled, he shrugged his shoulders, and merely said that he hoped Rosy would keep her friend in the background, and not let her be a nuisance.

A quieter or less intrusive guest than CEnone could not have been found. She made a favourable impression on my lady, with whom her silent reserve passed for the humility becoming her position. She sat at dinner on the first evening after her arrival, watching them with her wonderful dark eyes, quite unembarrassed, but also perfectly unobtrusive. Sir Cosmo said afterwards to his daughter, with that peculiarly genial veil of pleasantry which he affected, "Well, I can't compliment you on your friend's beauty. She's a sort of death's head, with the eyes left in it." But my lady was very condescending and good-natured, and said, "Oh, Cosmo, I don't think she's so bad-looking for a foreigner. They never have good complexions. And she seems to know her place. She is skinny, though!" added my lady, with

a fine sense of justice as she contemplated her own plump white arm.

The hours between the end of dinner and bed time were apt to hang rather heavily on hand in Sir Cosmo Lowry's dwelling. The master of the house retired to the library immediately after dinner to smoke, and seldom joined the ladies again. He would, however, occasionally make a brief appearance in the drawing-room, and drink a cup of coffee, standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire. But these visits were not particularly coveted by any of the feminine party, seeing that Sir Cosmo made a point of emitting, on these occasions, any venom which might have accumulated at the tip of his tongue during the day, and which had been suppressed at the club, owing to the impossibility of uttering it without danger of finding his words seriously resented, and getting into troubled waters. In his own drawing-room, and in the company of his wife, his daughter, and his sister, such dangers did not exist; and Sir Cosmo sometimes did feel that there was much comfort in the security of one's own fireside. It was one of his dearest domestic privileges to be disagreeable with impunity.

On the evening of Ænone's arrival, Sir Cosmo came into the drawing-room for his coffee. Mary had taken a book, and the two girls had settled themselves cosily on a low couch opposite to my lady's easy chair. Ænone was enjoying the warm temperature of the drawing-room, luxuriating in it like some tropical plant, and was listening, or seeming to listen, attentively to Sarah, who had just begun to talk about the *séance*, when her husband lounged into the room. She was never tired of talking about it. Sir Cosmo took his place on the hearth, and contemplated the group. Prettier female faces than three of those he looked at, it would have been difficult to find. The fourth—poor Ænone's—was a blot on the picture in Sir Cosmo's eyes. What beauty there might be in her singular face was not there for him.

“So the medium was really held all the time, you know, and of course——”

“Good gracious, ain't you tired of the medium yet, Sarah?” interrupted Sir Cosmo, with his sneering smile. “Why, this toy has lasted three whole days. Incredible instance of female constancy!”

Now, Sarah was by no means volatile or inconstant in her likings and dislikings, as

Sir Cosmo very well knew. But his remark had a good, sharp, stinging sound, and that its sense was false did not matter. For if you use your words, not as tools, but as weapons, it suffices that they prick.

"No, Cosmo," returned my lady, "I am not tired of the medium, and I don't think spiritualism is a toy at all. Have you ever seen anything of it, Miss Balasso?"

"Yes."

"*Have* you? Dear me!"

"Oh, bless you, everybody has, nowadays!" said Sir Cosmo. "Don't flatter yourself that you've got hold of anything new."

"If this thing be true, it cannot be new," said Enone, sententiously.

Sir Cosmo gave a prolonged sniff, and glanced satirically at Enone. But meeting her grave, unflinching eyes, he looked away again. He was beginning to dislike Miss Balasso.

"It is most interesting," said my lady, emphatically. "And Dr. Flagge says——"

"Dr. Flagge! Is that the man's name? Tell me!" cried Enone, abruptly raising herself from her lounging posture against the cushions.

My lady paused. She did not approve of

this cavalier manner of putting a question on the part of the "young person." But before she could marshal her forces to reply with majesty, Rosamond had said, "Yes; that's his name. Dr. Flagge, the celebrated medium. And they wouldn't let me see it. Wasn't it a shame, Nona? But Lady Lowry says I may another time, didn't you?"

Lady Lowry was still striving to express that she did not intend to be catechized by "young persons." But her dignity was a kind of heavy artillery, and very often, by the time she had got it well into position, the enemy was off and away.

"I know Dr. Flagge," said Enone, and then my lady postponed the assertion of her dignity, to the gratification of her curiosity. Where had Miss Balasso known Dr. Flagge? How? When? She was profuse in questions.

Enone had, it appeared, been present at several *séances* in the house of a lady to whose daughters she gave music lessons. Dr. Flagge had declared that she (Enone) had "strong mediumistic powers," and had even mesmerized her very successfully.

"You a medium!" cried my lady. "Only think of your being a medium! But are you?—are you really?"

"I don't know," answered Enone. "I know I went into a queer kind of sleep when he mesmerized me."

Mary had put aside her book, and now drew near to the group by the fire. "Do you not think that kind of nervous excitement may be bad for your health?" she said to Enone, gently. "You do not look very strong."

Enone shrugged her shoulders slightly. "I don't know," she replied. And her tone and gesture seemed to add, "I don't care."

"Oh, that sort of medium business is healthy enough," said Sir Cosmo. "Light work, good pay, and lashings of eating and drinking at other people's expense. I should advise Miss Balasso to stick to it."

To say the truth, Cosmo in making this speech had not had a set purpose to say anything offensive to the friendless girl beneath his roof. But to his dismay she turned round, and faced him, looking like a youthful Melpomene.

"I am not a medium," she said, "and if I were, I should not do those things for money. I am an artist. It's no shame for a Greek to earn his bread by art. The arts are my compatriots. They were born in my country, and had joined with nature to make it beautiful



when this island of yours was a barbarous wilderness."

"Wheugh!" whistled Sir Cosmo. And then he laughed a little uneasy laugh. It really was too bad that he could not be permitted to scatter bitter and ill-natured words right and left in his own house without being called to account for them. It was a cruel invasion of the sanctity of his domestic hearth.

"My dear girl," said Mary, taking her hand, "you cannot suspect Sir Cosmo of having wished to wound you by a word spoken in jest."

Rosamond's cheeks were crimson, and the tears stood in her eyes. "I am sure papa wouldn't!" she said hotly. My lady could not follow these rapid changes of tone. "What *is* it?" she said, staring from one to the other.

"Wound her? Of course not!" cried Sir Cosmo, snapping at his sister. "It's absurd. You won't make your way in the world, young lady, if you are always on the look-out to take offence. We English people hate high-flown talk. To us it sounds like humbug. As a matter of business I should advise you to drop it." And with that Sir Cosmo walked out of

the room, feeling a certain misgiving that if he gave the foreign girl a chance of replying the foreign girl might get the best of it.

But Enone made no retort on his last words, nor did she even turn her eyes to look at him as he went away. She would speak to him, but not at him, nor of him. It was curious to see the superb disdain with which she seemed to dismiss the whole incident from her mind, and resumed her description of how the medium had mesmerized her with perfect self-possession. Rosamond was greatly more ruffled, and Mary's face wore a troubled look for some time; but my lady, whose vigorous intellect concentrated itself wholly on one thing at a time, and whose mind was now occupied with the idea of having discovered a new medium, addressed herself to the cross-examination of Enone without wasting her words or thoughts on any other matter.

Miss Lowry resumed her book. Rosamond, growing gradually interested in Enone's recital, listened with eager attention. The room was very still, and the sound of the Greek girl's voice seemed to flow through the silence like the soft vibrations of a distant bell, sweet and strangely sad—when suddenly she stopped, and looked round uneasily.

"Go on. Why do you stop?" asked my lady.

CEnone did not answer the question, but resumed her narration. After a few seconds she stopped again, and put her hand to her forehead.

"What *is* the matter?" demanded my lady, imperiously. "Young persons" were not to interrupt the saying of that which she wished to hear at their own caprice.

"Does your head ache, CEnone?" asked Rosamond.

"No, it does not ache; but I have an odd sensation, almost as if——"

"Dr. Flagge, my lady," announced the servant, opening the door.

And Dr. Flagge walked forward into the midst of the group.

END OF VOL. I.

# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

BY

FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "A CHARMING FELLOW,"

ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

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## CHAPTER I.

"GOODNESS! How very strange that we should just have been talking of you, Dr. Flagge!" said my lady.

"I knew he was coming," murmured Ænone; "I felt it in the air."

Dr. Flagge looked leisurely at each member of the circle before he spoke. Then he said, "Lady, I was drawn to you to-night. This is not an hour when the giddy world of fashion pays its accustomed visits. But I am a son of the wilderness. I cannot be trammelled by the hollow forms of ceremony. Such as I am, if you receive me,—good! If not, I must be exiled, lady, that's a fact."

"Oh, besides, you know, I told you I was generally at home of an evening about this hour," replied matter-of-fact Sarah.

Dr. Flagge took no notice of this reminder, but resumed: "Yes; I was drawn towards you. I was attracted to this house. I felt the influence a-drawing of me, and I came. I am not accustomed to the courtly etiquette which surrounds the fair daughters of a European aristocracy like yourself. Your mansions, your manners, your feudal ceremonies and traditions, are not for me. I have snuffed the air upon our boundless Western plains, ma'am, along with Appanawchees and the tameless bison."

"La!" said Sarah. "Won't you sit down? And hadn't you better take that thing off? This room's so warm."

"That thing" was a large and picturesque mantle which Dr. Flagge had wrapped around him with much careful disposition of its folds. Beneath it he wore a loose jacket studded with silver buttons, and left open at the breast so as to display a scarlet shirt. He complied with my lady's recommendation to take off the mantle, and laid it on a chair in a distant part of the room. Sarah's objection to so unconventional a proceeding as paying an evening visit in such a costume as Dr. Flagge now wore, and even her anxiety as to what Lobley would think of it, were obliterated by

the enumeration of herself among the fair daughters of a European aristocracy. This American might not be precisely genteel according to the Bolithian pattern, but at least he had an exquisite sense of what was genteel in other people! And then his language, Sarah declared to herself, was most beautiful!


Dr. Flagge had saluted Miss Lowry with a half sullen, half obsequious bow; and had claimed acquaintance with Enone somewhat more familiarly. "I knew I should find you here," he said. But he said it in so low a tone as to escape Lady Lowry's ear.

"Didn't you mesmerize Miss Balasso?" asked Rosamond, with her frank eyes fixed wondering on his face.

"Yes; Miss Balasso is a trance medium of very remarkable powers, which only need developing to become phenomenal."

"What is a trance medium?" inquired Rosamond with grave interest.

"A trance medium is,—a medium whose receptivity to spirit influences is greatest during the magnetic slumber: a medium whose organism lends itself to the transcendental utterances of superior souls, and is psychologically sensitive to the impressions of a higher sphere. That's a trance medium!"





"I don't understand it," whispered Rosamond to her aunt. "What do you think it is, Aunt Mary?"

"I think, dear, that it is nonsense," replied Mary very quietly.

Meanwhile Flagge had established himself picturesquely on the couch near to my lady, and opposite to Enone, who had seated herself at a little table, on which she leaned her elbow and remained gazing at the medium with dilated eyes.

"You have here to-night, lady, a very rare and precious organization," said Flagge, addressing himself to Lady Lowry. "This young native of the classic soil of Greece is endowed with a very wonderful degree of sensitiveness."

Sarah stared a little glumly. "Rare" and "precious" and "sensitive" were epithets to be applied with some discrimination, to persons of condition,—herself, for example!

"Miss Balasso is staying here with my step-daughter. We wished to allow Miss Rosamond Lowry the pleasure of having a young—a—a—companion, and at the same time to improve her music by getting a professional person who would look after her practising," returned Sarah, with as much grandeur of

manner as she could assume. But Flagge would not allow himself to be too much awed by my lady. If she knew her advantages, he knew his.

"Miss Nony is a fine musician, I understand," said he. "But she is more than that. She has the capacity to become one of the most remarkable clairvoyants I ever met with. You are fortunate, lovely lady, in possessing her acquaintance. I tell you that there are many persons of exalted position and aristocratic fashion in this metropolis, who would give their ears to get hold of her."

"But I am not to be 'got hold of,'" said Ænone, haughtily.

"Not by the hollow world," interposed Dr. Flagge, "but to the claim of friendship you are responsive. The antique spirit of the godlike Grecians lives again in you. It lives again also in a product of our Western continent. Did you ever read the works of our admired poet Walt Whitman?"

"No."

"Didn't you? Well, I've been told by classical professors that his style is very like Pindar's. I believe Pindar was a prominent literary character among the Greeks at some date B.C. I don't pretend to classical learning

myself. The philosophy of natur' has chiefly occupied my attention ;—that, and the phenomena of spiritism, and a few commercial experiments in a dry goods store out in Tennessee. But trade is too limited and trammelling in its conditions to suit a temperament like mine, which requires the boundless freedom of the open firmament, and the simplicity of the primæval savage, to develop all it ought to."

Lady Lowry thought this sounded uncommonly fine. But it did not distract her attention from the point she had fixed her mind on. "I *should* like to see you mesmerize Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge," she said.

"We should have to ask leave," answered Flagge, glancing round in a quick, cunning way, and tossing the long, scanty locks off his forehead with his hand.

"Ask leave! Whose leave, pray?" demanded my lady, majestically.

"The spirits' leave. They are greatly interested in Miss Nony. There is a Grecian spirit that's partic'larly attached to her. Probably a remote ancestor. They do hover around their descendants sometimes. I've known several cases."

"Will you allow me to ask, Dr. Flagge, if

this spirit converses with you in Greek?" said Mary Lowry.

"No, madam; *being* a spirit, he is aware that I don't understand that language. He communicates through the medium of the English tongue."

"Why, of course, Mary," said my lady. "It would be very stupid to talk Greek to a person who doesn't understand it!"

"Yes; that would be very stupid,—if the object of talking were always to be understood. But spirits (at least, when enclosed in mortal bodies) sometimes talk for the purpose of not being understood."

Rosamond, who had a great deal of the *enfant terrible* about her, asked aloud, "But if he is an ancient Greek spirit, how did he learn English? English wasn't invented when he died."

"Rosamond!" cried my lady, severely, "you ought not to talk in that way! It's wicked, although you may not mean it.—Would you mind asking the Greek gentleman, Dr. Flagge, if he has any objection to your mesmerizing Miss Balasso for me? Here is a little table,—if you wouldn't mind? Perhaps you would like some refreshment first, though! I suppose you wouldn't care for coffee?"

Dr. Flagge evidently did not care for coffee. It was, he said, too exciting to his nervous system. But, as he had dined early, some hot brandy and water, and a sandwich, would probably facilitate the "manifestations." "*I have found bottled stout and oysters give considerable of a support,*" said Dr. Flagge, pensively.

Rosamond was desired to ring the bell, and the servant who responded to the summons was told to send Lobley to speak with my lady. Mary was amazed at her sister-in-law's boldness in suggesting to Lobley the preparation of food and drink at that abnormal hour. But even Lobley's elaborate look of stupefaction on receipt of the order did not awe my lady from her purpose. She conveyed some insinuation of an apology to the ducal one. She was at some pains to explain to him that Dr. Flagge's delicacy of constitution caused him to require sustenance rather frequently. And she skilfully threw out a hint that she was aware how considerately Her Grace of Belturbet had been wont to treat mediums. But, having made these concessions to Lobley's feelings, she completed her order about the refreshment.

"Is the tray to be brought up yere, my

lady?" asked Lobley, conveying with admirable dramatic effect that he really was at a loss to conceive what would happen next, but that he, for his part, would not be held responsible.

"Well, I don't know, Lobley. I think—perhaps——"

"Oh yes; bring it right here into this parlour," said Dr. Flagge, affably. And he added, turning to his hostess, "The atmosphere here is favourable and agreeable. There's no good in toting things round from one corner to another. Indeed, it frequently weakens the power. Just go ahead, young man, and bring the refreshment here, right away."

The expression of Lobley's countenance on being thus addressed was one of such overwhelming dignity and disgust as even a town-bred butler has seldom been known to wear. Without casting a glance in the direction of the offending Flagge, he stood for one instant dumb and motionless. Then, bending with a kind of condescending deference towards his mistress, he said slowly, "I believe I have understood your ladyship's directions. The tray *is* to be brought up yere!" And retreated in good order.

"I can't promise, you know," said Flagge, "that any manifestations will happen. They may, or they may not. That is one of the tests of their reality. If it was imposture—as some of the unbelievers claim—they'd always happen, you know."

This was said so obviously at Mary Lowry, that she replied at once, as if she had been addressed by name, "Does it not strike you as singular that these sounds and movements do not happen except when you expect them?"

"You never were more mistaken in your life, lady," returned Flagge. "They do happen. They are happening all the time."

"Not at this moment, for example?"

"Well, there are adverse influences to be taken into account, I reckon. You can't expect the spirits to like to manifest themselves when the conditions are not favourable. But as to not happening except when they're looked for—— Why, do you know, madam" (turning to Lady Lowry), "that I have been lifted right out of my hammock aboard a ship in the Pacific Ocean, and transported up on deck, by the spirits? I have been floated around the lofty summit of a gum-tree in the primæval forest during a dark and moonless night, and let down again into the wigwam

where a Red Indian was asleep without awakening of him! I have had quite a number of tropical leaves descend upon me through the air as I lay in bed in a hotel at Liverpool! But I don't feel like talking about these circumstances in general society, because I *have* met with persons who don't believe 'em!"

Any discussion as to the state of mind of those singular persons who did not believe Dr. Flagge's assertions was prevented by the arrival of the refreshments. And Dr. Flagge set himself to eat and drink in a rapid and ravenous manner, acquired possibly amongst his interesting friends the Appanawchees. The tray contained cold chicken, sandwiches, some confectionery, a small decanter of cognac, hot water, and sugar. Flagge expressed his approbation of Lobley's purveying. "That waiter of yours, madam," said he, "has considerable of a notion of providing a slight repast on short notice. He might be a little smarter, and a little sprightlier, but he is not without gumption, lady, I tell you."

"Waiter!" exclaimed my lady, to whom the word suggested a puffy-faced man in shabby black at the Blue Boar in Lambrook. "He's not a waiter at all! He's my butler, and a



most superior servant. He has lived with the Duke of Belturbet!" Then, seeing that the eating and drinking had come to an end, Sarah, with her own hand, pushed the little round table close to Flagge and said, "*Would* you mind asking him now? The Greek gentleman, I mean."

Dr. Flagge consented to make the experiment, and the bell was rung for the tray to be removed. Flagge, however, retained a tumbler full of hot brandy and water, which he placed on a marble console within reach of his hand; and then he declared himself ready to begin.

He decided that the sitters at the table should be only three: Lady Lowry, Enone, and himself. Rosamond was anxious to place her hands on the table also; but this was forbidden, as Dr. Flagge felt, he said, that her "magnetic conditions" were not favourable. So Rosamond perched herself on the arm of the chair in which Mary was seated, and watched the proceedings of the medium with childlike eagerness and curiosity.

Dr. Flagge, his hostess, and Enone then placed their hands on the table; and after a very short time—some three or four minutes at most—taps and cracks were heard, and the

table dipped down once or twice in the direction of Ænone, and away from the medium, who was seated opposite to her.

"It will probably communicate by tippings this evening," said Dr. Flagge.

"Do ask it something!" said my lady.

Upon this, Flagge glanced round a little uneasily at Mary, and said, after an instant's pause, "Let Nony put the questions herself. Ask if there's any one here for you, won't you?"

There was a brief pause. Then Ænone said in low, distinct tones, "Is there any spirit present?"

Immediately were heard three faint taps, and the table bowed itself towards her. "There!" cried my lady. "Did you ever? *Isn't* it wonderful?"

"Does the spirit wish to communicate with me?" resumed Ænone.

"Yes."

"Is it a spirit I have known in life?"

"No."

"Who is it?"

No answer.

"We'd better call the alphabet," said Dr. Flagge, in a business-like way.

This being done, it resulted that the spirit

was the spirit of a Greek deceased "about a thousand years ago." He declined to give a more precise date. He also declined to give his name. He stated that he had lived in Athens, but, beyond a boggling attempt to spell out "Parthenon," was unable to say anything about the city as it had existed in his lifetime. He had been a very distinguished person, however; and was an ancestor of Spiridion Balassopoulo, in whom, and in whose daughter, he continued to take an affectionate interest.

"Can you tell me where my father is now?" asked CEnone, earnestly.

Some bendings and bowings of the table followed, which Dr. Flagge interpreted to mean Asia Minor. But Sarah, not feeling the smallest interest in the whereabouts of Signor Spiridion Balassopoulo, impatiently interposed, and urged the medium to get leave to mesmerize Miss Balasso. This the spirit at once accorded. And after announcing that he loved Lady Lowry with a pure affection, and that her head was surrounded by a halo visible to spirit eyes, he said "good night;" and the table at once resumed its equilibrium, and kept it.

"Now, Miss Nony," said Flagge, "just you

set yourself right there, in that easy chair opposite. Come, and I'll make a few passes."

Mary Lowry rose, and drew her sister-in-law on one side. "Sarah," she said, "do you think it right to suffer this to go on? The girl is here under your protection, remember."

"Right to suffer it? Goodness, why not? How queer you are, Mary! What harm can it do her?"

"I do not know. I cannot tell. But I feel uneasy about it. I wish you would not allow it."

Dr. Flagge now paused in making the passes, and, casting a very malignant glance towards Mary, he said, "I am conscious of a counter influence at work here. There's something disturbing of the magnetic current, and distracting Miss Nony's attention."

"There, Mary, you see!" said my lady, impatiently. "You'll spoil it all. I do wish you'd be quiet."

Mary had no choice but to resign herself to be silent. At one time the thought crossed her mind that she might go and appeal to her brother. But a moment's reflection convinced her that such an appeal would in all probability be made in vain; and that if made in vain it would do rather harm than good.

Presently CEnone, whose eyes had been fixed on the medium, sank backward in her chair, with closed eyelids, and in another minute Flagge declared her to be completely asleep. The aspect of the girl's wan face was pathetic in its helpless quietude. She lay with her head leaning against a crimson velvet cushion. Her black hair surrounded her thin white face like a cloud, and her eyelids drooped heavily.

"Are you asleep, dear?" asked Mary, speaking very gently.

There was no response.

Rosamond pressed her aunt's hand nervously, and drew near to CEnone; but the medium motioned her back. "You must not touch her!" he said, hastily.

"You speak to her, Dr. Flagge," said Lady Lowry, who began to feel a little trepidation at the absolute marble immobility of the girl's face. Then Flagge said slowly, "CEnone Balassopoulo, do you hear me?"

A sort of ripple ran over her face, and a faint movement of the lips followed; but no sound.

"You hear me, and you can answer me. Do so."

She made a visible effort to speak, but again without result.

"Speak, I say! You can speak. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," was breathed forth in a low, hissing whisper.

There was an instant's awe-stricken silence.

"Is she really asleep?" asked Rosamond, rather tremulously.

"You may speak to her yourself, and try," said Flagge.

Rosamond did so; but Ænone's face remained as still as that of a statue.

"Put your hand on mine and then speak to her."

Rosamond obeyed, and asked, "Do you know me, Nona?"

Immediately a slight smile played on Ænone's lips, and she answered, "Yes;" in the same faint whispering tone as before.

"Are you convinced now that she is in a magnetic sleep?" said Dr. Flagge. And he glanced with a kind of suppressed triumph at Mary as he spoke.

"Convinced? Of course!" interposed my lady. "It's wonderful. Quite awful to see how dead-like she looks. But now, Dr. Flagge, do let me ask her a question or two, will you?"

Flagge took my lady's hand, and she began:

“Miss Balasso, I should be much obliged to you if you would ask some of the spirits whether I shall have any more visits from that spirit who came for me the other evening, and who I most particularly want to speak with.”

Ænone’s brow contracted itself uneasily, but she did not speak.

“We’d better not fatigue her too much now,” said Flagge. “She’ll be quite clairvoyant after I’ve mesmerized her a time or two more.”

“Oh, but I particularly wish an answer to this question now,” returned Sarah, obstinately, and with an air expressive of a firm refusal to be cheated. “I only allow you to put her to sleep here, in order that I might get an answer.”

“But, Sarah! If it is likely to do the girl harm——!” exclaimed Mary, earnestly.

“Nonsense about doing her harm! The spirit of the Greek gentleman said she might be mesmerized, and I suppose *he* knew whether it would hurt her or not!”

“Allow me to put a few questions for you,” said Dr. Flagge, relinquishing her ladyship’s hand, and making a few more passes with his own above Ænone’s head. “You see, you have a great amount of mediumistic power

yourself, lady ; and that is why your contact is distressing to her, and disturbs the magnetic currents. With Miss Rosamond here, it's just like touching a vegetable to take hold of her hand. There's no sympathy or antipathy of the vital fluids, you understand."

Sarah did not at all understand, but she was mollified by being told that she had some power which Rosamond was devoid of.

"Can you see?" continued Flagge, addressing himself to Enone.

"Yes."

"Then speak. Tell me what you see."

"Trees, a house—but it is dim. Many trees."

"Look again."

Her mouth dropped wearily, and her breast heaved as if with a sigh, but no sigh was heard.

"What do you see near the house?"

"A dog."

Lady Lowry clasped her hands together, and turned pale. "It's old Connaught!" she whispered breathlessly. "I thought directly she said 'many trees' that it must be Lowry Place, and the dog confirms it. Oh, do make her go on."

But at this point Dr. Flagge positively



declared that he was afraid to keep CEnone any longer in the mesmeric sleep. He would mesmerize her again some other time for Lady Lowry, but now she must absolutely be awakened. He proceeded to wave his hands about in front of the sleeping girl, and to fan her with a silk handkerchief until she began to recover consciousness. The moment she did so, and whilst Mary and Rosamond were busied about her, fanning her, and sprinkling eau de Cologne on her forehead, he whispered quickly to Lady Lowry, "Don't have those two next time; you'll get very different results without them. I don't know why, of course, but it seems that Miss Lowry is partic'larly objectionable to the spirits. It's my notion they've something to say as they don't want her to hear," he added, with a cunning, searching look at my lady.

Meanwhile CEnone was completely awakened, but she seemed languid and confused. She remembered nothing, she said, of what had passed during her sleep. At Mary's urgent recommendation she withdrew at once to bed, and as she went away with Rosamond her great dark eyes rested on the medium almost to the last with a singular look—almost of dread—which made a painful impression on Mary Lowry.

"I do trust that this may not be injurious to CEnone's health," said Mary, when the two girls had left the room. "For my part, I should be inclined to ask the opinion of a competent physician."

"Some competent physicians don't believe in mesmerism, I'm told," observed Flagge, with a scarcely disguised sneer. "They might say it was all humbug, you know ; and humbug don't hurt anybody's health, as I know of."

Then he took his leave of Lady Lowry in a manner ingeniously compounded of flattery, obsequiousness, and familiarity. To Mary he vouchsafed only a very cool, and not specially respectful, bow.

He had considerably extended his knowledge of various circumstances concerning the Lowry family since his first visit to Sir Cosmo's house ; and he thought himself quite secure enough in its mistress's good graces to afford to wage war—secret if it might be, open if it must be—with Miss Lowry of Lowry.

## CHAPTER II.

THE concerts of the Czernovic family pleased that portion of the London public which was not too fine to show itself at a place of entertainment in October. The room in which they performed was well filled every evening; and they became so prosperous that Mrs. Peppiat felt no scruples in getting rid of them. They could pay their way, and needed no forbearance in the matter of their weekly rent. So Mrs. Peppiat gave them notice to leave her rooms, and explained to Major Maude, that though the Czernovics were good quiet people enough, yet they had certain prejudices against brooms, dusters, soap, and water, which rendered them not altogether desirable inmates.

The family took their dismissal with perfect good humour, and removed themselves to another lodging near the Strand, recommended to them by Bob Doery, who had a room in the

same house. The landlord of this house called himself accountant and secretary to the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. He lived in a little grimy parlour on the ground floor, where he received numerous visits once a week from shabby persons, male and female, carrying little yellow account-books adorned outside with a wood-cut representing a pair of clasped hands. These little yellow account-books held the records of the bearer's transactions with the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. They contained the materials for many a piteous story of poverty, and struggle, and hope deferred, and slow, dreadful sinking into the depths which underlie the thin crust of shabby gentility.

Mr. Quickit (that was the landlord's name) had his drawing-rooms unlet at present. The Czernovic family occupied the whole of the second floor, and Mr. Robert Doery's modest apartment was on the third floor. Mr. Quickit was a dirty, civil man, with a trick of laughing and rubbing his hands while he talked, and a habit of contradicting most assertions made to him, with a most smiling submissive-ness of demeanour. He complained sadly of the emptiness of his first floor. Such splendid drawing-rooms they were! In so marvel-

lously central a situation ! And at such a ridiculously moderate rate ! And yet they were empty, and had been empty for four months.

The Czernovics paid well for their rooms on the second floor, and were peculiarly popular lodgers with the maid of all work, inasmuch as they never rang the bell, and never wanted their rooms swept. Major Maude—to whom they had recourse in all emergencies—had guaranteed their ability to pay the rent, and with Major Maude's word Mr. Quickit professed himself abundantly satisfied. He observed pleasantly that he liked professionals for his part, entertained no prejudice against them, and had various dealings with them ;—as indeed he had, and of a very profitable nature for the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. "But," said he, "I wish, Major Maude, that you could find a tenant for my drawing-rooms. Such drawing-rooms ! I have had a baronet in those rooms, sir ; a baronet of ancient family. He used to come up from the country twice or thrice in the year, and always occupied my drawing-rooms. He delighted in them ! "

"I suppose he paid you highly, Mr. Quickit ? "

"No, sir; he did not pay me highly. No, Major Maude, ha, ha, ha! Far from it."

"Then it was scarcely worth your while to keep the rooms for him."

"Pardon me, it was quite worth my while. Amply worth my while. I should not have done it otherwise. I can't afford to be sentimental, Major Maude, ha, ha!"

"Oh! well, you must hope the baronet will turn up again."

"Not at all, sir. Not at all. He can never turn up again—in any remunerative form—because he's dead, Major Maude! Ha, ha, ha, ha! I read it in the papers."

Major Maude did not feel himself called upon to seek for any one, baronet or otherwise, to replace Mr. Quickit's lost tenant. But Papa Czernovic announced to his landlord one day that he thought he had found a lodger for him. The person in question was Dr. Flagge, who had made acquaintance with the Czernovic family by means of CEnone. Dr. Flagge was always willing and anxious to extend his acquaintance in all directions. He had found it very useful, in the course of his career, to know people of all sorts and conditions. His fine patrons had as little notion of his life when he was not evoking spirits in

their drawing-rooms, as the spectators in a theatre have of the busy world behind the scenes. A great part of Dr. Flagge's existence was passed in a sort of social behind-the-scenes. He was supposed by the Honourable Mrs. Wigmores of the world to live a kind of recluse and savage existence in the heart of London : and to be an impracticable, strange sort of being, whom the ordinary pursuits and amusements of civilization delighted not. The Honourable Mr. Wigmores knew better—or some of them did. But as the more numerous, and incomparably the more powerful, of Dr. Flagge's clients were women, that did not much matter to him. The odds and ends of information picked up by Dr. Flagge in his behind-the-scenes existence were frequently found by a singular coincidence to be reproduced by the spirits at his next *séance*. And the astonishing utterances of Dr. Flagge's spirits about things "which he couldn't *possibly* have known, you know!" might have appeared less astonishing to the medium's fashionable patrons and patronesses, had they been sufficiently mindful of that general tendency which they shared with the unfashionable classes ;—the tendency, namely, of most human beings to talk about other people's affairs.

From the first moment when old Czernovic spoke to him about the vacant drawing-rooms which had been tenanted by a noble Englishman named Sir Rupert Lowry, Flagge showed a decided inclination to take the rooms. And Papa Czernovic returned to announce to his landlord that he believed he had got him a lodger. "A vonderful Mensch, Mr. Queek! Vonderfool!" said Papa Czernovic. "He is a medium. Makes come the spirits."

"Ha, ha! Very good, Mr. Churnywig, ve—ry good! But does he make come the cash, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

On this point Mr. Quickit was soon satisfied. Dr. Flagge came to look at the drawing-rooms, expressed his approbation of them, and agreed to the price asked for them, and paid down a month's rent in advance. He proved to be a quiet lodger, who gave little trouble; and, in short, Mr. Quickit had no fault to find with him, except that he incensed the curtains of the drawing-room with tobacco-smoke during the whole of the time which he passed in that apartment. But the hours he spent there were not very many. He soon struck up a kind of intimacy with his landlord; and would frequently spend the evening, or great part of the evening, in the little grimy parlour



surrounded by volumes and papers containing the archives of the Loan Society presided over by those steely and implacable patron saints, Castor and Pollux.

Dr. Flagge was liberal and convivial on these occasions. He treated Mr. Quickit to grog and cigars, and would listen by the hour to that gentleman's anecdotes of the odd experiences he had had in the course of his connection with the Loan Society. But what particularly interested Dr. Flagge were Mr. Quickit's reminiscences of his lodger the baronet. Mr. Quickit was a talkative man—extremely talkative. But he had an amount of caution which, perhaps, is more often found in company with loquacity than is generally supposed. Moreover, Mr. Quickit's experience during the many years which he had passed, chiefly in the grimy parlour, had made him a pretty good judge of character; at all events, of certain sorts of character, and Mr. Quickit mistrusted Dr. Flagge. Besides, the queer spirit of contradiction which characterized him operated to make him restive under any species of cross-examination, however cunningly conducted. Like the celebrated Irish pig, the only way to induce Mr. Quickit to go to Limerick was by persuading him that he

was on his road to Cork ; but, unlike that confiding creature, Mr. Quickit was not easily deceived as to the direction in which it was really desired to lead him. Flagge's acuteness soon enabled him to discover that the best plan was not to try to lead him at all, but to let him talk on, merely throwing in a word or two now and then, which gave Quickit an opportunity for contradiction, and acted as a stimulus to his conversational powers.

Sometimes Bob Doery would join the two smokers in the grimy parlour ; and sometimes, but much more rarely, Papa Czernovic would appear in the evening after coming home from his concert, clad in a ruby-coloured dressing-gown made out of an old merino dress of his wife's, and with a bandana handkerchief twisted round his head. Occasionally Dr. Flagge would entertain a select circle in his own rooms. There was no stint at these *symposia* of spirituous liquor and tobacco. Flagge was open-handed in his hospitality, and grudged no man a chance of getting drunk at his expense. But of drunkenness there was scarcely any amongst his associates. Doery, whilst availing himself to the utmost limit of prudence of the Doctor's Bourbon whisky, inflexibly stopped short at that limit,

and would not have risked an unsteady hand or a muddled brain for his work next morning to swallow Olympian nectar. Mr. Quickit could imbibe very large quantities of grog without its producing in him the slightest approach to intoxication. And as for Papa Czernovic, his usual beverage was a tumbler of brown tea, with a slice of lemon in it. But he would smoke with extraordinary energy and perseverance, and consumed large quantities of Flagge's cigars with a silent and concentrated relish.

Another visitor who would drop in for an hour or so in the evening was Captain Peppiat. Flagge had made very marked advances towards cultivating the Captain's acquaintance, and Pep, always willing to be sociable, and utterly guileless—strong, too, in that impetuousness with which he had defied the most fraudulent speculators to fleece him beyond a certain point—found no difficulty in associating with the celebrated medium, whose stories of wild life in the West amused him vastly. Dr. Flagge had entirely refrained from any allusion to the spirits in his communication with Quickit, but to Pep he would occasionally launch forth into some narration of wonders uttered in a studiously quiet and

matter-of-fact tone, and with an odd air of self-repression, as though much more might be said were the hearer but ripe for it.

It had happened in the years gone by, that Peppiat had visited the grimy parlour, carrying in his pocket one of the little account books with the clasped hands on it. And at that period his interviews with the smiling Mr. Quickit had been by no means agreeable ones. But in Flagge's room the secretary of the Loan Society doffed the cares of office, and appeared in the light of a boon companion endowed with unsuspected social merits. Pep, in his open way, claimed acquaintance with him at once. "How are you, Mr. Quickit?" said he. "It's some time since we met. I dare say you don't remember me?"

"Oh, pardon me! Excuse me, Captain Peppiat! I remember you perfectly. I never forget people, specially people I have met in the way of business, ha, ha, ha! But they don't always like to be reminded—eh? of our little transactions. I said nothing till you spoke, you know. How d'ye do? How *do* you do?"

"Faith, my dear sir," returned Pep, good-humouredly, "I don't wonder at any dislike on the part of the—the—the victims, to be

reminded of their little transactions with our friends, Castor and Pollux. Uncommonly sharp practitioners, Castor and Pollux ! ”

Mr. Quickit seemed to take this speech as a compliment ; and laughed with his head on one side, and rubbed his hands over and over one another, exclaiming, “ Oh, tut, tut, tut ! Not at all, not at all, not at all, Captain Peppiat ! Quite the contrary, ha, ha, ha ! Quite—the—contrary ! ” with an air of great gratification.

Later on in the evening Mr. Quickit, finding himself seated next to Peppiat, reverted to the period when the Captain had been a borrower of the Loan Society in an almost plaintive tone, like that of a man recalling some touching incident of Auld Lang Syne.

“ Ah, those were the days ! Those were the days, sir ! Why, there were parties connected with the C. and P. at that time, Captain Peppiat, of the very highest credit—not merely *money* credit, ha, ha, ha !—and position. You have no idea of the sort of parties ; none whatever.”

“ Shylock would come near my idea of the sort of party,” returned the Captain blandly, as he stirred his punch.

“ No, no, no ! Not at all ! By no means,

by—no—means. Nothing like Shylock. I'm fond of the drama, Captain Peppiat, and I can recollect the time when a pit order to Drury Lane was one of the greatest treats you could offer me. Ah, well, all that's bright must fade, you know, Captain, ha, ha, ha! But the parties connected at that time with the C. and P. were quite tip-toppers;—only they didn't wish their connection with the Society to be made public."

"That was wise," observed Pep, drily.

"There was—I may say it now, for he's dead and gone; I read it in *The Times*. Quite a paragraph to himself, headed 'Death of Sir Rupert Lowry of Lowry.'"

"Who?" cried the Captain, dropping his spoon with a clatter.

"Hulloa!" said Flagge, looking round very coolly, "what's the trouble now?"

"Nothing! only our friend here unexpectedly mentioned the name of a near connection of mine by marriage, and——"

"Did he? Well, now I should guess you'd a rather uncommon amount of family feeling, Captain. You might unexpectedly mention all the connections by marriage I ever had, and throw in my blood relations into the bargain, without my exhibiting of the slightest

emotion, much less spilling my spoon upon the carpet, I tell you."

"You don't mean to say," said Peppiat to Mr. Quickit, "that Sir Rupert Lowry was connected with Castor and Pollux?"

"Yes, I do. He had money in the concern, sir. He withdrew his capital after a time, but he had made a good thing of it. A model man of business was Sir Rupert Lowry, ha, ha, ha! And so he was a relation of yours, Captain Peppiat? Dear, dear, how oddly things come about!"

"Oddly indeed!"

"He lodged in my drawing-rooms, you know, whenever he came to town."

"Lodged here? In these rooms?"

"In these identical rooms, Captain Peppiat."

"Why, he was very likely sitting above my head many a time when I came to arrange my business with Castor and Pollux, and I hadn't the least notion of it."

"Hadn't you, indeed? Very good, ha, ha, ha! Ve—ry good! Oh, but the world is wonderfully small in one sense, Captain Peppiat. My experience in the Loan Society has shown me the extraordinary" — (Mr. Quickit pronounced this word "extreeor-

dinary")—"way in which everybody is connected with everybody else. Life is a sort of country dance, sir—a kind of Sir Roger de Coverley, where you cross hands, and down the middle, and set to corners, and the rest of it; and no matter what partner you start with, you have to take a turn with all and sundry before you've finished, Captain Peppiat."

At this point Dr. Flagge began the recital of some strange adventure he had had among the Appanawchees, and there was no further talk between Quickit and the Captain about Sir Rupert Lowry.

But Pep was a good deal impressed by the oddity of the coincidence, that he should have been borrowing money of Sir Rupert Lowry without knowing it, and he told his faithful Leonora all that Quickit had said to him. "What a close old file he must have been, Nora!" said Pep. "I never heard of his having lodgings in town in my life."

But Mrs. Peppiat said she remembered hearing her sister say that Sir Rupert had been for many years in the habit of going up to London at certain stated intervals, to look after some house property which he had there. "But," said she, "I believe he never gave any other address to his family except his



club. I remember Cosmo telling me that once, at Malta."


"I wonder if Mary Lowry knows where he lodged," said the Captain.

"Probably not; and what does it matter? I would advise you not to speak to her on the subject, Northam. It couldn't be pleasant to her to know that her father was mixed up with a set of usurious skinflints, like those horrid bloodsuckers!"

It was thus that good Mrs. Peppiat, with feminine emphasis, and a confusion of metaphors which is not exclusively feminine, designated that respectable company of citizens, the Castor and Pollux Loan Society.

## CHAPTER III.

MAJOR MAUDE had not found his evening at Lady Lowry's very delightful, and yet he could not keep himself away from her house in Green Street. To be sure, there did not seem to be any particular reason why he should keep himself away; and yet he tried to do so,—or fancied that he tried. But his feet turned in that direction with a curious persistence. No matter what the errand he was bound on, no matter what part of the town he began his day's walk in, sooner or later he was sure to find himself close to Sir Cosmo's house in the course of the afternoon. It was quite surprising what a number of reasons he found for being in that neighbourhood every day. It really seemed as if all the business he had in life had concentrated itself into a very small circle, of which Sir Cosmo Lowry's house was the central point. He passed and repassed that dingy mansion



until he knew by heart every dint and bump in the massive and ugly lump of iron-work on the street door, which served as a knocker, and the soot-laden iron pine-apples at the top of the area railings.

He did call on Lady Lowry rather frequently, but if he had visited her even half as often as he passed her door, he would have spent a considerable proportion of his whole existence under her ladyship's roof. Sarah had been well inclined towards Major Maude. The peculiar charm attaching to "officers" in the imagination of the female population of Lambrook—which was a garrison town—continued to exercise a certain sway over Lady Lowry after her elevation to a higher sphere. Then, too, Major Maude was good-looking, and, as she phrased it, "quite the gentleman." She was more easy and less artificial with him than with most people. She was not on her guard against being ridiculed by him if she should chance to transgress any of the unwritten laws of fashionable behaviour which it was the chief study of her life to fulfil. Major Maude was such a good-natured, harmless creature. The unaffected gentle sweetness of his nature was recognized, if not appreciated, by Sarah. She felt instinctively

that he would not assert himself at her expense in any direction whatever. And although she probably considered this to be a result rather of weakness than strength, was yet it was a sort of weakness which it indubitably agreeable to meet with. And, on the whole, she patronized Major Maude, with fine touches of unconscious comedy, and much self-satisfied condescension.

Sir Cosmo, for his part, made no advances towards renewing his old intimacy with Maude. When he saw him, he spoke to him with his usual unsympathetic indifference of manner, just as he would have addressed a complete stranger. But as Major Maude did not go to Green Street specially to see the master of the house, and as the master of the house made himself disagreeable to all the world with considerable impartiality, this did not operate to check Maude's visits. Neither did his own antipathy to Lady Lowry avail to check them. Strong as were the repellant powers of my lady and her husband, the force of Mary's attraction overcame them.

Maude certainly did not reciprocate my lady's liking. Indeed, he regarded her with an amount of dislike which increased day by day, and at which he was himself surprised,

whenever the strength of the feeling forced itself on his attention. Why should he be so angry with the foolish, selfish little woman? What did her coldness of heart, and dulness of head, matter to him? And yet it was really impossible, he told himself, for any one to witness her arrogant presumption to Mary Lowry, and her absolute insensibility to Mary Lowry's noble qualities, without disgust and indignation.

Poor Major Maude! It was, at all events, impossible for him to do so. To deny, or ignore, Mary Lowry's perfections, was in his eyes equivalent to a general negation of all excellence. Rosamond and he were great allies, chiefly by virtue of the former's love and admiration for her aunt; and C  none won a stronger hold on the Major's sympathy and attention than she had ever before possessed, by saying one day in his presence that Miss Lowry's thoughts shone in her face like sunlight through alabaster.

Maude had always felt a compassionate interest in C  none ever since he first made her acquaintance. She was then with the Czernovics in an English provincial town, where Maude was in garrison. The Czernovics were in severe straits, out of which Major Maude

good-naturedly helped them, paying their rent, and also some of their bills. Maude had been struck by the appearance and manner of the elf-like child, so different in all respects from the family with whom she lived. And Papa Czernovic had willingly related to him all that he knew of her history—which was little more than that which the reader knows already. Enone, on her side, conceived a romantic idolatry for this great, strong, gentle, handsome Englishman, who appeared in her life from time to time like a prince in a fairy story, cutting Gordian knots of embarrassment, in which the Czernovics had a peculiar gift of entangling themselves—a sort of magnificent sun-god, or at the least demi-god, in whose beneficent presence debt and duns were dissipated as the mists of the morning, and sheriffs' officers fled abashed like night-birds overtaken by the dawn !

Then, later, during one of the long intervals which occurred between Signor Balassopoulo's communications, Maude had told Miss Cribb, Enone's schoolmistress, that he would be responsible for the payment due for the girl's board and education. The next remittance which arrived after that, from her father, was more welcome to Enone than any former one

had ever been. Hitherto she had had no sense of humiliation in accepting whatever help was given her by the Czernovics. It seemed natural. She had been accustomed to it for several years ; and she believed that her father had reimbursed them, although in an irregular fashion. It never occurred to her to feel herself under any special weight of obligation to them. But when Major Maude undertook to be paymaster, Enone suddenly became conscious that her position was a painful one. She scarcely understood why it hurt her so much. Certainly she had no doubt of Major Maude's perfect generosity of feeling. To her thinking no one had ever conferred favours with such simplicity and delicacy. And yet she thought that she would rather have been beholden to any one in the world than to him.

When some money did come from her father, she went at once to the schoolmistress, and told her that the payment then made would be the last she could afford ; but that she was willing to remain in the school if her services in teaching music and languages could be accepted in exchange for her board and instruction in certain other things. Miss Cribb was willing enough to strike the bargain. Miss Balasso's musical abilities were

beginning to be recognized as remarkable by the virtuosi ; and, although neither popular nor pliable, she was able to make herself extremely useful. Then, having settled this matter without consulting any one, she told Major Maude what she had done. He could not help feeling some surprise at the swiftness and secrecy of the girl's course of action. It was striking to see such a young and inexperienced creature so self-reliant and resolute. But he fully recognized the value of those qualities to a girl in Enone's position. "I think you have acted rightly, Nona," he said. "It is fair and right that since you have the power to do so you should relieve the Czernovics of some of their responsibility on your behalf. And," he added, "I am sure you thought of them in making this arrangement."

"No," returned Enone, knitting her brows a little. "I did not think of them. I did not do it for their sake. As to responsibility—they have none. They can have none. They are just waifs and strays like myself, floating whither Fate wills. But you—you are different, I would not that you should be bound to pay money for me."

Maude had often thought that the only dark spot on Enone's moral nature was the in-



difference—almost insensibility—which she manifested about her obligations to the Czernovics. “It is so strange,” said Major Maude to himself, “for she is not ungrateful at heart. She is grateful enough—too grateful—to me, who have done so little for her. And yet she accepts all these poor people’s services as a matter of course!’

However, the peculiarities of poor CEnone’s character did not occupy his thoughts very long. He regarded her with the softness which he felt for all who were weak and helpless; and perhaps with some special tenderness of compassion which resulted from the benefits he had conferred on her. But her figure was a very subordinate one in his daily life, and stood in the background with a crowd of others, with whom it would have been gall and wormwood to the Greek girl to know herself associated in his mind.

But since her stay in Green Street, Maude’s opinion of CEnone’s judgment and heart had been considerably raised. She praised Mary Lowry! There was growing up in her secret soul a passionate, burning jealousy of Mary Lowry—for to her, Vincent Maude’s secret was no secret,—and yet she praised her;—praised her to him, warmly, fully, and ungrudg-

ingly. The exaggerated notions of her superiority in right of her Greek descent, which the forlorn child had fostered in the lonely, silent dreaming of her companionless life, had not been all evil in their effect on her character. Naturally generous and lofty-minded, her faults were chiefly those of ignorance and narrow circumstances. She did not claim her birthright of Greek supremacy without accepting the duties it entailed, as a baser nature might have done. Meanness, falsehood, cowardice, were not for her. She came of the race of the gods! Nay, she might be called upon to suffer more than mortals made of coarser clay. Well, if so, she would suffer bravely. Hitherto no strain had been put on her powers of endurance. The strain was coming, though. And she thought, in her young inexperience, and her fantastic pride, that she should be able to overcome temptation with superb heroism. Her seventeen-year-old imagination concerned itself mainly with the glow of combat and victory. It had not reckoned with the pain of slowly stiffening wounds, the humiliation of failure, the instinctive shrinking from repeated blows, which belong to all human struggle—even the bravest.

When she made that speech about Mary Lowry's thoughts shining in her face like sunlight through alabaster, Major Maude answered warmly, "Yes; that is just the idea she gives one. I have often felt it. But I could never have expressed it so poetically."

My lady, who was present, observed in a tone of majestic reproof, "Well, the truth is, that Miss Balasso does express herself poetically; it can't be denied. Sir Cosmo told her the other day that her talk was too high-flown to suit English people. She was a little angry with him at the time, but it *is* true, you know. Poetry, except in a book, sounds so silly! And I often say so to her, don't I, Miss Balasso?"

"Yes," replied Enone, gravely, "you often say so."

"Well, then, my dear, why don't you try to correct it? Major Maude will think you don't improve by being amongst us all. And I wish you to improve. I know you have been quite a benefactor to Miss Balasso, Major Maude. And, of course, you would like her to profit by the advantage of mixing with the society she sees at my house."

"You cannot mix antagonistic substances," observed Enone, quietly. "You may drag

them together, but they will never combine."

My lady stared and shook her head. "There!" she exclaimed, turning to Maude, "that's just what Sir Cosmo objects to so much—that funny kind of talk, not a bit like a young lady. She *is* such a queer girl!"

But Sarah had certain strong motives for wishing to keep CEnone Balasso in good humour, and she did not press her reproof any further. Two or three sittings had taken place since the occasion when CEnone was first mesmerized; and at these latter sittings no one had been present except Lady Lowry, CEnone, and Dr. Flagge. CEnone proved to be a wonderfully good subject, and made many statements during her mesmeric sleep which Sarah deemed highly important. These statements nearly all had reference to Sir Rupert Lowry, and encouraged the notions which Sarah had formed on the subject of his will. Indeed, it was observable that no sooner did Sarah, in her growing intimacy and confidence with Flagge, hint a suspicion than that suspicion was sure to be confirmed by the spirits at the next sitting. Still it was an undoubted fact that many minute details of Sir Rupert Lowry's character and habits

were accurately described by C  none during the magnetic sleep. Sarah tested their truth by questioning her husband, and frequently had the satisfaction of seeing that Cosmo was surprised and puzzled by her questions. He would fain have dismissed the whole matter with the convenient formula, "Ah! more of that fellow Flagge's humbug!" But the correctness of the circumstances narrated was frequently so startling that he was unable to treat the subject with indifference or sneering incredulity. He did sneer, indeed, but he was neither indifferent nor wholly incredulous.

"Well," said he once to his wife, "granting, for the sake of argument, that all this is true, supposing that the spirits, black, red, white, or grey, do tell this little Balasso, or Flagge, or both, a number of facts about my father—what then? What is to come of it? What do you expect to get by it?"

"I expect," replied Sarah, with steady deliberation, "to find Sir Rupert Lowry's last will and testament; for the will that was read out by Mr. Flint after your father's funeral is *not* the last, and no power shall make me believe it is. That's what I expect to do; and I shan't flinch from my duty as a wife towards you—not to speak of another whose

claims may have to be considered some day. How could I look my child in the face, Cosmo, if I allowed him to be robbed of his birth-right?"

In reply to which Sir Cosmo recommended her to keep her expectations to herself, unless she wanted to be taken for a mad woman. Nevertheless, her unwearying persistence, and obstinate faith in her own opinion, influenced his mind more strongly than he himself was aware of. He began to speculate on the possible contents of a new will to be discovered by Dr. Flagge's agency. And he grew more and more discontented with the conditions of the existing one.

Then there arose another feeling to be added to the secret hopes, fears, jealousies, and unavowed motives of all sorts which estranged Cosmo and his wife more and more from Mary Lowry, and made them look upon her as one whose interests were opposed to their own. And it originated in a conversation which took place between Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry one evening, when they were alone in the library, where the former was smoking an after-dinner cigar. All at once he said to his wife, with more than usual petulance, "Why the deuce is Maude

always hanging about the house now? I have found him in the drawing-room three times this week. There is a little too much of this."

"Well, I'm sure, Cosmo, I don't know why you should dislike Major Maude being here. He's very agreeable in his manners. And I suppose he finds some attraction that makes him come. I won't deny that he admires me a good deal; of course in the most respectful way—highly so! But you needn't be jealous, Cosmo."

"Jealous! Don't talk d—d nonsense."

"Cosmo, I declare I shall believe you are jealous if you use such violent language. However, there is no need for you to be, I assure you. Major Maude likes ladies' society. He says so, and I dare say he doesn't like it less when the ladies don't happen to be frights or monsters. That's natural enough, and there's no harm in it. But I am not the woman to encourage the least approach to flirtation, Cosmo. I am aware that it is done in the higher circles. Mrs. Wigmore tells me they think nothing of it. But I do not approve of it myself. At the same time, I'm sure Major Maude is so extremely respectful and polite in his behaviour that——"

My lady stopped short in her flowing harangue. She had been talking in her own slow, steady, untiring way, like the current of a full, but sluggish, stream, when the tide was arrested by the expression of Sir Cosmo's face as he looked at her.

"Well?" said my lady, indignantly, "what are you looking like that for? I haven't said anything ridiculous, have I?"

"Since you do me the honour to ask me, I am bound to tell you that you have said something supremely ridiculous," replied Sir Cosmo, smiling sarcastically, and bending his black brows together at the same time.

"Well, I'm sure, Cosmo! You're very polite!"

"I'm very right; and I'm aware that that is sometimes far from polite. Why, Sally,—where are your eyes? I really thought women were quick at that sort of observation. But I suppose that notion is merely conventional humbug, like so much else. Don't you know that Maude comes here for my sister Mary? He's been over head and ears in love with her for years."

My lady's face expressed incredulity and amazement. Major Maude in love with Mary! The idea had never entered into



Sarah's head. She could scarcely believe it Cosmo must be mistaken.

"Major Maude in love with your sister for years past? Why, Mary never breathed a hint about it!"

"All the Lowrys are not so communicative as Sir Rupert's ghost, Sally."

"Cosmo, you ought not to talk like that. But how did you know? When was it?"

"Oh, Maude went down to Lowry as a— a sort of ambassador to my father when our little boy was born. It was Isabel's doing chiefly. And then he saw Mary. She was eighteen or nineteen, and wonderfully beautiful, and——"

"Well, I *can't* see that Mary is so beautiful. I never could. Her eyebrows being so much darker than her hair give her such a funny look."

"H'm! You know nothing at all about it. Mary Lowry was, and is, as handsome a woman as any in the three kingdoms. All the women of our family have been handsome. Maude was desperate about her. But directly my father found out what was going on, he sent him packing."

"Why?"

"Why? Do you suppose that Sir Rupert

would have dreamt for an instant of allowing Miss Lowry of Lowry to marry a fellow whose father kept a shop ? ”

“ Did Major Maude’s father keep a shop ? ”

“ Something of the sort. A shop, or a warehouse, or something. Anyway, he wasn’t quite the sort of match for Miss Lowry of Lowry, and I wonder he hadn’t the sense to see it himself. I told him plainly it wouldn’t do, when he said a word to me on the subject in Malta. He dropped it with me at once. But I believe that Isabel and her sister foolishly encouraged him, as women will do.’

“ Oh ! that Mrs. Peppiat encouraged it, did she ? It shows what dangerous people those Peppiat are to know ! And did Mary like him ? ”

“ Can’t say, I’m sure. I know that she sent back a letter he wrote to her after he left Lowry Place, because he brought it to me to ask if that were really my sister’s writing on the cover.”

“ And was it ? ”

“ Yes, it was. Mary writes a peculiar hand, not easily mistaken.”

“ Well, that ought to have been enough for him, if he had any proper spirit.”

“ It don’t seem to have been enough for

him, judging by the way he hangs about the house now."

"Do you feel quite, quite sure that he comes for Mary?"

"Who else can he come for? As to his coming for you—it's absurd."

There was so long a pause that Sir Cosmo had got through a leading article in the newspaper before Sarah said, "Should you like Mary to marry Major Maude?"

"Like it? Not exactly. I'm not ambitious of connecting myself with the noble race of Maudes. It's really uncommon presumption on Vincent Maude's part to think of such a thing. Miss Lowry of Lowry! H'm! There's nothing like flying high when you are about it."

"I," said Sarah, with a stolid plainness which was the quality by which she most powerfully influenced her husband, "I don't want Mary to marry at all! She's lived single so long, that she has come to be considered quite an old maid; and she ought to feel bound not to carry all that money out of the family. It's a religious duty; she ought to leave it to your children."

"H'm! If I had a dozen children—which Heaven forbid!—Mary wouldn't be likely to do

anything for any of them, unless, perhaps, for Rosamond."

"More shame for her, then! But even if she left her money to Rosamond, it would save your having to provide for her, and would be something gained. I say that Mary Lowry ought to consider it a religious duty to keep that money in the family. It's bad enough—a great deal too bad—that she should deprive us of it during her life. And then there's Lowry Place;—how should you like to see a stranger set up to be master in Lowry Place? And that's what would happen if Mary was to marry."

Sir Cosmo turned round and snapped at her almost fiercely. "What the devil is the use of worrying yourself about it?" he said. "At all events, I beg you won't worry me. Mary must do as she likes. There's no good in talking, if you talk for a twelvemonth; and, for my part, I don't intend to trouble my head on the subject any more."

Nevertheless, Sir Cosmo did trouble his head on the subject from that time forward.

## CHAPTER IV.

IF Lady Lowry had not so completely turned the cold shoulder to "those Peppiats," as she called them, she might have had some chance of being enlightened as to the actual source of much of the information which was furnished to her by Dr. Flagge's spirits. The Captain—to whom it was absolutely impossible to be reticent or prudent—talked about "that queer fish, Quickit," over his supper-table, and repeated Quickit's stories of the niggardly old baronet, and of Sir Rupert's connection with the Loan Society, to any one who would listen.

But of all that not a word reached my lady's ears. Ever since she had been enlightened by her husband as to Maude's old love story, she had displayed an increasing dislike to the very name of Peppiat; and she dreaded lest Mary and Major Maude should find opportunities of meeting in Nelson Place,

out of her ken. It was impossible for her to shut up Miss Lowry, or openly to control her actions. She might forbid Rosamond to visit her aunt and uncle, but Mary was free to see them whenever she pleased. Having once got the clue, Sarah had become convinced that the attraction which drew Major Maude to her house was, in truth, Mary Lowry. Not that my lady gave Maude credit for disinterested affection. She had a grudging jealousy of Mary, which made it very disagreeable to her to accept the conviction that the former was the object of a romantic passion, so she simply refused to accept it,—a convenient method of bringing facts into harmony with one's prejudices, but not attainable by all minds.

My lady set up the theory that Major Maude, having neither ancient lineage nor much money, desired to ally himself with a woman who possessed both. Opportunity caused him to select Miss Lowry of Lowry, and his chance was all the better with her because there had formerly been some youthful love passages between them; that was all. Sarah admitted it was not wonderful that Major Maude should try for such a prize. She felt little or no anger against Major

Maude. Having once established the assumption that Major Maude was not heartily in love with Mary, my lady found it easier to forgive him for seeking to marry her. Nevertheless she regretted that chance, or Mrs. Wigmore, or the spirits—or, perhaps, all three—had brought him to her house whilst Mary was in it. And yet, she reflected, it might have been worse; for they might have met elsewhere, out of her reach. As it was, she could exercise some supervision over them. She could at least watch them, and know what was going on; accordingly she did watch them, and, let Maude come when he would, he never found Miss Lowry unaccompanied by her sister-in-law. Formerly he and Rosamond and Mary had been permitted to enjoy many a half-hour without the honour of her ladyship's company; but now Lady Lowry suddenly showed a strong sense of her hospitable duties towards the Major, and never quitted the room for an instant so long as he remained in it.

Sarah was greatly puzzled by the simplicity of Mary's demeanour in Maude's presence. She found herself completely baffled in her efforts to discover what Mary's real feelings were towards him, and at length she resolved

to try the effect of awakening a little jealousy. In pursuance of this idea she took an early opportunity, when she and Mary were alone together, of saying she could not help noticing Major Maude's growing attentions to Miss Balasso; she hoped he was in earnest, and did not mean to trifle with the poor girl, but his manner to her was very particular. Didn't Mary think so? and had she remarked that the Major had positively haunted the house ever since Miss Balasso had been an inmate of it?

Mary's head had been bent over a book, but she raised it at once, and looked full at her sister-in-law as she answered, "I hope, Sarah, that you have not hinted anything of this sort to Enone? It would be cruel. I am convinced that Major Maude has no such feelings about her as you seem to think."

"Are you, really? But I am not at all convinced of it. I have eyes, and I watch them. How do you account for his manner?"

"His manner seems to me to be that of a kind, gentle, generous man towards a young girl whom he looks upon as little more than a child, and in whom he feels a compassionate interest."

"Ah! well, compassionate interest is all



very well, no doubt, but I don't believe in its making a man look and speak as the Major does, and hang round a girl day after day. As to considering her a child—she *isn't* a child, you know; and youth is a great attraction to most men. Seventeen has a better chance than seven and twenty, any day."

Mary grew a little pale, but her eyes looked clear and unfaltering into my lady's. Sarah went on:

"I'm sure if he doesn't think of her in that way he ought not to behave as he does; and why shouldn't he think of her? She has no money, but I suppose he has enough to keep a wife well enough for his station. He's a man of no family whatever, so it would be no come down for him as far as *that* goes. His father kept a shop."

"I think you are mistaken there," replied Mary. "Not that it matters."

"Oh, of course it doesn't matter to us, but it may matter to Miss Balasso. If he belonged to a high family it might be different; but seeing what his origin was, I do not consider it presumption on her part to try to catch him."

"Sarah, how can you use such an odious word?" cried Mary; and now the blood

flushed up hotly into her cheeks. "I am convinced that Enone has no such idea in her head. She is too pure-minded, and too proud."

"Too proud! La, Mary, what will you say next? A little twopenny teacher in a boarding school, and a foreigner, too—a girl that comes from nobody knows where, and belongs to nobody knows who—*proud*? Well, you may say what you please, but just watch her the next time the Major is here, and see if she don't sit and stare at him with those great saucer eyes of hers, all the time he is here."

Mary was more disturbed by this conversation than she liked to acknowledge to herself. She told herself at first that Sarah's suspicion was the common suspicion of a vulgar mind, and that it was entirely erroneous; and yet, by-and-by, many little circumstances began to haunt her memory, and to make her uneasy. Enone made no secret of her gratitude to Maude. If she showed less sensibility than was becoming to the good offices of the Czernovics, she certainly acknowledged Major Maude's benefits with the deepest feeling. Mary fully acquitted her of the coarse design which Lady Lowry had coarsely expressed, but she recognized the passionate temperament lying hid beneath Enone's silent re-

serve. The girl was young, inexperienced, romantic. Might it not be that she was cherishing a day-dream about Vincent Maude, and laying up to herself stores of sorrow and mortification?

But then, later, arose another thought. Was it so certain that CEnone's day-dream was destined to disappointment? Might it not be that Maude was attracted by the girl in the way that Sarah fancied? Although her whole heart cried out "No," yet she found herself continually pondering this question. It presented itself to her mind with distressing importunity again and again. But whatever conclusion she reached in these mental debates, that conclusion was almost certain to be shaken the next time she saw Vincent and CEnone together. This unshared anxiety, this harassing fluctuation between hopes and fears, grew almost a torment. She was ashamed of herself, and that was a new and very intolerable feeling for Mary Lowry. She was conscious that the words dropped from my lady's heedless tongue—she believed it to have been heedless—had changed her manner towards Maude, and that, struggle as she would, she could not regain her old sweet serenity in his presence. She had believed that he came to

her brother's house to seek her ; she had believed that the romance of her youth might have a second spring-time, and blossom anew. She had never wavered in her faith to him, and although there had been a time when she thought she had buried hope, yet at the first glance of Vincent Maude's eyes, as they rested on her, she had felt that hope had not been dead, but only chilled into stillness like a frost-bound flower, and that it stirred and woke at the sight of her old love ; now there was a bitter flavour which spoiled the sweetness of his presence ; the sensitive chord of womanly dignity had been roughly jarred, and it would not cease from quivering. Had vanity blinded her to the truth ? Had she too readily assumed that Maude's heart had been as her own during all the years of separation, and was she with foolish self-complacency accepting for herself the devotion meant for another ? She resolved that she would not be guilty of the weakness of giving more weight to Sarah's judgment in this matter than she would have attributed to it had the case concerned any other person than herself. She made this resolution, and honestly tried to keep it, but the bitter flavour was there, the insidious word had been spoken, and the aspect of many

things was changed and darkened for Mary Lowry.

Nevertheless my lady was by no means aware of the amount of her own success. To her mind the result of Mary's believing that her former suitor was now inclined to be the suitor of CEnone Balasso should naturally have been to make Mary dislike the latter; but, so far as my lady's observation went, Mary appeared to treat the girl with more tenderness and consideration than before. True, Mary might be acting; but yet, what need was there of acting before Miss Balasso? Miss Balasso had neither money, station, nor friends. It would have been only natural, Sarah thought, to be quite unconstrained in the expression of any disagreeable sentiments towards *her*! But then presently Sarah found herself in the position of seeing that which she had uttered as a fiction for purposes of her own, begin to take shape as a fact. Having given up the fancy that Major Maude's attention and admiration were entirely concentrated on herself (reserving, however, the soothing conviction that they would be so concentrated, if only his interests did not interfere with his inclinations), my lady's eyes were opened to observe much which had before escaped

her, and, to her surprise and not unmingled satisfaction, she began to perceive that Eñone Balasso did sit and gaze at Maude whenever he was present, like a spell-bound creature. She was never forward or demonstrative; but it was certain that from some modest corner apart she would watch him, and treasure every word he spoke, and could remember to a syllable what he had said on such and such a subject, and knew his likings and dislikings, and consciously or unconsciously adopted his opinions.

Now, one of Major Maude's opinions was that Dr. Flagge was wholly untrustworthy, and a man with whom anything like intimacy ought to be discouraged. This opinion had never, perhaps, been distinctly stated by Maude in Lady Lowry's house, but it had made itself felt; and when the circumstance of Eñone's having been mesmerized by Flagge was mentioned to him, Major Maude at once made a strong remonstrance against any repetition of that proceeding.

"Dear me," said my lady, "I can't think why you should object! It does Miss Balasso no harm."

"I don't think it good that a man like Flagge should obtain influence over Nona."

"Nor do I," said Miss Lowry.

"Oh, as to you, Mary, we know that you hate Dr. Flagge! But I should have thought Major Maude would be more liberal, because he has seen a good deal of mediums and spirits. And I'm sure—at least in my house—Dr. Flagge's spirits never utter any but the most proper sentiments."

My lady was very angry. She resented Maude's interference, even although the interference only amounted to an expression of opinion. What business was it of his? The worst was that Enone would infallibly be influenced by Maude's objection to her being mesmerized, if she were made aware of it. Perhaps she would decline to be present at the sittings altogether, which would be highly inconvenient; for, as my lady said to herself, the spirits who knew all about Sir Rupert seemed to utter their communications by means of Miss Balasso better than in any other way.

She hinted her anxieties to Dr. Flagge the next time he came to Green Street.

"Miss Nony can't refuse to be mesmerized," said Flagge, with a smile which was not a pleasant one.

"Oh, you don't know the influence Major

Maude has over her ! And Miss Lowry, too. And they've both set themselves against it quite strongly ; and Miss Balasso can be very stiff and self-willed, though she does look such a poor creature that you might blow her away, almost."

"I didn't say Miss Nony won't refuse ; I said she *can't* refuse," returned Flagge, still with the same smile.

"How do you mean ?"

"I mean that if I choose to put her into the magnetic sleep she can't resist me ; I have acquired considerable of a power over her."

"What—against her will ?" stammered Sarah, looking rather frightened.

"She hasn't got to have any will when she's in my presence—not without I choose to let her."

"Oh, la ! but that sounds almost awful, Dr. Flagge !"

"Well, a good many natural facts are rather awful, Lady Lowry ; anyway, I'm not responsible for 'em ; I'm but an instrument for carrying of 'em out."

There was a pause. Then Sarah said, "If we could *persuade* Miss Balasso, I should prefer it. I—I—don't think I should like to



have her mesmerized against her will. I'm afraid it would be wicked."

"That depends on what you want to mesmerize her for. I reckon your motives are pure, high-minded, and lofty?"

"Oh yes," answered Sarah, naïvely. "Of course! But—if anything should happen to her,—if she was to get ill, or anything,—or to tell people,—it *wouldn't* look well, you know."

There was always a latent assumption in Sarah's mind that not to "look well," and to be wicked, were nearly equivalent to each other.

"It might be possible to do without her altogether," said Flagge. "I can't say. But if it isn't possible to do without her, I expect you'll have to decide about taking the responsibility of what's to be done. I believe I'm on the track of a very important discovery."

"Oh! What?"

"Well, I don't know as I'm justified in stating it just yet: not without Sir Rupert Lowry's leave, anywáy. He was with me last night at a late hour, and we had a very interesting time."

"Do you know," said Sarah, after a short silence, during which she had been staring at

the medium with flushed cheeks, and a general air of ponderous excitement—if the phrase may be permitted—“Do you know that sometimes it comes over me as if it *couldn't be* all true about the spirits. Things do fall out so astonishing!” Here she clasped her hands tightly together. “It’s almost like you feel in a dream sometimes—real and not real. To think of the spirits going on as they do, and saying what they say—it *is* so wonderful that I sometimes can hardly believe in it—there!”

“The feeling you describe is very usual, lovely lady,” answered Flagge quietly, “especially in the early stages of experience. The human mind, in its carnal development, revolts against transcendental phenomena. It is a phase which most embodied intellects have got to pass through. But you’re continually liable to fall back into it. It’s one of the conditions of our imperfect terrestrial existence. And the fact is that the manifestations *are*, as you say, so wonderful, that I sometimes can hardly believe in ’em myself.”

## CHAPTER V.

It was more than two months since Mary Lowry had arrived in her brother's house. She had reached London on the 17th of September, and it was now close upon the end of November. She had been for some time past considering what arrangement it would be possible for her to make as to her future life, and which of all the possible arrangements would be the best. It became more and more clear to her that her brother's house could be in no sense a home for her. She had looked forward to the happiness of companionship, to the secure sense of love and trust needing no expression in words to make itself felt, to the sweet familiar intercourse, which made the atmosphere of a happy home more genial than that of any other place on earth. But in Cosmo's house she had found none of these things. And she had now

assured herself that they would never be found there.

Life was slipping away—swiftly, swiftly. It seemed to her that the six months which had elapsed since her father's death had made a longer stage in the march of time than the six years which had preceded it. The feeling came upon her, which comes to most of us sooner or later, that she must seize on some of the golden grains of life which were running away like the sand in an hour-glass, and feel them in her grasp, not idly watch them fall and dwindle till the last fragment should be irrevocably lost. It was not selfish enjoyment that she craved for. She would give those golden grains of time to serve others at their need; but she desired that at least the gift should be given consciously, and of her own free will. As it was, the hours of her life seemed to fall dully, drop by drop, like water on a barren rock, and she saw neither use nor pleasure spring from them.

Of course this feeling was intermittent. She did not sit and brood over it day after day. But it came frequently enough to depress her spirits. And her wish to make some change in the tenor of her life grew very strong.

She had said a word to Cosmo and Sarah about their going down to Lowry Place for the Christmas time ; but they had both declared it to be out of the question. Mary would fain have passed Christmas in her old home, even although she had to pass it alone. There would be the familiar scenes which had woven themselves into her life. There would be the old servants, and the old dog. She might feel melancholy there ; but it would be a melancholy full of gentle thoughts and tender sorrow. In Cosmo's house she not only suffered from that worst loneliness, want of sympathy, but she was tormented by feeling herself in constant antagonism to the characters of those around her. She would, however, force herself to remain in her brother's house until after Christmas ; but then she was resolved she would leave it—at least for a time.

In the last days of November she got a letter from Mr. Flint, which she answered as follows :—

“ Green Street,

“ November 30th, 187—

“ DEAR MR. FLINT,

“ The sight of your handwriting was as welcome to me as the face of an old friend.

I must put duty before pleasure, and answer the business part of it first. As regards the proposition you mention for taking Lowry Place on lease, I have thought of it as carefully as I could, and have decided to decline it. My father bequeathed the old house to me in order that I might have a home among the people who know me, and whom I know. I appreciate better than I did his motives for doing so. I certainly have ample means without that to provide myself with a suitable dwelling elsewhere, if that were all, and if the shelter of one roof were as good as another. But it is not so—at least, not for me. I think, too, that I might be more useful to others at Lowry than anywhere else. And I wish to be useful if I can attain to so much happiness before it is too late. I begin to feel quite an old woman! No; dear Mr. Flint, I do not like the thought of strangers inhabiting the old house. If my brother would live there it would be different. Perhaps some arrangement may be come to between Cosmo and me which will result in his taking up his abode at Lowry for at least a portion of the year. I will abide by the terms which you have counselled me to propose, knowing, as I do, that you understand the position of affairs,

and understand us. I think that is all that need be said on business at present. I am delighted at the hope you hold out to me of seeing Mrs. Flint in London before long. Pray beg her to let me know her address in town, and the time of her arrival. I hope you will be able to accompany her, if but for a few days. My present plan is to remain here up to the end of December, and then I think I shall come home for a while. I long for home. I shall ask Cosmo to let Rosamond accompany me. She is a sweet-natured, honest-hearted girl, and I have come to love her very dearly. She reminds me often, in certain turns of expression and tricks of face—and especially in her thorough simplicity and candour—of my dear mother, whom you and Mrs. Flint remember well. Rosamond has not quite my mother's soft gentleness, but she is very affectionate. I am well; but I fear I have become too completely a country mouse to be quite at my ease in town. I long for Clevelen Woods, bare and leafless though they must be now; and for a wide stretch of sky, even though it be cloudy, and for the cawing of the rooks, and all the country sounds that seem as sweet and wholesome to my ears as the country air does to my lungs. A thou-

sand thanks for the details you give me about Lowry Place. I am glad that all is going well there. Will you kindly let the servants know that I asked for them? And pray pat poor old Con for me, and tell him he will soon see his mistress again. I know he will understand quite well. I should have asked leave to bring him here with me, but Lady Lowry dislikes dogs. Give my love to Mrs. Flint, and believe me,

“ Dear Mr. Flint,

“ Yours always, with sincere regard,

“ MARY H. LOWRY.”

“ Miss Lowry is not happy in London,” said Mr. Flint to his wife, when he had read this letter.

“ Of course not! How should she be happy with such a person as the present Lady Lowry?” returned Mrs. Flint.

“ I’m not sure that Lady Lowry is chiefly responsible for her not being happy. That brother of hers has turned out a complete disappointment. Hollow as a drum. Not a particle of heart or feeling about him.”

“ She seems to be fond of Rosamond.”

“ Yes; that’s some comfort. Oh yes; when Mary Lowry says the girl reminds her of her



mother, we may be sure that she has taken her into her heart."

"What do you think of her refusal to let Lowry Place, Samuel?"

"I think—I think she's right, on the whole. And I am glad to find she is willing to abide by my advice as to the bargain to be made with her brother. If she let him and his family into Lowry Place without a distinct contract being made, it would end in her being shouldered out of her own house. Sir Cosmo Lowry can't be treated with generous confidence. His mental constitution requires much harder diet."

"Well, Samuel, but he comes of the old stock, after all. For my part, I should say that the person most to blame is that low-born woman he has married."

"I wish Miss Lowry would get married herself! That would be the best thing that could happen."

"Ah, Samuel, that *would* be a good thing. And why she doesn't I can't imagine. So handsome as she is, so well-born, such an amiable character, and, now, such a good dower—I can't think what the men are about!"

"I wonder if there's any one she cares for."

"I should think she might pick and choose the county through."

"Do you remember, Bertha, long ago—ten or twelve years ago—a man coming down to Lowry, a handsome fellow, who was in the army?"

"Y—yes; I do remember. I only saw him once, though. What of him?"

"I fancy—I can scarcely tell how I first took up the idea—but I fancy that he fell in love with Miss Lowry."

"Not a very strange fancy either!"

"No. But I fancy, moreover, that she was at least very well inclined to fall in love with him."

"La, Samuel!"

"Of course, it is merely a conjecture. One evening, soon after Sir Rupert's death, when I was talking with Miss Lowry, some word she said gave me a sort of glimpse of it all. I began to recall half-forgotten circumstances, and I gradually recollected how it was that he came to Lowry. He brought letters of introduction from some officer of high rank whom Sir Rupert had known in his youth. And he was well received at first. But then it presently turned out that he was a friend of Cosmo's, and had come to negotiate a reconciliation between father and son. He brought the news of the birth of Mrs. Cosmo's first

boy. I suppose she had fancied, poor thing, that the birth of an heir would soften the old man. But it all came to nothing. The man—I cannot think of his name, I should know it if I heard it—went away after a week or two, and Sir Rupert spoke angrily about him. I thought at the time that that was merely because he had come as a friend of Cosmo's. But I am inclined to think now that Sir Rupert had other reasons for taking such a dislike to the young man."

Mrs. Flint was greatly interested in all this. But, as she said, even supposing there had been some youthful love-making long ago between Mary Lowry and this stranger, that need not prevent her marrying now. "She ought to make a great match," Mrs. Flint said.

"She writes here about feeling herself to be old," said Mr. Flint, balancing Mary's letter in his hand.

"Parcel of stuff and nonsense! I hate to hear such trash. That has been put into her head by that horrid Lady Lowry, I'll warrant. Oh yes, it would suit her very well to keep Mary Lowry an old maid, no doubt. I always told you from the first, Samuel, that that young woman would be a thorn in Miss Lowry's side."

Mr. Flint pshaw'd and shrugged, and bade his wife not make giants in order to kill them; but nevertheless it did seem to him not unlikely that some such scheme as Mrs. Flint hinted at might be floating in my lady's brain.

He wrote back at once to Miss Lowry, warmly approving her plan of returning home for a time, and promising her a hearty welcome from all Clevelen folk, high and low, not forgetting her friends at Elcaster. "I really believe Con did understand your message," he wrote. "His spirits have decidedly improved since I gave it him."

Excited by the prospect of Miss Lowry's return home Mrs. Flint lost no time in calling a mental muster-roll of all the men in the neighbourhood who could be considered eligible matches for Mary. And after a careful balancing of advantages and disadvantages, she selected two possible candidates to whom she was willing to give her vote and interest. One was a neighbouring landowner of fine property, unimpeachable pedigree, and unblemished character. The other was the Earl of Elcaster. "The Elcasters can't boast of very old blood," said Mrs. Flint to herself, "but—an Earl is an Earl. And he is so enormously rich that he will be sure to care

more for pedigree than cash—not to mention that Miss Lowry is the handsomest woman in the county.”

But when she hinted these schemes to her husband, Mr. Flint answered her almost crossly. “Lord Elcaster? You’re crazy, Bertha! He’s a fool—or, at least, an ignoramus. He knows nothing except horses, and not enough of them to help losing his money by them.”

“He can afford to lose his money. The Elcasters are rich enough to buy all the race-horses in England if they liked.”

“My dear Bertha, you had better put that nonsense out of your head. Lord Elcaster is spending—well, never mind.”

“I *should* like to see Miss Lowry a Countess!” said Mrs. Flint with a little sigh.

“Wouldn’t you like better to see her happy with a man she could really love?”

“Of course, Samuel, I should wish her to love her husband. But why shouldn’t she love an Earl?”

Mr. Flint withdrew to his office without proffering any reply to that query. To be sure, there did not seem to be any reason why, other things being equal, Miss Lowry should not love an Earl. But then, the only Earl

within reach was not lovable—or, at all events, he was persuaded that Mary Lowry would not think him so.

Meanwhile, when Mary told her sister-in-law that she intended to go home after Christmas, and expressed a wish to take Rosamond with her, she was surprised to find the proposition received with evident disfavour. She did not flatter herself that Sarah was pained at the idea of parting from her on any grounds of personal attachment. But it was clear that for some reason Sarah did not wish her to go away.

“I can’t understand what you want to go to Lowry for in this weather,” said my lady.

“I fear it might be difficult for me to make you understand. I am a little home-sick. I believe that is the truth.”

“Well, I should have thought you might feel your brother’s house to be home!”

“You are very kind.”

Sarah was a little disconcerted to find what she had intended for a sneer received with grave politeness. After a pause she resumed: “And I’m sure there can be nothing on earth for you to do at Lowry.”

“But suppose I would rather do nothing at Lowry than do nothing elsewhere?”

"I can't make it out," returned Sarah, with perfect truth and some temper.

Sir Cosmo's remark on the subject was, "I suppose Mary is tired of us. I dare say she don't find Green Street a very pleasant residence."

"Well, I'm sure! Why shouldn't she?"

Sir Cosmo responded merely by a prolonged sniff.

"I see no reason why she should not find it pleasant," continued my lady doggedly. "None at all. We live in much better style than your father kept up at Lowry. She has society. There are the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Wigmore! His brother is a lord, and even Mary can't say to the contrary. And as to servants, I don't know where she would find a butler like Lobley; I don't indeed."

"There are clearly all the elements of happiness! And if Mary don't appreciate them it's her own fault."

"Quite her own fault. But I hope you won't give leave for Rosamond to go to Lowry with her. She has taken a great fancy to Rosamond, and perhaps if we keep Rosamond here, Mary may stay too."

"Why the—mischief—do you want her to stay? You don't love her too dearly!"

"I want to have her under my own eye," replied my lady deliberately. "Once she's off to the country, there'll be all sorts of people ready to catch hold of her—that Mr. Flint and his wife, and who knows how many besides? We shall have her marrying and setting up a master in Lowry Place, mark my words!"

Some spark was struck even out of Cosmo's cold metal by this flinty hardness.

"Good God, Sarah," he cried, "do you suppose I'm going to play jailer over my sister? If she wishes to marry she has a right to do so, and let her, with all my heart! Only I don't know where there's a man worthy of her. It isn't every one who appreciates Mary. There are creatures that pearls are wasted on."

Lady Lowry, albeit curiously protected by Nature from many strokes calculated to wound the feelings, had her vulnerable points. She now had recourse to tears. It was not often that she was driven to this extreme measure, but now she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to cry. She did not sob with violence, but her eyelids and nose grew red, and the tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.



"That's the return I get for looking after the interests of my family, Cosmo," she said from behind her pocket-handkerchief. "I am aware that your sister despises me, but I don't think you ought to. And—and—in my delicate state I think you might show me some consideration."

Sir Cosmo was so accustomed to his wife's stolid way of passing over his roughest and sharpest speeches, that it came upon him almost with a sense of injury, to find her taking any of them to heart. Nevertheless he did not like to see the little woman cry; nor was he insensible to the reason she gave for some special consideration being due to her just then.

"I suppose you want to make me out a brute, Sally," he said. He spoke awkwardly, and almost gruffly, but Sarah understood very well that her husband was pensive to her tears. And she understood, too, that, notwithstanding his gruffness, he felt, if not contrite, at least uncomfortable.

Now, those who knew him well might be quite sure that the mortal who had the power to make Sir Cosmo feel uncomfortable, and from whom Sir Cosmo could not get away, would chiefly rule Sir Cosmo's life.

“You mustn’t ask me to put in my oar, Sally woman,” he said after a little while. “But if you don’t mind taking it upon yourself to refuse leave for Rosamond to go to Lowry, you can do as you please. Only don’t bother me. I can’t interfere. You women must settle it amongst yourselves.”

“Oh, I shan’t at all mind taking upon myself to refuse,” replied my lady.

And, to do her justice, she had the courage of her convictions.

## CHAPTER VI.

MR. CASSIUS DEMAYNE had had dealings in his day with the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. He had been an actor in country towns under a feigned name, and had had recourse to Castor and Pollux for the means of taking a journey from London to the North of England, and of living after the journey, until Saturday should come round, and bring with it the payment of thirty-five shillings sterling as his weekly salary. Mr. Cassius Demayne was not fond of alluding to those days. He would fain have drowned them altogether in the waters of oblivion. But there were persons who knew that part of his history, and with whom, therefore, he thought it best to speak freely of his unsuccessful efforts in the theatrical line. When he did speak of them, he always exaggerated both his own artistic failure and the miserable quality and circumstances of the troop he had performed with. He had

that form of vanity—not very uncommon, if you will observe a little—which prefers to make a strong effect of *any* kind rather than make no effect at all. One may often see persons who are willing to purchase the undivided attention of the company they are in, even at the cost of putting themselves in a ludicrous light, if by no other means can such attention be purchased. There is probably lurking in their minds an idea that the abiding impression left upon their hearers will be rather admiration of their wit, sense of humour, and so forth, than any sentiment akin to contempt. But perhaps the experiment is a dangerous one to make frequently; for, if it be not true that the world will take us absolutely at our own valuation, it nevertheless remains pretty certain that the world will not insist on pricing us higher than we price ourselves.

However, in the case of Mr. Cassius De-  
mayne, it must be owned that he balanced  
matters tolerably fairly. For while freely  
admitting that he had failed as an actor, he  
more than insinuated that this was owing to  
his superior birth and breeding, which were  
clearly superfluous in a profession requiring  
merely natural abilities. In confidence, and

with the most perfect regard for the capital fellows in the profession with whom he was on excellent terms of comradeship, Mr. Demayne would own to you that he did not think it possible for a thoroughbred gentleman to become a successful player. But there was an odd circumstance which made the whole case amusingly paradoxical ; namely, that the one strong desire, the secret and devouring ambition of Mr. Cassius Demayne's soul, was to play Benedick on the London stage. Meanwhile he earned his bread, with a fair share of butter on it, as treasurer in a fashionable theatre. And though he could not act himself, he was a very severe and astonishingly acute critic of those who could—one of the numerous instances of that curious perversity of Fate, which decrees that the people who best know how a thing ought to be done are so very seldom able to do it.

His attempts to act had brought him into the clutches of Castor and Pollux, and earned him a squeeze or two from their mailed fingers. On the other hand, the occupation of keeping accounts, and paying out little heaps of money every Saturday in a close room tapestried with play-bills, gave him wherewithal to live comfortably, and to keep

clear of those sharp practitioners who lend moneys on usury. Still, he occasionally saw Mr. Quickit, who boasted a taste for the drama, and had a rather wide acquaintance among a miscellaneous tribe of public performers whom he spoke of as "professionals."

Dr. Flagge had once met Demayne in Mr. Quickit's back parlour, and he had struck up an acquaintance with him. Demayne affected an almost unlimited catholicity in his acceptance of associates. "I, too, am a denizen of Bohemia," he said, speaking of some actor of the "poor devil" species. "And if one goes to settle in a country, one ought to consort with the inhabitants, and adopt their manners and customs."

"Why, yes; and it comes cheaper, too," returned Flagge, with perfect appreciation of all that was implied in Demayne's little speech about being a settler in Bohemia, and not to the manner born. "When I lived among the Appanawchees, it didn't cost me much for clean shirts."

After that, Dr. Flagge invited Mr. Demayne to his rooms, and regaled him with Bourbon whiskey and very special cigars.

The other guests present were Papa Czernovic and Bob Doery. Now, one might have

thought the members of this company little likely to interest themselves in such matters as spiritual manifestations. Yet the fact was that Flagge found his marvellous narratives eagerly listened to by them. Demayne was gradually led on to relate a story of a ghost which haunted his family ;—your family ghost has a flavour of respectability and antiquity, and is as genteel a hereditary evil as the gout ;—and Papa Czernovic told of some singular Moldavian superstitions, in which he was evidently a firm believer. Mr. Quickit, after contradicting everybody all round, admitted that he never could see the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* without a thrill of terror. And he added that he was inclined to think Shakespeare knew what he was about when he introduced supernatural agents into so many of his plays. “ Ghosts, you see,” said Mr. Quickit, rubbing his hands, “ ghosts are mixed up with human nature, ha, ha, ha ! Now, the immortal bard knew something about human nature, gentlemen. I don’t undertake to say positively that there are such things as ghosts, you understand ; but I’ll stake my head on this,—that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of us believe in ’em ! ”

"I don't believe in 'em," said Robert Doery, sturdily.

"Oh yes, you do! Oh yes, yes, yes, Mr. Doery, ha! ha! ha! To be sure, to—be sure! You may think you don't, but you do."

"Not a bit of it. I never did. I've no taste for wonders. I never cared for cock-and-a-bull stories even when I was a little chap."

"Aha! no? Dat is bat, my dear Mr. Bobby, very bat!" said Papa Czernovic.

"Bad or good, it's true. But I don't think it's bad not to like being humbugged."

"Ah, but my dear Mr. Bobby, it is not good for de artist to despise de vonderfool. No; de vonderfool is de life of de artist."

"Ah! Well, I ain't going to swallow a lot of old wives' tales."

"Look here, my dear Mr. Bobby, I am old, and I have seen many *menschen* and much places. And I have washed dem all wiz my eyes. Ja! Now, I tell to you dat if you did love de vonderfool what you can't understand,—I don't say exactly *belief* it wiz your cold head, but *love* it like de *kinder*, de little children do,—you would paint more better pictures. Even when he paint a stool and a table, it is better for de artist dat he love de vonderfool!"



"Hear, hear, Mr. Churneywig!" cried Quickit. "Very good, ha, ha! Ve—ry good!"

"Oh, that's all gammon," said Bob, a little nettled. "I know what that kind of talk means. If you can paint a stool and a table as they really are, you needn't bother yourself about the wonderful."

"But tables as dey really is isn't art, my dear Mr. Bobby!" said Papa Czernovic, excitedly. "If we was to sing de Moldavian melodies as dey really is—*ach bewahre!* You would fill up your ears with woollen!"

"Well, I know which is the most difficult, a jolly sight! A chair out of perspective might be more 'wonderful' than a chair in perspective, perhaps. But a child with a slate could do the one, and it takes some training and industry to accomplish the other."

"It's rather a big subject, Bob, and I don't think you and Herr Czernovic will quite settle it to-night," said Demayne.

"Anyhow, I reckon the wonderful ain't to be talked away," observed Flagge. "It's hovering around us, and above us, and inside of us——"

"And below us, eh?" put in Mr. Quickit.

"And below us. Yes, sir. And we've got to talk a pretty considerable amount before

'we're a going to eliminate the wonderful out of the universe ! ”

“ Well, but, Dr. Flagge, I suppose you don't believe all you hear of these spirit-tappings, tippings, and tomfoolery, yourself ! ” said Doery. “ You're not so soft now, are you ? Come ! ”

“ There are impostors,” said Flagge, with cool candour.

“ I should think there were, too ! ”

“ But their imposture is founded on facts—spiritual facts. If there was nothing to imitate there'd be no imitators.”

“ Oh, I don't know that I quite go with you there ! ” said Mr. Quickit. “ No ; I don't feel so sure about that. If people will open their mouths for humbug, humbug will drop into their mouths. It's the one thing that may always be had for asking. Ha, ha, ha ! ”

“ Humbug won't do what I've seen done, Mr. Quickit.—Just ring the bell for some more hot water, won't you, Doery ? Try another cigar, Mr. Demayne. They ain't just the best I ever did smoke, but they're pretty fair.—Humbug won't float a human body seven foot from the floor, across a room in full lamp-light. At least, if any gentleman present is acquainted with the receipt for that 'humbug,'

I shall be happy to deal with him for it. I expect it would pay."

"Do you mean to say you've seen that, Dr. Flagge?" asked Doery.

"Guess I don't 'mean to say' any more'n I'm asked to, on the subject."

"Oh, but I'm asking, you know. I want to know."

"It wouldn't be any good to tell you what I've seen. It never is. Folks must see for themselves."

"Well, I wish I could, but somehow, I never can. I remember once at Huddersfield, when I was a little lad of twelve years old, a travelling mesmerist gave a lecture in the theatre. He had a clairvoyant, as they call it, with him. But, you know, it was all humbug. It was found out afterwards."

"That was humbug, too, was it? Well, I'd like the receipt, as I said before, for a humbug that'd make a person in the magnetic sleep describe things he never saw nor heard of in his waking condition!"

"Have you ever mesmerized any one who did that?"

"Well, I have known it occur under my influence. Yes."

"Where was it? In London?"

Flagge gave a quick look at old Czernovic, who was listening attentively. "No, it was not in London. It was way off among the Appanawchees," said he, gravely.

"Oh!"

"Did you not once mesmerize Nona?" asked Czernovic. "I dink she once say you mesmerize her, eh?"

"Who? Oh, that Greek young girl? Well, I don't know, but I may," answered Flagge, puffing out a thick cloud of smoke, and staring fixedly at the opposite wall.

"Was that Miss Balasso?" said Bob, eager to catechize. "I know Miss Balasso. I met her at Captain Peppiat's. Did you really mesmerize Miss Balasso?"

"I have mesmerized a good many people in my time. Take some more whisky and water."

But Bob would drink no more. And after making one or two attempts to cross-question Flagge, and finding him grown suddenly uncommunicative, the young man rose to go away.

"I come too, upstairs," said Papa Czernovic; "I go wiz you, my dear Mr. Bobby."

"I'm off to the theatre, sir," said Bob, buttoning his overcoat. "There's a night

rehearsal of the pantomime after the play, and I want to see the effect of the 'Meads of Asphodel,' with the gas full on."

"Aha! Dat is very good. Ja. Don't despise de vonderfool, my dear young friend, eh?"

"We shall be as wonderful as we can for the money," replied Bob. "Dutch metal and red foil make a grand effect at a distance. And, between you and me, the wonderful never ought to be looked at too close."

When Doery and Czernovic were gone, the other two made some show of taking their leave also; but Flagge pressed them to stay with hospitable warmth. "What's the hurry?" he said. "I guess you've nothing to do just now, Quickit. And if Mr. Demayne hasn't either, I don't see why we shouldn't see the end of the bottle."

Then he made up a roaring fire, drew the table nearer to it, replenished the tumblers with grog, and bade his guests make themselves comfortable.

"Queer old card, Czernovic," observed Demayne, lighting a fresh cigar.

"He's an original, is Churneywig," said Mr. Quickit. "He's seen an immense deal of the world—an—*im-mense*—deal! I don't

know where he hasn't been, and he knows a little of everything."

"Yes; there's amusing elements in the character of our friend Czernovic. And romantic elements," said Flagge.

"Humph! He don't look romantic," remarked Demayne drily.

"Well, sir; that's a fact. He does not look romantic. But there is a highfalutin element in Czernovic. There mostly is in Germans, far's I know."

"But Churneywig isn't a German," said Quickit. "Oh, dear, no; ha, ha, ha! Not at all so!"

"A Moldo-Wallachian, eh?" said Demayne.

"By no means! By *no* means. He is, I understand, a Russian by birth. His mother was a German. His father was—what is it they call it?—Sclavonic, eh? Ha, ha, ha! his name is queer, isn't it? Oh, Churneywig is a cosmopolitan party, out and out. As queer a fish as I ever came across; and I've known a few queer fishes in my time. Oh dear, yes!"

"Oh, as to queer fishes, I've a pretty large experience in that way myself. I don't suppose many men are as well acquainted with the back slums of Europe as I am!"

There was always considerable likelihood that when Demayne got (conversationally) into the back slums of Europe, he would linger there. And, indeed, he forthwith began to wander about in that unsavoury labyrinth with singular gusto. As Flagge let him proceed for some time without interruption, a result presently followed which that acute individual had foreseen; namely, that Mr. Quickit was stimulated, by emulation and grog, to narrate sundry strange experiences of his own. Flagge watched them both attentively, and threw in a word or two now and then, as a bait to encourage Quickit in his revelations. This had to be done with caution. But Quickit was made expansive beyond his wont by Bourbon whisky. There is, besides, a contagion in garrulity which few men can resist. Against Demayne's Continental adventures, Quickit matched experiences of the London loan office. And, looking at the dialogue as a mere game of brag, he did not come off second best. The strangest of strange things with foreign names and surroundings, was surpassed by the strangeness of strange things in the midst of our everyday life, unknown and unsuspected. It is, after all, more immediately impressive to be told that Smith's

shop, where we bought cheese and butter yesterday, has been burnt down, than to read of a whole village swallowed up by the latest South American earthquake. The imaginations of few of us are so strong on the wing as not to be sensible of the difference between one mile and a thousand.

In order to compete with Mr. Quickit in interest, Demayne ought to have restricted his flights to Soho, or the purlieus of the metropolitan theatres. But instead of that, he rambled on about Vienna, which was very flat after the local melodramas of Castor and Pollux; and, finally, Mr. Quickit decisively took the lead and kept it.

“Oh, Lord bless you, the people I’ve come in contact with in that parlour downstairs, would amaze you! Our transactions, to be sure, are chiefly with the sort of persons that I call small fry, ha, ha, ha! Small fry, you know; but bigger fish have nibbled now and then. Lady’s maids, now—you’ve no idea of the lady’s maids that have come here on behalf of their mistresses. Why, sir, we have advanced cash to get diamonds out of pawn to go to Court with; just got out for the day, and put back next day. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Pretty expensive kind of business, that,



Mr. Quickit? I suppose Castor and Pollux didn't forget to make them pay for their diamonds?"

"Not at all, sir. I think we did it dirt cheap, all things considered. Then there was the baronet, sir; the baronet that lodged in these very rooms,—these i-dentical apartments. Why, he could walk into Her Majesty's Drawing Room, and was hand and glove with the nobility. And yet a relation of his—the circumstance only came out the other night—came to borrow twenty pound of us!—which wasn't twenty, either, by the time he got it. Came to borrow a small sum like that, of the Castor and Pollux, and all the time his rich relation was lodging overhead, and drawing his percentage on money put into the concern! And neither of 'em knew anything about the other's having dealings with us. That's the cream of the thing, sir. Oh, Lord bless you, talk of coincidences—the coincidences that have happened in that parlour alone, would fill volumes,—volumes! I often think that if I had time to write a novel, I could turn out something sensational that would astonish people;—and keep to facts all the while, too."

"Why don't you snatch a quarter of an hour now and then, Quickit, and give us a

novel?" said Demayne, with his woodenest expression of countenance. "It must be very easy. I think if it wasn't for the orthographical difficulties of the English language, I should write a novel myself. But it's the spelling that's so d—d difficult!"

Mr. Demayne's irony was lost on Quickit, whose tumbler Flagge had recently and quietly replenished.

"No, no; it isn't the spelling. Not at all, ha, ha, ha! Not—at—all. It's time that's wanting, sir. Minutes and hours; minutes and hours. But as far as incident goes—and *Co-incidence*, which is more, a great deal more—I could supply you *ad lib.*"

"Domestic dramas, I suppose, Quickit? Plenty of them, eh?" said Flagge.

"Not particularly domestic," returned the landlord, whose tendency to contradiction seemed aggravated by his potations. "I shouldn't style them peculiarly *domestic*, you know. Quite the reverse, ha, ha, ha!"

"I think the queerest thing I ever heard was that about the lady's-maid coming to borrow money for the diamonds," said Flagge.

"Oh, that's not the queerest thing, by any means. Oh dear, no! That kind of thing happens more often than you would suspect,

my dear sir, ha, ha, ha! Women—specially women in high life—are always up to some dodges. But the baronet, eh? a shrewd man, a wonderfully shrewd man! Such a head! And the way he managed to keep the Castor and Pollux in the background! I don't believe the big-wigs that he consorted with even knew where he lodged in town. No letters ever came for him here; all sent to the club, he told me. Close, eh?"

"Ah!" said Demayne, drawing his breath through his teeth, "your baronet's not the first man that hasn't cared to have his address known by his family when he was down on his luck in London. By George, in my own case——"

"Down on his luck? Good! Ha, ha, ha! Ve—ry good! Happy to hear from you again, sir! You never made a greater mistake in your life, Mr. Demayne. Down on his luck, eh? I tell you what, I wish I was down on my luck in the same way! He could have bought up our friends, Castor and Pollux, and never missed the money. I happened to know of one or two investments of his whilst he was living in my house, and they all turned up trumps, every one! Down on his luck? Ha, ha, ha! Positively that's the funniest

mistake. I've often wondered who got all the old boy's property. He made a will when he was in my house—in these drawing-rooms—this i-dentical and actual apartment, sir—and I witnessed it.”

“Did you, by G——?” exclaimed Flagge, pitching the end of his cigar into the fire with a sudden movement.

Quickit drew himself up with slightly inebriated dignity. “Yes, Dr. Flagge, I did, and I don't see what reason you have to doubt my word, sir.”

“You witnessed the will, did you? Why, then, of course you do know where all the property went! No need to wonder about the matter, eh?”

“I am sorry to contradict you, sir—very sorry, ha, ha, ha! But I will simply answer, it's nothing of the sort, sir! People do not read a will when they witness it! At least, they needn't to. I didn't. Sir Rupert Lowry wasn't likely to take me into his confidence, sir.”

“Wheugh!” whistled Demayne. “So your baronet was Sir Rupert Lowry, was he? Odd enough; I happen to know something about that family.”

“And that, then, was made after the will that—of course you know the date, Quickit?”

“Of course I know nothing of the kind, Dr. Flagge! Ha, ha, ha! not at all! I wish you good night, Dr. Flagge. There’s a meeting of our directors to-morrow morning, and I must have my head clear and my papers ready. Too much good company *may* result in muddle, ha, ha, ha! Good company combined with Bourbon whisky, you know, eh? I’m fond of society myself; always was. But duty, sir, duty calls. In the words of the convivial and lamented poet, ‘And doth not a meeting like this make amends?’ and so on. But unfortunately it don’t make amends for neglecting one’s business! By no means, ha, ha, ha! By—no—means! I wish you gentlemen a very good night!”

Then Demayne also went away, and Flagge was left to his own reflections.

## CHAPTER VII.

It was a cold, damp, dreary December evening in London. The shop-windows still sparkled and shone in the main thoroughfares; but in the genteeler streets, where commerce has not intruded, or where a few fashionable tradespeople present merely a dingy wire blind with a name on it to the curious gaze of the vulgar, the darkness was scarcely mitigated by street lamps blinking through the haze.

On such an evening, one sitting lonely by the firelight, and listening to the distant sounds of life and traffic in the streets, might fancy himself drifting with shades on the swart Lethean flood just bronzed by flaring torches, and hearing the voices of the living come faintly from the upper world with the sadness of an eternal farewell. The past, with its heart-wringing pathos, seems so near to us. The ghostly shades of vanished friends, of

those dearer than friends, flicker amid the lights and shadows on the wall. A distant rattle of hoof and wheel conjures up some yearning memory of lighted rooms, of cheerful gatherings, and smiling faces—never more to smile on us or on each other. A voice, a foot-step on the pavement, a laugh, a cheerily shouted greeting or farewell, can fill our eyes with tears. That which might have been—that which was, and is no more—these, these are with us as we sit lonely by the firelight on a winter's evening; whilst that which is—all the vast, surging, seething tide of life in the great city, flows past as with a sound made up of many voices, like the sound of the dread and infinite seas—"deep calling unto deep."

So sat Mary Lowry at the close of that drear December day. But, although lonely, she was not alone. Enone, crouched on a low stool by the fire, rested her chin on her clenched hands, and stared with her wonderful eyes into the red heart of the glow. Neither had spoken for a long time. The twilight had died outright, and the unshuttered windows had grown to be mere black panels in the fitfully illumined wall.

Enone's voice broke the silence, with low,

vibrating tones. "I have been reading a book about Indian creeds," she said; "and I wish I could believe in *Nirvana*."

"Enone! That is extinction, is it not?—annihilation?"

"It is rest," sighed Enone, with her eyes still fixed on the intense core of the fire.

"Nay; not so. Rest implies surely a sensation of pleasure in repose. *Nirvana* will not give you this. But I grieve to hear you talk so."

"I shock you?"

"Well,—yes; in a sense, you shock me."

"And that means that you feel angry with me?"

"No, Enone; it does not mean that."

"Does it not? At school, when Miss Crib said she was shocked, it meant that she was cross, and scolded," replied Enone, with curling lip. "Oh, but I know their cant. Those good kind ladies who were 'shocked' if they found out that I—a poor, wandering foreigner, a little shabby girl who taught music for food and shelter—had a soul inside me, a brain to think, a heart to aspire; I know them well. It did not shock them that I was helpless and friendless, as they thought. It shocked them that I did not lick their



charitable fingers, offering me a bone, as a dog might lick them."

After an instant, she added abruptly, "But I know that you are not like those women. You have nobler feelings. Yes, I know it, and I will not seem to lie even by silence."

There was a long pause. The fire cracked and flickered. A strong, swift footstep beat rhythmically on the pavement outside, passed, grew fainter, and was gone.

Then said CEnone with a weary sigh, "*Nirvana!* To be blown out like a flame! That is what it means, they say. Then it would be ended—all ended, in thick, soft darkness."

"My child, such thoughts are not natural to your age. Youth means hope. You are not well, CEnone."

"Not well! Why do you use that common prate? Are there no ills but ills of the body? Are there no pains that physic cannot touch? I think you English do but half believe in souls at all. If one has the heart-ache—'Give him drugs, or baths, or change of air!' That is the common cry. Give him *Nirvana*, I say—if you could but find the secret of that potion! Youth is hope? Perhaps. But what makes youth? Not to have lived only

a few years on earth : not that ! I think one may feel the weariness of centuries at seventeen."

"I think not. But one may feel the weariness of seventeen, and have only the strength of seventeen to endure it," answered Mary, quietly.

"Ah, you don't understand. You are happy."

Mary stretched out her hand and drew the girl nearer to her. CEnone passively obeyed the impulse, and sat down on the rug close to Mary's feet ; but she kept her face still turned towards the fire.

"CEnone, I think that in youth troubles seem the harder to bear because we are apt to think that such a burden was never laid on mortal before. We are lost in contemplation of our own woes ; but our woes are not the only ones."

"But it cannot comfort one to know that others suffer ! I have heard that preached by some of your good people. It seems to me merely barbarous !"

"It is not that the sufferings of others should comfort *you*, but that there is blessing and healing in the thought that you may comfort *them*, CEnone."

Enone put up her hand behind her head, and took Mary's fingers in her own. It was a rare and significant action with her, for she had an almost morbid shrinking from the touch of most persons, and she usually refused to conform to the custom of shaking hands, saying that there were so many hands whose contact made her shudder.

"I knew a girl once," said Mary, "who lived a quiet country life amongst quiet country people. Her pleasures were simple and sweet; her duties, quite plain, and clear. You would have thought that there could come nothing very hard or difficult into such a life; it seemed fenced and hedged round to be always safe and tranquil. But there did come a time when duty was no longer plain—when she had to grope and struggle unassisted to find the right. She had no mother. She was young. She wanted to be happy after her own fashion, but it could not be. Well, just now as I—who cannot, you say, understand you because I am so happy—sat here in the dimness, and watched the firelight make strange pictures on the wall, it seemed as if all my youth, my lost youth, came back, or its ghost came. My mother, who loved me so fondly—my father in his sad old age—he loved

me too, poor father—the brother who used to lead me by the hand and lift me on his pony when I was a little toddling child, and he was a bright handsome schoolboy—the friends I can remember all my life—some one—some one who was dearest of all—the dead hopes, the forgotten pleasures, the sunshiny summer day, the cheerful winter evenings, the very notes of an old fiddle on which they used to scrape out Sir Roger de Coverley for us young ones to dance to at Christmas—all the sights and sounds flowed out of some hidden corner of my heart as if a well-spring of tears had been touched there. What set it flowing? I don't know. A distant voice in the street beyond—the glint of the firelight—the sense of a great busy world outside there that cares nothing for me—who shall say?"

"I did not know *you* had ever been so sorry!" said Enone, simply.

"Yes; I have been sorry. I am often sorry. But, Enone, I don't invoke *Nirvana*! There may be some one whom I can help."

"Oh, if there were any one I could help—and yet perhaps I should not do it if it were very hard. I don't know. I used to feel so brave I could trample on myself, I thought. But now sometimes I—I am afraid."

"Afraid?"

"I didn't know how hard life was. It is so different thinking to be heroic, and being it."

"Poor child!"

"And then,—you don't know what it is to feel so terribly alone as I do. Sometimes it comes on me with a strange kind of dread. It is like a dream I have had of being on a little barren rock with the sea roaring all around me. The sharp hard rock is dreadful; the sea is more dreadful; and the loneliness! You would grasp at any hand—you would clutch at any living thing, when you feel so. And yet, if the only hand held out to you makes you shudder to touch it——! Oh, to sleep sound, and forget it all!"

"Ænone, tell me the truth. Is there any one whom you are afraid of—who persecutes you?"

Ænone drew her hand away from Mary's, and pressed it tightly against her own forehead, but she did not speak.

"If you will have confidence in me, I may help you; and you have other friends who can protect you more efficiently than I can."

Ænone only shook her head uneasily from side to side.

Mary made an effort to overcome a certain

shy constraint she felt in speaking of Vincent Maude to C  none. She laid her fingers softly on the girl's rich coils of hair, and said, "One of your best friends thinks that Dr. Flagge's influence is bad for you, and oppresses you. If you were to say one word to Major Maude, I am sure he would release you from that man's persecution—for I fear he does persecute you."

"No, no; I can't speak to him. No; don't say any more of that. It would only drive me to—no, say no more of that, I *pray* you."

"Shall I speak to him?"

C  none made a quick gesture of dissent.

"Or to Lady Lowry?"

"What can you say to Lady Lowry?"

"Nay, it is for you to tell me what to say. If you are distressed by the influence of that man, and will say so frankly, Lady Lowry will cease to bring you into contact with him."

"Dr. Flagge has more feeling for me than Lady Lowry. She has no feeling. But I do not want her to have any for me."

"My child, don't let a foolish pride prevent you from accepting advice and assistance."

"Pride is not foolish;—not pride in strong,

noble feelings. I must be proud. It is all I have. If I were not proud, I should die."

The pale wan face, the feverishly blazing eyes, the emaciated hands clenched forcibly together as she spoke, made a pathetic commentary on CEnone's words.

Mary shook her head. "Don't lean on pride, CEnone," she said gravely. "It has a sharp point, and will pierce you like a lance."

The two sat silent again for a long time. It was a black night outside, and the fire had burnt low within the room. The handle of the door was turned softly, and two persons came in, conversing as they entered. "It is a most important discovery," said a woman's voice. "I always was sure of it, though. I felt it. It was a regular presentiment, you know! Poor, dear old man, think what his feelings must have been all this time! You must not breathe one word to Miss Lowry at present. Do you hear? Not one word! I think myself——"

"Sarah! You don't see us! I am here with CEnone."

"La! bless my heart, Mary, how you did startle me! Enough to bring on palpitation. What on earth are you sitting in the dark for?

Do ring for lights!" And my lady sat down with her hand pressed to her side.

The other person who had entered the room was Dr. Flagge. He now stepped forward and rang the bell. There was a short pause. Then Lady Lowry said in a complaining tone, "I cannot understand people liking to sit like this. The firelight always did make me feel dull. And I declare when I hear the muffin-bell in the streets before the lamps are lighted of an evening, it gives me such a lowness of spirits that I don't know what to do with myself. But some people don't feel things in that way."

Mary rose and left the room, with a very slight and haughty salutation to Flagge as she passed him. At the door she turned and said, "Rosamond is coming into my room to read with me for an hour before dinner. Will you come too, Enone?"

"Yes," answered Enone. "I will come." But she did not move.

A servant who appeared with a lamp informed his mistress that Mr. Wigmore was downstairs in the boudoir, and wanted to say one word to her ladyship.

"Shall I show him up here, my lady?" asked the man.



“No; I’ll go down to him. Dear, dear, everything comes at once! Go and give my compliments, and say I am coming. Dr. Flagge, don’t you go till I have seen you again. I want *particularly* to speak to you. Wait here.”

As the door closed behind her Ænone rose slowly and made as if she were going too. Flagge stretched out his hand with a gesture half of command, half of entreaty. “Stay, Miss Nony,” he said. And she stood still, looking at him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"I wish you didn't run away from me so often," said Flagge.

"I have not run away. I do not run away; that is for cowards."

"Oh, I know you've spirit enough for an army of heroes; real ancient Greek spirit! But what I mean is that you *feel* like running away all the time, and that hurts me, more'n you think for."

She stood looking at him in a dreamy way, and neither spoke nor moved.

"Look here, Miss Nony, just set yourself down there for one minute, and let me say what I want to say—if I can. 'Tain't so easy, but it's got to be said."

Enone obeyed him mechanically, as it seemed, and seated herself in the large chair beside the hearth which Mary had occupied. Flagge sat down too, but not close to her; he sat so that he could look full into her face as he spoke. But he did not avail himself of the

advantage of the position, for his eyes drooped and wandered, and he showed symptoms of nervousness. After a few seconds he began : " See now, Miss Nony, the chief thing is that you've got to believe in the truth of what I'm going to say to you. It *is* the truth. But first I'll ask you a question. You're not going back to that schoolmistress, Miss Cribb, I'm told. Is that so ? "

Cenone bowed her head.

" Well, then—that's the first thing. Yes, that's the first thing."

He stopped hesitating in a confused manner, very different from his usual self-assured glibness. " Why do you give that up ? It was a living. You earned your bread there, and something over."

" I can earn my bread by private pupils."

" But Miss Cribb's was a home. I wonder at you, Miss Nony, with your feelings of independence——"

" I earn my bread here. I teach Rosamond."

" What do the Czernovics say to it ? "

" What matters what they say ? I am not accountable to them—nor to you."

" Don't flash out on me," said Flagge, almost humbly.

The flash had been a very brief one, for CEnone almost immediately fell back into the dreamy, languid manner she had shown at the beginning of the interview.

"No, I know you ain't accountable to me. But I'm behind the scenes here. I know these people. I know Lady Lowry's character, the real nature of her, as you can't know it, and I tell you that all she wants is to make a catspaw of you. She wants to know what the spirits say to you; that's all. Soon as her turn's served, you won't be welcome here long."

CEnone roused herself with an apparent effort to answer him with some energy. "I will not be catechized," she said haughtily. "Why should you venture to speak to me as you do? If I am alone in the world, at least I will take the benefit of it as well as the pain; I will follow my own mind, and not another's. There is no reason why you should interfere to question me—no reason why I should answer you!"

"As to your answering—that's as it may be. As to my questioning—there is only one reason for it, but that's a pretty strong one." He paused for an instant, and his eyes met hers. The latter did not drop, but remained

looking full, at him with a strange expression. There was a kind of solemn, self-forgetting intentness in those eyes, and yet they conveyed in some indescribable way a sensation of lurking, latent dread. Flagg's gaze fell before them. He began plucking nervously at the silver buttons on his fantastic jacket as he proceeded: "It's a pretty strong reason—just about the strongest a man can have. I love you, Nony, and I s'pose you knew it afore I spoke."

She seemed to draw herself together and grow smaller, like a shrinking bird, but her eyes remained on Flagg's face.

"You did know it, Nony, didn't you?"

"I did know what you were going to say."

"Guess there's never a woman that don't know *that* secret before it's told out to her in words. But you're honester than the rest, and you own it."

"I should have known what you were going to say, *then*, whatever it might have been."

"Well—since you knew what was coming and didn't stop me—I hope—I hope you don't altogether dislike to hear it, Nony."

"Why do you say it?"

He had been leaning forward to speak to her with his elbows resting on his knees, but

at this query he fairly started back. Enone was perfectly quiet, serious, and intent. Her face was white, her widely-opened eyes glittered. So strange a manner of receiving a declaration of love might have disconcerted a more massive-natured man than Flagge. It disconcerted him greatly. The first thing he did was to mutter a deep oath under his breath; it was merely his unpremeditated, almost instinctive way of expressing emotion, and he was really moved.

“By the Lord above, Nony,” he said, “I believe you are a kind of sprite without human feelings! I wonder does red blood run in your veins!” Then after an instant he burst out vehemently, striking his clenched hand against a little table near him. “Why do I say it? Because it’s been burning inside of my heart this long time, and it had got to be expressed. Look you here, Nony, I don’t say but what at first I sought after you just because you had a sensitive temperament favourable to the mesmeric developments. You were ‘a good subject,’ and I didn’t go beyond that. Not but from the very first I was kind of attracted to you, and that you were different in your influence on me from any woman I’d ever seen. And ’twasn’t

long 'fore I found that you were just simply the only woman in the world for me. I couldn't explain why, p'raps. There may be handsomer, cleverer, better-humoured girls—I dunno. But I do know that I never turn my eyes to look after 'em, whilst when you're in the room I don't only see you all the time, but I see nothing else. The world's just full of you, Nony! Is that love or ain't it? Answer, you!"

"Yes," she said, very faintly, rather forming the word with her lips than sounding it with her voice.

"'Why do I say it?' Because I want you to take right hold of my hand and trust me. I want you to know there's some one in the world doesn't look on you as a music machine, or a mesmeric machine, or a machine to talk French or German. Some one that'll put you first in the whole round earth, and all the others a hundred miles behind you, let 'em be duchesses or any other d—d humbug they like! I've had a rough life, and lived with rough men, but I know God Almighty's patent of nobility when I see it. There's some as don't, I tell you."

If Flagge had schemed with industrious cunning to hit on a form of flattery which

should incline CEnone Balasso to listen to his suit, he could have found none better adapted for his purpose than this. The passion in his voice and his eyes was not simulated; only there was a certain dramatic instinct in the man—a kind of imitative sympathy—which impelled him to become, as it were, an accomplice of all vanities and weaknesses and self-esteem in those whom he wished to influence. His divining-rod was quiescent near many buried treasures, but it seldom failed to vibrate towards a hidden fault.

As he spoke, many varying expressions passed over CEnone's mobile face. First the intentness of expectation changed to disturbed surprise; then two bright spots of colour dawned on her white cheeks; lastly there stole into her great glittering eyes a dewy softness which veiled their lustre somewhat, but made them more wondrously beautiful than ever. There was still the old lurking look of fear, but it was mingled with compassion.

“ Oh, do you really care so much for me ? ” she said in the tone of one reluctantly acknowledging a sorrowful truth, and her face and her voice seemed tremulous with a new and adorable gentleness.



"Care for you, Nony! When you look so I feel as if I could lie right down and die at your feet."

He was pale with passion, and leaned back in his chair, pressing his hands across his eyes.

"I thought you were not speaking the truth at first, and I hated you. I thought you wanted to keep your influence over me. I am useful to you. They say I am useful to you, and that your influence is bad for me," said Enone, uttering her genuine thoughts with a crude, almost cruel, candour. But still the softness of her face and voice was exquisitely sweet, although her words seemed bitter.

Flagge removed his hands from his eyes. "They say! And I s'pose you believe what they say before me."

"No, not now. I think you do not always speak the truth. But I believe what you say now. I wish I did not believe it!"

"Nony!"

"Yes, I do. If I did not believe it, I should not feel sorry for you. It is very hard to love a person who cannot care for you. I am sorry. Life seems all sorrow, I think."

"But it needn't to be!—not *all* sorrow. Listen here, Nony. The words seem just

bubbling in my heart till I can't speak 'em. They kind of choke me. I wish there was one word, one great full syllable that 'ud say all I want to, and I could cry it out so as you'd feel it in every fibre of you. Listen here : you don't care for me as I care for you, nor you can't. 'Tain't in nature. Well, I know it. I'm resigned to it. I've lived down in dark sorts of depths fathoms below your sphere. You're one of them white-winged kind of creatures that seem as if they can't take a soil more'n a swan can. But you might take me up higher with you, if you would, Nony. I know you might. You say I don't always speak the truth—well, I ain't a going to lie to you, anyhow. No, I don't always speak the truth; 'twouldn't suit most folks if I did. My aristocratic customers like lies best—a deal best. But when 'they say' that my influence over you is bad, they—well, for your sake, Nony, I'll say they're *mistaken*, that's all. Influence! The fools, *which way is the influence?* Why, Nony, don't you see that I've lost the power I had over you?"

She started, and uttered a barely audible exclamation of surprise.

"There, I've said it, and it's the truth; I won't take it back. I could no more mag-

netize you now than I could magnetize that bronze statue a-horseback outside there."

"How can that be?"

"I only know it is. I haven't said so to Lady Lowry. She thinks my power over you is as strong as ever. P'raps I might have deceived you yourself about it—for a bit longer, at any rate."

"But is it true? Are you sure?"

"Will you let me try?"

He made one or two passes, but his hand trembled, and his glance faltered. Enone's eyes were fixed on his, scrutinizingly. Suddenly Flagge dropped his hand and passed his handkerchief across his forehead. "I can't do it, Nony," he said. "Your friends needn't be afraid of my influence over you. I guess it's *my* friends have got to be afraid—or would be if I had any."

There was an appeal to her compassion in the words and the tone which moved her powerfully.

"I know what it is to be friendless," she said. "I have been friendless as long as I can remember. Oh, I don't mean that I have not found kindness,—from the Czernovics and others. But friends—that is different."

"You've got one now, Nony. See, now, I

ain't a going to boast about what I can do for you—though something a man that loves a woman as I love you can always do to help her through life—but only think what you can do for me! Money I know you don't care for, but I can work for both of us. I've made some cash since I been in this country. And I can make more. If you'll just throw me down one crumb of hope to live on, even if you do it no kinder than you'd throw a bone to a starving dog, I'll wait, and work, and you shall see if I don't make a home for you. Beyond seas if you like. Why shouldn't we go right away from all the lies and the humbug and the insolence of fools not worthy to loose your shoe-tie, and make a life for ourselves? Why, Nony, if you'd like it, why shouldn't we go to Greece, to your own beautiful country? I'd do that for you and more, if you'd only let me! I've a strong will, Nony, and I can be smart enough, too, with the outside world. I have been smart enough up to to-day, to do whatever I'd a mind to, sooner or later. And think what I might achieve when I'd not only a mind, but a heart to it! Let me take you away from them all, and put you in a shrine of your own, and worship you. I know I ain't your equal. I

know I'm ignorant of book-learning compared to you, but anyhow I've had mind enough to appreciate you,—and that's more'n these superfine folks have got to, with all their education. Nony, just say one little word to give me a hope, and I'll wait, and be dumb, and patient, and not ask to touch your hand or the hem of your garment, until you give me leave!"

CEnone was not made of such stern stuff that she was insensible to this fervid wooing. It is in the eternal nature of things that to be loved and woo'd is so intensely sweet to the womanly heart, that even a simulated love, a false idol, may chance to be accepted without question. Every woman has an ideal of Love in her soul; and she will often bow down before his image carved out of base stuff, as a Spanish peasant worships some blackened tawdry doll, set up as a symbol of the pure and radiant Madonna. CEnone had an intense craving for sympathy and admiration, a fantastic pride which exaggerated her claims to these on imaginary grounds, and a shy modesty which made her distrustful of her purely personal merits; she nourished a secret romance of unrequited passion; she was jealous, sensitive, affectionate,—and seventeen

years old. What wonder that this man's passionate words, made eloquent by looks and tones, swayed her as a reed is swayed by the wind? There was no longer a marble coldness on her cheek, a proud gleam in her eye. She was flushed, and trembling, and the tears ran down her face and glittered on her long black lashes. Flagge paused in the torrent of his words and looked at her. "I never thought to be glad to see you cry, Nony," he said, "but I thank God that you do feel for me. You believe me, Nony. You can't help it."

"I believe you; yes, I do believe you. And I thank you. I am not ungrateful. But I am sorry,—oh, so grieved and sorry!"

"As to gratitude, there can be no talk of that from you to me. As well expect the sun to be grateful because we see he shines! I don't flatter you, Nony, as some might. I don't tell you you are the most beautiful creature in the shape of a woman that ever walked this earth. I dunno, scarcely, whether you're beautiful or not. But I love you, that's all. You've a power over me that no human being ever had yet. Instead of me controlling you and drawing you, by imagination, or will, or anything else, it's you control me. You

might set your little foot right down on me this minute. I'm at your mercy."

Again, no cunning premeditation could have taught him a subtler appeal to her than this unconditional surrender. In her young ardent worship for all that was heroic, to be outdone in magnanimity seemed to her a most grievous burthen.

"I wish I could do anything to show you that I am grateful, and—and—to make amends for having so much misjudged you," she said. "I *wish* I could! But for loving you—I cannot."

"Will you let yourself be loved? I'm more than willing to strike that bargain! Nony, won't you give me one kind word?"

He drew nearer to her as he spoke, and she shrank away with a movement which was all the more significant because it was wholly involuntary.

"The kindest word would be to tell you to go away and never see me any more. I can never love you,—never, never! And I would give ten years of my life—no; that says nothing,—I would live ten years longer to make you not love me."

Her shrinking movement of repulsion, far more than her words, stung him so intolerably

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that he was driven beyond all self-command. "Do you think I don't understand it all?" he said, fiercely. "It ain't so much that you don't love me—I didn't expect you should, all at once—as that you do love some one else. You're just casting yourself down at the feet of that hulking Englishman,—a fellow who'd think you barely good enough to be a lady's maid or hired companion to the women that have the honour and glory to belong to *him*!"

He knew even while he was speaking the words that they would outrage and offend her,—perhaps beyond forgiveness. Nevertheless he spoke them; being goaded by a desperate impulse of pain and anger. But when he ceased and looked at her, he was stricken with a sudden fear at what he had done.

All the softness and warmth had gone out of Enone's face. It looked white and frozen; and her eyes seemed to see something which filled them with terror. And truly she did see something which terrified her, but it was with her mind, and not with her bodily vision that she saw it. She looked into the future as one looks down into some dreadful gulf;—not upward, nor onward. Was this what life had in store for her? Not heroism and noble



sorrows, and a poetic ideal, and self-sufficing disdain for the mean pettiness of the vulgar—whether high or low; not these, no; but to be coarsely ridiculed, or coarsely pitied; to be exposed to hear the sacredest feelings of her soul discussed with brutal frankness;—for who was she, and what was her place in the world, that men should pay her the hypocrisy of respect?—to fall from her fancied height, below the level of the humblest woman who had father, husband, or brother to protect her!

Morbid and overstrained as such thoughts were, they were none the less real to C  none. None the less did they pierce her to the heart. None the less bitter and crushing was the mortification she suffered, because, with the egotism of youth and inexperience, she exaggerated both its nature and extent. For although she had led a poor precarious life,—although she had consorted with nomad tribes of the artistic Bohemia,—although her home had been for years with people whom the respectable of the world called “vagabonds,” and who accepted the appellation with a smile and a shrug, yet she had hitherto been as safe from insult as the most daintily-nurtured lady in the land. Poverty she had known by her

own experience; debt and duns she was familiar with in the experience of those around her; sorrow and heartache had come as she grew out of childhood; but the bitterness of personal humiliation she had never known until that moment. The coarse, blunt phrase in which Flagge had spoken his thought, even more than the knowledge that he had the thought, seemed to strip her poor secret of all glory and beauty, and to leave it an object of contempt and ridicule. She felt as if her very heart had been bared to an intolerable glare of eyes.

There was silence for perhaps a minute. Then Ænone rose up from her chair, and moved towards the door.

“Nony!” said Flagge, and he looked at her as if he were pleading for his life, “won’t you speak one word?”

She did not even turn her eyes on him, but advanced towards the door. But she seemed to move with an uncertain step as if she were dizzy.

“You won’t leave me like this, Nony! You won’t be so right down cruel and heartless! My God! You drive a man clean mad, and then you punish him for not being in his cool senses?”

She had reached the door by this time, and was fumbling with the handle.

“Listen, Nony, I take back what I said. I’ll ask your pardon on any terms if you like. Can’t you understand that if I didn’t love you desperate I should never have been driven to say what I did !”

He stretched out his hand to detain her, but at the same instant she succeeded in opening the door, and swaying heavily forward would have fallen to the ground if she had not been caught by Percival Wigmore, who appeared at the head of the staircase in the wake of Lady Lowry.

## CHAPTER IX.

"HILLOA!" exclaimed the gallant Percy. "Miss Balasso! She's fainted. Jove! it is lucky I came up in the nick of time, or she'd have gone headlong down the stairs as safe as the day! We'd better get her on to a sofa here. And haven't you got some *sal volatile* or something?"

What with surprise, obesity, and the tightness of his garments, Percy was panting and puffing under the effort to carry even *Ænone's* light weight into the drawing-room, when Flagge swooped down on him, lifted her from his arms, and placed her on a couch. It all passed so quickly that Lady Lowry followed them into the drawing-room in a confused state of mind as to what had happened.

"What is it? Good gracious! I can't understand such extraordinary ways. It's a mercy that she didn't fall on me, and knock me backwards down the stairs!" And my

lady, overcome by the image she had conjured up, sank into a chair with very decided symptoms of requiring the general attention to be diverted from Enone to herself.

Flagge remained on his knees beside the motionless girl, fanning her white face with a hand-screen, whilst Percy rang the bell and issued orders for water and sal volatile, and bustled about very zealously.

"I understand all about how to treat a swoon. My wife used to be very subject to that sort of thing,—*attaque de nerfs*, eh! Air! that's the grand thing. Lots of air, don't you know? And just sprinkle the forehead with fresh water, sharp—like this!" And Mr. Wigmore, suiting the action to the word, flicked a considerable quantity of ice-cold water into the face of the majestic Lobley, who stood by with an official air; causing that functionary to start and gasp, to the detriment of his dignity.

"Eh? La, bless me! Bad shot, eh? Look here, Flagge! It's no good dabbing her forehead with a wet handkerchief. You must send the water with a sudden dash, don't you know? This way!"

Lobley on this occasion made a skilful and hasty dive to avoid the shower; and conse-

quently Mr. Wigmore's efforts resulted merely in the drenching of the sofa cushions,—a consequence which the ducal one found himself able to regard with well-bred indifference.

All this while Lady Lowry was left to the attentions of her maid, who, being a very superior young person, and not inspired by the masculine sympathy with girlishness and black eyes which softened Lobley's bosom towards Miss Balasso, was in the habit of treating that young foreigner with distinguished disdain upon all occasions.

"I'm sure, my lady," she said. "*You* ought to lie down. Do take a few drops of sal volatile, my lady! You have become quite pale. I think persons might have more consideration than to startle your ladyship in that sort of way. Mr. Wigmore! Would you be kind enough to drop a little sal volatile into this tumbler for my lady?"

Thus appealed to, Percy relinquished his attempts to revive Enone, and hovered about Lady Lowry, casting, however, a sympathetic glance at the swooning girl from time to time.

"Shall I fan you?" he said to Lady Lowry. "Look here, this is the best way; you send a gentle current of air—so! But *you* don't feel faint, do you? You look all right!"

"My lady was deathly pale an instant ago, sir," put in the Abigail, with an air of virtuous protest.

"Talk of paleness, Lady Lowry, did you ever see any one look so pale as Miss Balasso, poor little thing! Just like marble, isn't she? And those black eyelashes of hers on her white cheeks—wonderful eyelashes, ain't they?"

"I think Miss Balasso has behaved with great want of consideration and proper feeling," said my lady deliberately.

"La! But she couldn't help fainting, don't you know?"

"If she felt indisposed she should have retired to her own apartment. She has a very nice bed-room next to Moore's" (Moore was Lady Lowry's maid), "and every comfort. And I think it would have been more becoming to go to it—much more becoming, than to upset a whole household in this way, and to startle me as she has done. My nerves are not strong enough to cope with this sort of thing, I can assure you, Mr. Wigmore," said my lady, somewhat loud of voice and flushed of cheek.

"Don't like my noticing the eyelashes!" thought Percival to himself with a complacent chuckle. He prided himself on his

knowledge of the sex, and was quite convinced that he understood all its little foolish jealousies. But he liked the feminine nature none the worse for attaching so much importance to manly admiration : not at all ! He was very indulgent.

At length Enone began to recover consciousness. At the first ripple of returning life which trembled across her face, Flagge rose up from his knees, and moved so as to be out of her sight when she should open her eyes. She did open them widely and suddenly, but for a second or two she did not appear to recognize any object before her.

"You should get her some brandy. Her pulse is very feeble," said Flagge in a low tone. The order had been anticipated by Wigmore, who, taking a small glass of cognac from Lobley, proceeded to pour a little of it down Enone's throat. "I think she's coming round all right now," said he kindly. "Poor little thing ! How d'ye feel now, Miss Balasso ? Don't move. Lie still a little bit longer. Nothing to be frightened at, you know. Just a sort of dizziness ! Don't be frightened !"

Her eyes were in truth full of a strange expression of terror, as she looked around her



as far as her range of vision could extend without turning her head. But after a moment she seemed reassured, for she closed her eyes with a little sigh of relief.

"She'll do now," said Wigmore. "Famous! Oh, I know exactly what to do for any one in a fainting fit. Dooood lucky I happened to come upstairs just in the nick of time, wasn't it, Lady Lowry?"

"Dear me, you said that before," returned my lady, brusquely.

"Lucky, I mean, because it saved you from a collision, don't you know? The poor girl was swinging forward as helpless as a log."

"Don't speak of it! It brings on palpitation even to think of what would have happened if she had come against me. I know I should have fallen. I dread the effect on Sir Cosmo when he hears about it. It will upset him frightfully,—frightfully!"

"Oh, do you think he'll mind—I mean so long as it didn't upset *you*, you know? Because it might have been worse, eh?"

"Dr. Flagge!" cried my lady, imperiously, "where are you going? You mustn't go away! I wish to speak with you particularly. I told you I wished to speak with you."

"I will wait for you downstairs, then," said

Flagge, pausing as he crossed the room. "It would disturb her again to see me just now. I can't stay here. She—I—the magnetic influence just overcame her for the moment—she's weak. You'll find me in your boudoir, if you want me." And Dr. Flagge went out of the room without further ceremony.

"Disturb *her*, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Lowry, almost breathless in her outraged dignity. "I don't understand what Dr. Flagge means by this sort of thing. It may suit the Dableys or the Petheringtons to take such liberties, but I don't approve of it in *my* house. Particularly not before the servants," added she, lowering her voice as she glanced across the room. "I assure you, Mr. Wigmore, I would not have had Dr. Flagge speak to me in that free and easy manner before Lobley for more than I can say. It looks so strange!"

"Oh, bless you, Flagge don't mean anything. It's no good blowing him up. He's a child of nature, don't you know? My idea is this—and I know something of life—either make up your mind to stand him as he is, or else kick him out. Of course a lady couldn't exactly do that; but you know what I mean! —Give him the cold shoulder, don't you

know? Oh, Flagge's a very amusin' fellow if you take him in the right way. It would be pleasanter if he didn't look quite so much like a galvanized corpse, pr'aps, but——"

"Goodness, Mr. Wigmore, how can you say such horrid things?"

"Well, but he does look ghastly, now don't he? Uncommon ghastly he looks to-day."

"What is to be done with Miss Balasso, if you please, my lady?" asked the maid. "I suppose she can't lie here on this sofa all night."

"Oh, don't bother her! Just let her be, poor child! She'll come round right enough if you leave her quiet," began good-natured Percy.

"Allow me, if you please, Mr. Wigmore," said my lady, majestically. "Miss Balasso cannot possibly be left quiet on the sofa in my drawing-room all the evening. Don't you think you could get up to your own room, Miss Balasso? It would be much better for you to make the effort, I'm sure."

"Yes," said Enone, faintly. Then she struggled up, and stood on her feet, looking round like a hunted frightened creature.

"Perhaps, my lady," said Lobley, "we could assist her as far as Miss Lowry's apart-

ment. There's a good fire in Miss Lowry's dressing-room, and I think Miss Balasso would be comfortable and quiet there, until she's able to get up as high as her own room, my lady."

This suggestion was acted upon. Wigmore insisted on giving CEnone his arm upstairs, whilst Lobley followed with the smelling-bottle and a phial of sal-volatile, and, thus escorted, CEnone was safely deposited in the care of Mary Lowry, who had been reading in her own room with Rosamond, and knew nothing of what had happened.

Then Wigmore took his leave, receiving a very cool farewell from my lady; and meditated as he walked homewards on the singular unreasonableness of the female nature when moved by jealousy. "It's so stoopid, too," reflected the youthful-hearted Percy, "because she's a devilish deal the prettier woman of the two. In point of fact that little Balasso ain't pretty at all:—bag of bones, poor little thing! My lady 'll come round in time. And she's really an uncommonly nice sort of woman. Don't set up for intellect,—in fact, don't bore one in any way. Sort of woman a fellow can get on with comfortably, if he only knows how to manage her."

Meanwhile the subject of these reflections descended to her boudoir, where she found Dr. Flagge pacing up and down, restless and agitated.

"How is she now?" he asked, as soon as he saw Lady Lowry.

That model of a genteel young matron found her patience in imminent danger of giving way altogether. "She? If you allude to Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge, I believe her to be very well,—and I don't feel at all sure that there has been much the matter with her at all. It's very interesting to faint away. And persons accustomed to public exhibitions may take that way of making themselves interesting for aught I know, when they find they don't excite attention in any other way!"

Flagge was tapping his fingers nervously on the table whilst my lady spoke, and did not appear to give that undivided attention to her words which she considered due to them.

"I think you ought to send for a doctor to see her," said he, looking up.

"Pray don't trouble yourself about Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge! There is a great deal too much fuss made about that young person. And I don't approve of it. Why should you

put yourself into such a state, pray? She isn't the first sickly young woman who ever fainted, I suppose!"

My lady was hot, and had lost the polite repose of manner which it was her aim to preserve. In a word, she had become subject to that infirmity from which not even the genteelst principles can entirely guard ladies of her character;—she was in a spiteful ill-temper. Her heat, however, had the effect of suddenly cooling Dr. Flagge. He became calm—at least outwardly,—watchful, and self-possessed, as usual.

"Well," said he, "I don't know as she is the first, nor I don't suppose she'll be the last, neither. But if we're not to attend to any sick folks except when they developè new and original symptoms, I guess the doctors might as well retire from business and take to coffin-making. However, see here, you'd better have Nony looked after. If she got a bad illness it might be awkward for you. Folks 'ud be sure to say that the mesmerizing and spiritism had overthrown her nervous system. There's your sister-in-law, would be one of the first;—and that hulking major,—and plenty more."

"Awkward for *me*?" said my lady, with her most stolid and wide-eyed look. "I don't see that!"

"Oh, but other folks would!"

"I'm not responsible to anybody for Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge. If Major Maude chooses to consider himself her guardian, he'd better look after Miss Balasso himself. I'm sure he makes a fuss about her that disgusts me."

"He does, does he? He's wonderfully kind, is Major Maude!"

"I wish he'd make up his mind to marry her, and take care of her altogether!"

"Do you? Well, I don't."

"Really? I suppose you've no particular wish on the subject one way or the other. But I've had enough of Miss Balasso for the present, Dr. Flagge, so, if you please, we'll drop the subject, and proceed to something of *importance*. You were just beginning to tell me, when we got upstairs and found Miss Lowry in the drawing-room, that you had reason to believe that Sir Rupert had actually made a will after that unjust one that was acted upon, and which I never believed in; and that you could put your hand on one of the witnesses who signed that will. Now, I wish to know who the witness is, where he

lives, and how long ago he signed the will—and, in short, *all* particulars.”

Before replying Flagge went to the door and opened it abruptly, so as to catch any eavesdropper who might chance to be near it. There was no one in the hall, however. The house was quite still. Flagge stood for an instant listening, and as he so stood, Mary Lowry's maid descended the stairs. Miss Balasso was much better, she said. Miss Lowry had kept her in her dressing-room by the fire, and thought that she would be well enough to come down to dinner at eight o'clock. Then Dr. Flagge returned to the boudoir, closed the door carefully; seated himself opposite to my lady, with his elbows on the table, and said:

“It's just as well to have a clear understanding, Lady Lowry. I understand you pretty well. I know what you want, both from what you've said yourself, and from what the spirits have told me about you. But you don't quite understand me. And what I want is nat'rally uninteresting to a lady of your beauty and exalted fashion. But, seeing that what I want has considerable more of interest for me than anything else just at present, and seeing, moreover, that you can't get what you



want without me, why, I've arranged a few indispensable conditions in my own mind, and before going any further into the business you want to know about—I'm just a-going to tell em' to you."

## CHAPTER X.

THE party that was assembled at dinner in Green Street that evening was anything but a cheerful one. Enone appeared at table. She showed great disinclination to be treated as an invalid, and declared that her indisposition had entirely passed away. But she looked ill, and her voice was faint and hollow ; and altogether, as Lady Lowry said, it was very trying to see that white face opposite to one when one was eating, looking more like a ghost than a creature of flesh and blood.

Mary Lowry was disturbed and ill at ease. She suspected that Flagge was in some way connected with Enone's strange and sudden prostration of strength and spirits ; but her conjectures only had reference to his mesmeric influence over the girl. She had never conceived the idea of his looking on her in any other light than as a pliable subject for his schemes and impostures. Mary had not honoured Dr. Flagge with very close atten-

tion; nor, indeed, had she been willing to do so, could she have had many opportunities of watching him, for ever since the "spirits" had banished her from the *séances* she had only met the medium casually for a few minutes at a time in her brother's house.

Rosamond was influenced by the air of general depression in the faces around her; and of the whole party, perhaps, Sir Cosmo came the nearest to being in his usual condition of mind. He ate his dinner almost in silence, but when the dessert came he began to talk.

"How are you now, Sally?" he said. "Better for your dinner? Take some more wine. Yes—nonsense! That claret won't hurt you. Miss Balasso, you nearly broke your own neck and my wife's too, I understand. Lady Lowry has been very nervous ever since she saw you coming down upon her through the air head foremost."

Enone looked at him with a face like that of a tragic Muse. "I did not hurt her?" she said. "I know nothing."

"No, dear, Mr. Wigmore caught you before you fell," said Rosamond.

"I believe we have found out a reason for Wigmore's existence," said Sir Cosmo, holding

up his glass to the light. "I have occasionally wondered what he could possibly have been created for; but now it's clear that his mission was to save Miss Balasso's life."

"I think he saved *me* quite as much as Miss Balasso, Cosmo."

"H'm! Then there are two reasons for his existence. By-and-by we shall discover that he was indispensable to the due working of the solar system."

"I shall always like Mr. Wigmore better from this time henceforward," announced Miss Rosamond, decisively.

"Really, Rosy," exclaimed her father, "that is very important indeed, and ought, if possible, to be communicated to Wigmore without delay!"

"Oh, I don't mind you laughing at me, papa;"—her cheeks grew very hot and red, however—"but I think Mr. Wigmore showed a great deal of kind feeling this evening. I never thought he had so much heart; he always seems so silly!"

"Upon my word, Rosamond, I think you ought not to be quite so presumptuous in judging of—of persons older than yourself!" said Lady Lowry.

"Oh, I know he's old enough, but——"

“Pray check that tendency to sauciness, Rosamond! I assure you it is vulgar! When I was your age I should not have dreamt of setting myself up to judge of people as you do.”

“I didn’t know I was setting myself up,” returned Rosamond. “I’m sure I thought everybody called Mr. Wigmore silly.”

Sir Cosmo upon this came as near to laughing as he ever did; that is to say, he smiled with closed lips, and uttered a series of little snorts at the same time. And my lady grew angry. “I know,” she observed, “that Mr. Wigmore is not liked or appreciated in some quarters, simply because he is my friend, and because he makes me the first consideration in my own house. As to being silly—I can only say that I find his conversation most entertaining—*most* so! And his manners have the stamp of high birth.”

Lady Lowry, with these words, rose majestically, and led the way out of the dining-room, but she intimated that she was not going upstairs at once. “You will excuse me, Mary,” she said; “I have some business to discuss with Cosmo. I shall perhaps not be able to join you in the drawing-room at all this evening.”

This prospect at once made Rosamond's face clear and brighten. And, to say truth, Mary also appeared to receive the intelligence with considerable cheerfulness. She went upstairs with the two girls, and my lady proceeded to Sir Cosmo's private den, in which he was in the habit of smoking and studying the sporting papers. By an odd perversity of things, whereas Lady Lowry's step-daughter and sister-in-law seemed not ill-pleased to get rid of her company, Lady Lowry's husband displayed some dissatisfaction at the prospect of having it.

"Can't you say your say by-and-by, Sally?" he asked. "Let me smoke my cigar in peace. You always make no end of a fuss about not being able to stand tobacco smoke."

But my lady declared that she could not, and would not, put off the saying of her say to any such indefinite period as "by-and-by." As to the tobacco smoke, she would endure it; stipulating only that it should proceed from some Russian cigarettes which her husband had, and not from a large and strong-smelling cigar. Sir Cosmo threw himself into a chair, with an expression of countenance compounded of a strong inclination to rebel, a lazy conviction that it wasn't worth while,

and an attempt to make it appear that he was having his own way and not being forced into taking any one else's.

Then my lady, having settled herself in an arm-chair as comfortably as circumstances would permit, began to narrate all that Flagge had said to her that afternoon.

"Now, it's no use, Cosmo, your making light of it, and turning up your nose, this time. The thing is a great deal too serious. You see there *was* a will made after that wicked one,—poor old gentleman, I ought not to say 'wicked,' though, for I'm sure he was played upon shamefully!—and the will was witnessed here in London, and the question now is, Where is it?" said my lady, summing up breathlessly.

"The question is, rather—Is it at all?"

"No, Cosmo. I'm as sure that that will was made as that I'm sitting here!"

Sir Cosmo was undeniably impressed by what his wife had told him. He had for some time past been allowing his avarice to gloat over the idea of possessing Lowry Place, and the twelve thousand pounds bequeathed to Mary. Sarah's strong faith infected him against—or at least without—his will. But he kept up a semblance of incredulous in-

difference. "Who gave this precious information to Flagge? How did he come by it?" he asked with a sniff.

"The spirits gave it to him, Cosmo."

"Fudge!"

"And they have told him all manner of things about Sir Rupert which he couldn't possibly have known or heard from any mortal. Why, when he has mesmerized Miss Balasso, Cosmo, she has described Lowry Place, and the dog, and Mary's room there, and the walnut-wood writing-desk, and everything, most wonderfully! And he says that it's chiefly Sir Rupert's spirit who communicates the information to her in her sleep. I suppose you don't think Miss Balasso—the Peppiats' *favourite* Miss Balasso—is an impostor, if you doubt Dr. Flagge?"

"The Peppiats are exactly the sort of people to be taken in by anybody, for that matter! But granting she's not an impostor, of course she only repeats what's in Flagge's mind, when she's in this mesmeric, cataleptic, or whatever-you-call-it condition. However, all that doesn't matter a straw. The thing is, Has this man got some real information, however he came by it, or has he not?"

"He has got some real information, and the



spirits gave it him," persisted my lady, with her own unassailable dogged firmness.

"H'm! But as to his terms, you know, they're preposterous!"

"They're rather dear, Cosmo. But if we got what he promises, it would be worth our while."

"I'm not going to buy a pig in a poke. I don't believe in his spirits, and so I should tell him plainly if I spoke to him. And I think that perhaps the better way would be for me to speak to him."

When her husband said this, Sarah felt that she had gained a great victory; for nothing short of some measure of belief in Flagge's revelations would have got the better of Sir Cosmo's natural and habitual indolence as to induce him to offer such a suggestion. She feared, indeed, that he might offend the medium by scoffing at his supernatural pretensions; but she reflected on the other hand that Flagge had shown himself eager to drive a bargain with her for further information, and her intelligence accepted the conclusion that he would not allow himself to be baulked of his purpose by anything so flimsy as fine feelings. She therefore encouraged her husband's idea, and urged him to visit the medium without delay.

Sir Cosmo "jibbed" a little at this. The coercion of immediate action was always galling to him; and he began to repent of his incautious words when he found that his wife intended him to carry them out. However, my lady was not easily baffled, and she did not leave Sir Cosmo to solitude and his cigar, until it had been arranged between them that he should drive to Flagge's lodgings immediately after breakfast on the following morning.

"I shall tell Lobley to order the brougham for ten o'clock, Cosmo," said she. And her husband, although he muttered sundry anathemas against the brougham, and Lobley, and Flagge, and things in general, felt that there would be no escape for him, and tacitly acquiesced in the arrangement.

As he was rolling down to Howard Buildings, Strand (where Mr. Quickit's house was situated), the next morning, Sir Cosmo found his nervous system rebellious even to the soothing influence of a cigar. He called himself a fool for embarking in such a business at all. And he prefixed an epithet to the word "fool" which was the measure of his mental disturbance. Sir Cosmo was one of those persons who find strong language almost

as efficacious in working off their passions, whenever the passion begin to boil over—in getting rid of superfluous steam, in short—as strong action. He was not likely to kick a man, let him be offended never so grievously, but he was pretty sure to lash out hard with his tongue, even for an offence which might not be very grievous. A volley of oaths had greatly relieved his pent-up feelings by the time he reached Howard Buildings. And when he alighted on Mr. Quickit's doorstep, he was, if not quite at his ease, at all events, to all outward appearance, as coolly disagreeable as usual.

He declined to send up his card, when invited to do so by the slatternly maid-servant who opened the door, but told the girl to say that a gentleman from Green Street wished to have a few minutes' conversation with Dr. Flagge. The girl hesitated for an instant, but she was impressed by the fact of Sir Cosmo's having arrived in a private carriage with a servant in livery; and, moreover, a rapid survey of the baronet had convinced her that this man's gloves and boots were not as the gloves and boots of most visitors to Howard Buildings. Good clothes appealed to the feelings of this slatternly young woman with

no less cogency than to the feelings of her superiors. So she set off to do the well-dressed gentleman's bidding without farther parley. Sir Cosmo followed her up the stairs, and when she opened the drawing-room door, and left it slightly open, he could see and hear what passed within.

Flagge was sitting at a round table covered with the remains of breakfast. He wore a large and showy dressing-gown of silk, wadded and quilted. But his uncombed locks and his unshaven chin were not in keeping with this smart garment. He held a half-smoked cigar between his finger and thumb, but it was not alight; and his whole expression and attitude as he sat staring at the fire denoted listless despondency.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, Dr. Flagge," said the maid servant, walking close up to his chair.

"Who is he, and what does he want?"

"Well, he wouldn't give his name, but said he was the party from Queen Street. I think he's a reg'lar swell. He come in a private brougham with a livery footman, and his boots is as shiny as shiny," returned the damsel, unconscious that the subject of this eulogy was so near her.

"I don't know anybody from Queen Street," began Flagge, when Sir Cosmo advanced into the room.

"Good morning," said Sir Cosmo, curtly. "Sorry to disturb you, but I should like to have a word or two with you. I shan't keep you long."

Flagge had only seen the baronet once before, but he recognized him immediately, and rising from his seat, held out his hand.

"Sir Cosmo! How do you do? I hope her ladyship is well. Please to take a chair right here beside the fire, won't you?"

"*Sir Guzman*," muttered the maid-servant to herself as she shuffled down the kitchen stairs, making a rhythmic tattoo with one slipper down at heel. "I knowed he was a swell!"

"What can I have the honour of doing for you, Sir Cosmo Lowry?" asked Flagge when the door was closed. He spoke in his habitual melancholy tone, with that peculiar inflection of remonstrance in it which has been noted before in these pages.

"I'm afraid it's very doubtful whether you can do anything for me, Mr. Flagge, but my lady thinks you can!" replied Sir Cosmo, with a sniff intended to imply that his words were to be accepted jocosely.

"Lady Lowry's a lady of uncommon powers of mind, Sir Cosmo. I guess you'd better think as she thinks. You won't go far wrong at that."

"H'm! Well—I suppose—of course you know what I've come for, Mr. Flagge?"

"Well, I know a good many things, Sir Cosmo, that's a fact. But I'm not sure as I'm able to define exactly what your motive for coming here this morning is; no, sir."

"H'm! Ha!" Sir Cosmo crossed one leg impatiently over the other. "That means you don't choose to speak first. I suppose I'd better state the thing in plain words, then."

"Why, I do suppose it might be conducive to a mutual understanding between us, Sir Cosmo."

"Well, then, in plain words, you have professed to my wife that you have certain information about a will made by my late father subsequently to the will which has been proved and acted upon. You profess that you will be able to obtain further information on the subject, and for obtaining that information and communicating it to us, you ask a sum of money. Is that a correct statement?"

"I b'lieve it ain't far wrong, Sir Cosmo."

"You're not fond of plain 'Yes' or 'No,' Mr. Flagge?"

"Well, sir, there's a baldness about 'em; yes, sir."

Sir Cosmo was considerably taken aback by the cool simplicity of this reply. He had an uneasy misgiving that he was being laughed at, and a strong desire not to betray that misgiving, which together made him uncomfortable. "I presume you are aware that in asking money for any such information you are advancing the quite monstrous and untenable theory that you have exclusive and secret means of obtaining that information?" said he, almost snappishly.

Flagge smiled. "Well, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said he, slowly, "if that theory's so monstrous, it seems a'most a pity to have put yourself to the trouble of driving down here just to say so—don't it?"

This time Sir Cosmo was quite sure that he was being laughed at.

"I came here, Mr. a—a—Flagge, in compliance with Lady Lowry's wish——"

"Well, that's an amiable motive, anyhow!"

"And because I don't think she's fitted to deal with—with gentlemen of your remarkable acuteness."

"Well, now, I wouldn't say so, myself. Lady Lowry has a very good notion of making a deal, sir. Ladies very often have."

"Of course you know that I don't believe in your spirits."

"I guessed you might be a likely sort of gentleman to disbelieve."

"I take that as a great compliment to my common sense! No, I don't believe in the spirits at all. Therefore, you see, when I am told that such and such information has been communicated by the spirits, the first question I ask is, 'Has the information been given at all?'"

"Just so; and not being able to resist the belief that I've got *some* information—let me have come by it how I may—you get up a little earlier than usual one fine morning, to come and find out if you can what it is that I know, and whether my knowledge is worth buying, or whether you can't get at it for nothing, which would be best of all."

This came so near being an accurate statement of Sir Cosmo's sentiments on the subject as for the moment to disconcert him. Moreover, he did not at all relish being talked to in this free-and-easy manner by a person like Flagge. But he said to himself that we



cannot handle pitch without certain disagreeable consequences ensuing ; and that he (Sir Cosmo) knew the world a great deal too well to waste time in asserting his dignity to a fellow of that sort.

“My good sir,” said Sir Cosmo, “excuse me for saying that I think you carry hocus-pocus a little too far. Hocus-pocus has its advantages, and when the spirits are in question no doubt it is indispensable. But as to making a mystery about whether Sir Rupert Lowry caused a will to be witnessed in London on a certain day or not—I assure you this is a prosaic country of policemen, and newspapers, and so forth, and there can be no difficulty in verifying such a fact as that without troubling the spirits on the subject.”

“Why, you wouldn’t have got so far as the beginning of an idea that there was another will made in London if it hadn’t been for the spirits !” returned Flagge, striking the palm of his hand on the table. “And now you’ve got the idea, I should like to know how you are going to verify it. If it’s so uncommon easy, I wonder you took the trouble to come here at all.”

“I’ve no objection to gratify your curiosity, Mr. Flagge. The means I should take to

verify the fact in question would be—simply to put an advertisement in *The Times*, begging any one who witnessed such a will to come forward.”

This was a sudden inspiration suggested by his own mention of “newspapers” amongst the things to be met with in this prosaic country.

“Well, just look here, Sir Cosmo Lowry. I don’t belong to the aristocratic classes myself, and time is money with me. I’m a child of natur’, raised among the wild tribes of the West, and unaccustomed to the trammels of conventionality, and it just comes to this:—if you’ve got any proposition to make, I’ll be happy to listen to you; if not, it don’t matter one d—n to me what you do!”

With that Flagge re-lit his cigar, and began to smoke with long vigorous puffs.

This was by no means the kind of tone which Sir Cosmo had looked for. He had expected to find a supple, smooth-tongued charlatan, who would wheedle and flatter, and try to mystify him; and he had promised himself the pleasure of opposing sharp, sarcastic speeches to the charlatan’s blandishments, and utterly getting the better of him. But Sir Cosmo’s weapons were useless here—

needles against granite. Flagge's manner was rough and reckless. He had certainly never exhibited this side of his character at the mansion in Green Street. Sir Cosmo felt a burning desire to conclude the colloquy by throwing the coffee-pot at the "medium's" head, and walking out of the room. Instead of doing so, however, he said—prefacing his words by a prolonged and contemptuous sniff, "I suppose 'conventionality' means 'civility' out West?"

"Dunno but it may, sometimes. It sometimes means useless palaver, anyhow. And as to civility—it seems to me that to come into a man's house and tell him to his face he's a humbug—for that's what you meant, neither more nor less, when you said you didn't believe in 'my spirits'—is scarcely good manners. But I don't go in for manners myself."

"To come to the point, Mr. Flagge—I think you ask too much money."

"Can't take less."

"And then—you're asking me to buy a pig in a poke. Is that the way you children of Nature deal with each other in the West?"

"We call it spekilation."

"It would come much cheaper to advertise in *The Times*, you know."

“And cheaper still not to advertise at all! That is, unless you expect to get a lump of money under a new will. Lady Lowry seemed to think there was reason to believe your father had changed his mind about the way he'd leave his property shortly before he died. However, that's your business, not mine.”

“What do the spirits say about it?”

“They advise me not to sell my information except for ready money.”

“H'm! You're a sharp practitioner, Mr. Flagge! Couldn't one buy a sample?”

“A sample! You've had no end of samples for nothing, or at least your wife has. Ask her what I've told her about your father's life here in London. Not but what I guess she has repeated it all to you already. How do you s'pose I got all those partic'lars? Or rather, for that's the main point, how could you have got 'em without me? I reckon you might have 'advertised' considerable of a time 'fore you'd have arrived at much worth having.”

“And do you really—I ask from curiosity—do you really mean to say it's the spirits who have told you what you know? Is that the theory you seriously advance?”

“I don't advance any theory at all, Sir

Cosmo Lowry. My opinions are my own—my private property. I just set the facts before you, and you've got to account for 'em best way you can."

"And do you believe that a will was made by my father, Sir Rupert Lowry, subsequently to the one dated two years before his death?"

"I don't *believe* it, I know it."

"That sounds very extraordinary."

"It *is* very extraordinary."

"But my father may have made and destroyed a dozen wills during the last two years of his life, for aught I know."

Sir Cosmo's hands were playing irresolutely with one of his gloves. Flagge observed him with a peculiar feline nonchalance, like a cat sure of its spring. He was convinced that thenceforward the only question would be about the terms; and the result justified his prevision.

After some haggling Cosmo agreed to pay him half the sum asked, on the day when he (Sir Cosmo) should be brought face to face with the person who had witnessed his father's will, and the other half as soon as certain information should be obtained that the will was still in existence, and where it was.

No sooner had he left Howard Buildings

than Sir Cosmo began to repent of his bargain, and to feel heartily ashamed of having made it. He to be caught by a quack like that! But he told my lady that he thought he had "managed the medium" pretty satisfactorily. "No song, no supper, Sally. If he don't give us information worth having, he gets not a farthing out of me. I think my money's pretty safe at that rate," said Sir Cosmo. And then he began to consider within himself as to the best way of carrying out certain alterations in the stables at Lowry, *in case* the house should come to him, and *in case* the new will should furnish him with the means of improving it.

## CHAPTER XI.

ALL things considered, Flagge thought it the best plan to take Mr. Quickit to Sir Cosmo's house. He had debated the question whether he should not rather ask Sir Cosmo to meet Quickit at Howard Buildings; but had finally resolved that the objections to that scheme were greater than to the other. There were certain things which he much desired Quickit to leave unsaid in his colloquy with the baronet, but Quickit was not amenable to Dr. Flagge's hints and recommendations. And, after all, thought the medium, it would matter little if Sir Cosmo arrived at the conclusion that it was Quickit who had furnished all the details respecting Sir Rupert which Flagge had communicated to Lady Lowry. Sir Cosmo did not believe in the spirits as it was. But his wife did, and that was the main thing.

One evening, about nine o'clock, Dr. Flagge

and Mr. Quickit were ushered into Sir Cosmo's study, and received by the baronet alone.

"This," said Flagge, walking in without any ceremony of salutation, "is the gentleman who can confirm the information I gave you, Sir Cosmo Lowry." Flagge behaved to Sir Cosmo in a cool, defensive sort of way, like a man who has got hold of an animal which he can thoroughly master, but only by dint of cautious and unrelaxing watchfulness.

"Oh!" said Sir Cosmo. "Take a seat."

"Thank you; thank you, Sir Cosmo. Happy to make your acquaintance. I had the honour of knowing your lamented father for several years—se—veral years," and Mr. Quickit sat down, and rubbed his hands and looked at the baronet with his head on one side. To do honour to the occasion Mr. Quickit had washed his face, and put on a clean collar. The portions of skin and shirt adjacent to these, when a movement of Mr. Quickit's head and throat permitted them to be seen, displayed a deeper tone of colouring. But this evidence of his habitual disregard for soap and water made his concession to other people's prejudice in their favour all the more complimentary. Mr. Quickit had performed a perfunctory sort of ablution, much as poten-



tates politely wear the crosses or decorations of each others' country when they meet. The complete costume of the order would be, indeed, too cumbrous and inconvenient to go about one's affairs in ; but a star or a ribbon serves quite as well for a symbol of civility and consideration.

But, though minded to be civil, Mr. Quickit was not in the least servile, and was perhaps more incapable of feeling himself awed by his superiors in rank than most men.

"Oh, you knew my father, did you? How did you come to know him, Mr. ——?"

"Quickit! Ha, ha, ha, Mr. Quickit. Your father, Sir Cosmo, lodged in my house whenever he came to London during several years."

"Where is your house?"

"Howard Buildings, Strand."

"Oh! Where Flagge lives?"

"Precisely."

"A queer place for my father to lodge in."

"Not at all! Not in the least queer, Sir Cosmo! A most judicious choice of situation, on the contrary, ha, ha, ha! But your lamented and respected father was judicious—highly so."

"H'm! When was the last time you saw Sir Rupert?"

“The last time I saw Sir Rupert was in July, to the best of my recollection. Yes; it was July; Parliament was still sitting, I remember; and I can recall asking your father if he was going to Westminster to hear the debate on some interesting topic of the day—just as a joke, merely a joke, you know; and he replied that he had his own business to attend to, and that if every man would do as much, there’d be no need of Parliament at all! Or something to that effect, ha, ha, ha! Your lamented father was a man of great energy of character.”

“July, eh? Why, that was only a short time before he died!”

“Between five and six weeks before he died, Sir Cosmo. I saw the death in the papers.”

“I suppose he was a good deal broken and enfeebled when you saw him last?”

“Nothing of the kind, Sir Cosmo! No—thing of the kind. His vigour was remarkable—quite remarkable.”

“His vigour of body, I suppose you mean?”

“By no means exclusively of body. Certainly not. His mind was active and clear as ever. I never saw a man less ‘broken,’ and

as for being 'enfeebled,' it is about the very last epithet I should think of applying to him! He was a man, in the words of our immortal bard (who had a considerable acquaintance with his own species, Sir Cosmo), 'take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again!' Ha, ha, ha?"

Sir Cosmo, who was standing all this time with his back to the fire, glanced quickly at Flagge, and then turned round and stood with the toe of his boot on the fender and his back towards Quickit. Flagge had seated himself astride of a chair, with his elbows resting on the back of it, and had watched Sir Cosmo unwinkingly during the whole interview. "Well," said he, "guess you find my statements pretty accurate, Sir Cosmo Lowry. Your father was in full possession of all his faculties up to the last. And no arrangement that he made can be set aside or altered except by later evidence under his own hand. It won't do for any party or parties to say, 'Oh, but the old man was failing in his intellects.' We must find something stronger than that, or things have got to stay as they are. And that's just exactly what Sir Rupert was saying to me only last evening. His communications were marked by uncommon vigour, and I

thought he'd have broke a solid rosewood table in the exuberance of his manifestations."

Sir Cosmo made an impatient gesture of contempt. "I thought we had agreed to drop all that nonsense, Mr. Flagge," he said.

"Well, Sir Cosmo, we might conclude not to allow the electric fluid to circulate through the atmosphere, but I don't know as our agreement would amount to much. Guess the 'lectrical phenomena would go on pretty much the same. And so do the spirits. A good many folks have 'agreed to drop that nonsense.' Only it won't be dropped. That's so."

"Look here, Mr. Quickit," said Sir Cosmo, turning round again, so as to face the two men, "we needn't waste any more time. I've got a simple question to ask you, to which you can give me a straightforward answer. Did my father make a will in your house within two years of his death? You can answer that—Yes or No!"

"Not at all, Sir Cosmo. As it happens, I cannot answer that with 'Yes' or 'No.' By no means. The fact is, that I don't know whether your father did or did not make a will in my house, ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Flagge met Sir Cosmo's look with one

of cool security. "Just you go easy, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said he. "Our friend Mr. Quickit is extremely accurate. He ain't a-going to be driven a furlong further'n he sees his way ; nor yet to be hurried."

"Hurried? I very seldom find any one who wants to go quicker than my pace, Dr. Flagge. I keep the steam up pretty well on most occasions, sir. I go as fast as most people, but I won't run my head against a stone wall, ha, ha, ha! Not at all. By no mans. Cer—tain—ly not."

Sir Cosmo's face expressed bad temper and perturbation, but most of all, perhaps, disappointment. Flagge, taking mental notes of his physiognomy, remarked to himself, "He'd set his heart on getting the information more'n I imagined even. If he wasn't deadly disappointed he'd never smile so much, nor his nostrils wouldn't look so pinched. I might have had another hundred dollars." Then he said aloud—

"Mr. Quickit don't know, you see, whether your father made a will in his house or not."

"So I find. Well—in that case it was hardly worth while to give him the trouble of coming here merely that I might have the pleasure of making his acquaintance. We

shall neither of us find it answer, I'm afraid," returned Sir Cosmo, with a sneer of such undisguised bitterness and contempt as fairly astonished Mr. Quickit. The latter had no intention of submitting to be treated with rudeness, however, and he immediately got up from his chair, saying, "That's enough, Sir Cosmo, quite enough. I did not seek the honour of coming here, sir. I have no wish to force myself upon any one. I have a fair share of common sense, and I am too busy a man, besides, to run about in search of acquaintances out of my own line altogether. I wish you a good evening, Sir Cosmo."

"Hold hard, Quickit!" cried Dr. Flagge. "You go ahead at such an infernal pace there's no keeping up with you. Sir Cosmo Lowry don't rightly understand what the information is that you can give him. He has jumped to the conclusion that you can give him none at all, which is a mistake."

"Sir Cosmo Lowry has made more than one mistake, I dare say. Good evening."

Flagge caught him by the coat-tails. "Thunder! What an almighty hurry you're in! Just come along here and sit down again. You're a good-natured kind of man, you know, and you ain't a-going to refuse to give informa-

tion that may be important to a great many people, not you ! ”

Sir Cosmo's brows were knitted savagely. Various sarcasms hovered on his tongue. He longed to bid the two men not to endeavour to enhance the value of what they had to say by any further “palaver” or “acting,” but his anxiety to hear what Quickit could tell him overcame the impulse to give vent to his temper. Flagge had read his face aright. He had set his heart on getting the information. And as to the bitter speeches, they would not be wasted. They would keep, and could be expended at some future period. So he waited, and looked from Flagge to Quickit and from Quickit to Flagge, breathing hard through his nostrils, but saying no word.

“You'll have, I reckon, to change the form of your inquiry, Sir Cosmo Lowry,” said Flagge. “Mr. Quickit is nat'rally tenacious of exactitude dooring an inquiry of this kind. You didn't put your question so as it could be answered by a negative or affirmative right away. You asked did Sir Rupert make a will in Mr. Quickit's house within two years of his death. Well, Mr. Quickit don't know ! But just you ask if Mr. Quickit witnessed a will for your father in his own house. You've got

to make your questions clear as print, I tell you, for our friend Quickit."

"H'm! Well, Mr. Quickit, did my father, Sir Rupert Lowry, get you to witness his will when he was lodging in your house, at any period within two years of his death? I hope that's sufficiently categorical!"

"Yes, Sir Cosmo, he did so."

Cosmo was standing with his back to the fire again, and his elbows resting on the chimney-piece. When he heard Quickit's answer, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and clenched them tightly, out of sight there.

"Can you remember the date?"

"I can remember it within a day or two, because it was just before Sir Rupert went back to the country. It must have been about the end of the first week of July last."

"Of course you—you have no idea whether my father destroyed that will or not? Old men at his time of life will sometimes go on making new wills, and destroying them again directly, day after day."

"What he did when he got back to his home, I can't say, of course. But up to the time he left my house, I *can* say, as it happens, that he had not destroyed the will."

"Did he tell you so?"



"No, Sir Cosmo. He did not tell me so. But when he was just going away, I was talking with him on a little matter of business which is neither here nor there——"

"Had *you* business transactions with my father?" interrupted Cosmo, with quick suspicion.

"Which, as I say, is neither here nor there," continued Quickit, "neither—here—nor—there; and the table was covered with papers and so forth, and Sir Rupert opened a little despatch-box he travelled with, to look for a document, and showed me the paper I had witnessed lying there. 'There's your sign manual, Mr. Quickit,' said he. And there it was, 'Mark Anthony Quickit,' in my identical handwriting."

"I reckon that's pretty satisfactory, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said Flagge. "P'raps, on the whole, it's a darned sight more satisfactory than you expected! Our friend Mr. Quickit is a man of very remarkable smartness and clearness of intellect. I'm a pretty good judge of men—I oughter! I've known considerable of a variety of 'em, from the Appanawchees, eastward,—and I'm not acquainted with a smarter man than Marcus A. Quickit, I tell *you*."

Sir Cosmo was highly excited. His hands

twitched nervously in his pockets, and his lips were pressed more tightly together than usual ; But his excitement did not make him "expansive." Indeed, Sir Cosmo's emotions were seldom of that beneficent or sunshiny nature which may be allowed to burst forth unchecked. They resembled, rather, explosive material very dangerous to set a light to. Flagge was triumphant. Quickit, urged on by a desire to show Sir Cosmo Lowry how important was the information he was able to give, and how entirely whatever obligation there was in the matter lay on the baronet's side, had given fuller and more precise details than Flagge had expected or hoped for. Let these particulars come from what source they might, they were of very high interest and value to Sir Cosmo, and without Flagge's assistance Sir Cosmo could not have obtained them. That much was clear ; and the contingent "dollars" were, he felt satisfied, assured to him.

After a little pause, Sir Cosmo said, " Oh ! Well, there's nothing to show that my father did not tear up that will, or light his pipe with it, directly he got home to Lowry." And after another, shorter pause, he added, awkwardly, " Much obliged to you."

Mr. Quickit stood up, pulled a large silver

watch from his pocket, looked at it, and said that he must be going homeward as to-morrow was Saturday, and there were accounts to be made up for the Castor and Pollux.

“Won’t you—ahem!—is there any remuneration to be given to Mr. Quickit for his trouble?” said Sir Cosmo, speaking to Flagge.

Quickit answered for himself. “I did not come here with a view of obtaining remuneration, Sir Cosmo,” he said. “I could not afford to be out of pocket, and should have charged the cab to you, if Dr. Flagge had not undertaken to settle it. I thought it my duty to state the truth in this matter, so far as I know it. Besides, I had a respect for your father, Sir Rupert Lowry. He was a gentleman of great force of character, always sure of his own position, and understanding other people’s. I shall now take my leave, Sir Cosmo, merely adding that my time is of value, and that I shall be unable to wait on you again—unless, indeed, upon strictly business terms—ha! ha! ha! *Good evening.*”

With that, Mr. Quickit, whose actions were never wavering or undecided, walked out of the study, through the hall, and out at the hall-door, which they heard him close sharply and firmly behind him.

“Now, Sir Cosmo,” said Flagge, looking coolly into the baronet’s face, “before going any further, you and I will settle *our* little account. I reckon you’ll scarcely deny that I’ve done well for you so far—and got Quickit for nothing, too. Better than *advertising*, eh, Sir Cosmo Lowry ? ”

## CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT a fortnight before Christmas Mrs. Flint arrived in London, and went to pay a visit in Green Street the very next day. She asked for Miss Lowry, and was shown into Mary's dressing-room, where she enjoyed an uninterrupted chat with her favourite. But before going away she asked Mary to present her to Lady Lowry. "I cannot come into Lady Lowry's house and ignore her existence, and I shall have to make her acquaintance some of these days in any case," she said with an air of not very flattering resignation.

Mary conducted Mrs. Flint to the drawing-room, and went herself in search of her sister-in-law, who at that hour would probably be in her boudoir, she said.

Mrs. Flint had sat but a minute or so, critically surveying the room, and perfectly appreciating all the indications it afforded of the character of its mistress, when she became

aware that there was some one in the adjoining room, which was divided from the main drawing-room by means of folding-doors. There was, besides, a velvet curtain hung on the side of the larger room, and this, of course, muffled all noises. Still, as the folding-doors were ajar, some sound of voices came to Mrs. Flint's ear, although she could only distinguish a word or two here and there. The voices were those of a man and a woman.

After some undistinguishable murmurings the man's voice was raised, and said, "My dear girl, I was much distressed when I heard of your illness. I wish I could carry you off to a warm climate for the winter."

Then the woman's voice murmured a reply, and the man exclaimed, "Pray don't speak so! You know that you can believe in *my* affection for you, do you not?"

Mrs. Flint here gave a loud and elaborate cough in her deepest notes, and the voices ceased. Almost immediately a thin white hand parted the velvet hangings, and a thin white face looked into the drawing-room. Then Cenone Balasso came forward, and saluted Mrs. Flint.

"I am waiting for Miss Lowry," said that

matron. "I am Mrs. Flint from Elcaster." And she wondered in her heart who the strange girl might be. She did not certainly correspond to the descriptions of Rosamond.

"Oh yes; Miss Lowry expected you," returned Enone, with grave, unsmiling courtesy. Then she looked back into the smaller room, and said, "Major Maude, this lady is an old friend of Miss Lowry's. I have often heard her speak of Mrs. Flint."

Upon this, a tall, bearded man walked forward and bowed.

This, then, was Major Maude! Why that, Mrs. Flint was certain, was the name of the young officer whom Samuel and she remembered at Lowry Place years ago, and of whom they had been speaking together only the other day! Why on earth was he there in a confidential *tête-à-tête* with this young girl? And how very odd that he, whom Samuel supposed to be a devoted lover of Mary Lowry, should be assuring this sprite-like young creature with the great eyes, of his unalterable affection! However, Mrs. Flint returned the Major's salutation graciously, and looked at him curiously. Yes, he was a fine-looking man, well set up, with a good, strong, gentle face, and all the outward pre-

sentment of a gentleman in every respect. But a great deal more than all that was required, in Mrs. Flint's estimation, from any one who should aspire to woo Mary Lowry. And then, moreover, it was certainly not Mary Lowry whom Major Maude had just been assuring of his affection.

Enone glided quietly out of the room, and then Mrs. Flint asked of the Major who that young lady was.

"She is Miss Enone Balassapoulo, more commonly called by her friends and acquaintances Nona Balasso."

"Oh! A foreigner?"

"A Greek—or partly Greek, by race; but almost English now by education."

"Oh! Yes; she seems to speak English fluently. Ahem!"

"Your name is very familiar to me, Mrs. Flint. And, if I mistake not, we have met before, although it is not likely you should remember me."

"I think I do remember you, though. You were at Lowry Place for a short time eleven or twelve years ago, I think?"

"Yes, I am surprised you should remember anything about me. I have been knocked about the world so much since then, and been



so bronzed and buffeted, that I should think there is little left of my old face, Mrs. Flint."

"Well, perhaps I might not have recognized your face. But we—I—in short I recalled your name when I heard it."

"You have been paying a visit to Miss Lowry?" said Maude, not so much for the sake of getting an answer as for the pleasure of speaking about Mary, although his heart beat with so warm and eager a pulse at the utterance of her name as to flush his honest face up to the roots of his bronze-coloured hair.

"Yes; I have been to see my dear and valued friend, Miss Lowry. She is looking beautiful, of course; that is a matter of course. But I find her a little pale, and a trifle thinner, I fancy, than when she left Clevenal."

"Do you? Do you think she is not well?"

"Perhaps not exactly unwell,—she has a magnificent constitution; almost all the Lowrys have. Sir Cosmo takes more after his mother, who was delicate in that respect, although he don't resemble her in anything else——"

Maude was not interested in the delicacy of Sir Cosmo's constitution. "You were saying

that Miss Lowry looked pale and thin?" he hinted.

"It may be only my fancy, but I did think so. I want to get her home among people who appreciate her. She is not appreciated by vulgar-minded persons."

Maude rightly concluded that this shaft was levelled at Lady Lowry; and although he cordially concurred in the sentiment, he thought it would not become him to pursue the subject. "I should have thought," said he, "that every one who knew Miss Lowry must admire, and—and—love her."

"Oh, she *is* admired and loved I assure you, Major Maude, by half the county in her own home. But the fact is—— I don't know whether you're a particular friend of Lady Lowry?"

"I have only the honour of a slight and recent acquaintance with her, madam."

"Ah! Well, my acquaintance with her has yet to be begun—personally, that is to say. But I believe I know enough about her to form a judgment on certain points, and I am much afraid that she is not able to value Miss Lowry as she ought to be valued;—and as she *is* valued by people of her own class and breeding."

Mrs. Flint had become warm, and paused to fan herself with her card-case.

"One might suppose that a fairly good heart would suffice to make people recognize Miss Lowry's fine qualities, even without much breeding," said Vincent Maude softly.

"Well, there's a great deal in blood," returned Mrs. Flint, thinking with bitterness on Sir Cosmo's *mésalliance*. "And however amiable Miss Lowry may be, she can't but think so. She wouldn't be a Lowry if she could."

Major Maude made no answer. And after a very brief silence, Mrs. Flint went on to hint in pretty plain terms at the brilliant position which Miss Lowry might attain if she would; and the honours waiting to be laid at her feet if she would but deign to accept them. Mrs. Flint had received a general impression that all these London people,—and especially these in Green Street,—required setting to rights on the subject of Mary Lowry's claims on their respect and admiration. As to my lady, Mrs. Flint told herself that no proper appreciation of Mary could be expected from *her*; and yet she was clearly irritated and offended at every indication of my lady's obtuseness. Here was this Major Maude, too, talking sentiment

and affection to a queer-looking foreign girl with big eyes, instead of dying for Mary Lowry as Samuel had imagined! To be sure, Major Maude would not be a match worthy of that peerless lady. But that was no reason why he should not languish for her; which would, Mrs. Flint thought, have been much more creditable to his character and discernment than were his present goings on. So, moved by these considerations, Mrs. Flint did her best to let Major Maude understand how infinitely precious a jewel was shining unvalued in Sir Cosmo's house, and how highly the jewel was valued elsewhere.

Vincent listened in silence. It was the first time that he had ever heard Mary's praises without a warm glow of pleasure. But now it must be owned they depressed him strangely. And Mrs. Flint, taking his silence and sad look for want of sympathy, spared no pains to impress him with the grandeur and ardour of the suitors who would—(Mrs. Flint was morally convinced they would!)—crowd around Mary Lowry so soon as she could return to her ancestral home.

There was ample time for the good lady to expatiate on her theme before the mistress of the house appeared to interrupt her. My lady

was minded to "begin as she meant to go on," to use her own phrase; and did not intend to pay Mrs. Flint, the lawyer's wife, the compliment of appearing to be in any hurry to receive her. At length, however, she swept into the room, and greeted Mrs. Flint with a condescending bow.

"How do you do?" said my lady. And then she sat down, and held out her hand to Major Maude.

"I came to see Nona, Lady Lowry," said Maude.

"So I supposed. Well, did they send her to you?"

"Yes; I have just been speaking with her. She is far from well. I am not satisfied with her state at all."

"Oh, she'll do well enough. Don't you worry yourself!"

"She is in a morbid, nervous state of mind."

"Oh, she'll do very well. As to being thin—to be sure, she is a bag of bones, but that don't always show delicacy. Some plump persons are far more delicate, although they may not look it."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Flint sat by in no meek or conciliatory frame of mind. At the first pause she spoke—

"I was unwilling to leave your house, Lady Lowry, without paying you the compliment of asking to see you. But I will not intrude on you longer. You seem to have private matters to discuss with this gentleman; and, as my visit was really to Miss Lowry, and I have seen her, I may as well take my leave."

"Oh! Hadn't you better stay till Mary comes back? She's gone to find Rosamond, I think," returned my lady, quite unmoved by Mrs. Flint's reproachful majesty of demeanour.

"Well, I should like to see Rosamond," said Mrs. Flint. "I knew Sir Cosmo when he was much younger than she is; and Sir Cosmo's dear mother—the sweetest lady in the world. She was an angel!"

"She was a Miss Hovenden," observed my lady gravely. "Oh, I know all about her."

"I hope Sir Cosmo is well," said Mrs. Flint. She had never brought herself to discard Sir Cosmo from her regard so completely as her husband had done. Cosmo came of the old stock, and must surely possess some indefeasible virtues by right of that fact!

"He's pretty well, thank you."

"He and I are very old friends."

"Oh, for that matter, I suppose he knew

everybody in Clevenal and Elcaster more or less when he was a boy."

"His family were universally respected in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, of course."

"Yes; Clevenal folks are old-fashioned enough to think a good deal of long descent. And the Lowrys were allied with the best blood in the country. I believe in London these matters are not so much considered. However a Lowry—a born Lowry—will, of course, hold his own everywhere with people of any breeding."

Even my lady's tough moral integument was pervious to the meaning of this. She reddened, and looked hard at Mrs. Flint with a sulky defiance. Maude gently tried to change the subject. "There must be many alterations in your part of the world, Mrs. Flint, since we met there years ago," said he.

"Some alterations, of course. But, as I was saying, Clevenal folks are old-fashioned folks, and don't change quickly."

"You never told me about your visit to Lowry, Major Maude," said my lady condescendingly, shaking her fore-finger. "But I have heard all about it. You were very sly and close, but a little bird tells me a great many things."

Maude blushed like a schoolboy. "I did not know that you would do me the honour to take any interest in the matter, Lady Lowry," said he. "I should not have ventured to bore you with it."

"Well, considering that you went to Lowry as an act of friendship to Sir Cosmo—Mr. Lowry he was in those days—you might give her ladyship credit for being grateful enough to feel some interest in the matter!" said Mrs. Flint. "The Lowrys always had good memories both for favours and injuries. And although Lady Lowry does not come of their race, we must suppose she has learnt to be Lowry enough not to forget a kindness shown to the family."

Sarah thought this speech monstrously presumptuous. What did the woman mean by interfering, and talking about the private affairs of the Lowry family in this free and easy fashion? And Mrs. Flint's personal antagonism to herself was not lost upon my lady. She resented it quite as much as if she had received the stranger with the most cordial courtesy. Indeed, my lady never measured the behaviour of other people to her by the standard of her own behaviour to them. There existed in her mind a sort of original



premiss—a first principle not to be disputed, or even discussed—to the effect that a great deal of civility was due from everybody to Sarah, Lady Lowry; and another minor assumption which seemed in some way to spring from the first, that any civility shown by her to others was not a duty, but a bounty.

When Mary reappeared, accompanied by Rosamond, matters were not much mended. Mrs. Flint's genial manner to Miss Lowry and her niece was so strongly contrasted with her frozen manner to Lady Lowry as to verge on burlesque. But Mrs. Flint was in very angry earnest, and was resolved that Lady Lowry should for once be treated with the contempt she merited. "An impudent, ignorant, thick-headed dairymaid!" was Mrs. Flint's mental verdict on her hostess. "She ought to have a good setting down to bring her to her senses!"

But to a sense of her own inferiority to persons of gentle breeding there was small chance of bringing our Sarah. And Mrs. Flint went away in a state of open hostility to Sir Cosmo's wife. "I hope you will try to come and see me, dear Miss Lowry," she said, "and bring Rosamond with you. Otherwise I fear I shall not see you any more during my

stay in London, for I scarcely think I can come here again."

"You are staying a long way off?" said Mary.

"Oh, it isn't only the distance, my dear."

"There are plenty of omnibuses plying between South Brompton and this part of the world. I often see them when I am driving out in my carriage," observed Lady Lowry.

Mrs. Flint disdained to notice this clumsy thrust. "Do come, dear Miss Lowry," she said. "The friend I am staying with would be only too delighted to receive you. She has heard me speak of you so much."

"Of course I shall come to see you."

"Mrs. Hautecombe is a very old friend of mine, and a charming old lady. My father held a living in her father's diocese."

"Hautecombe? She must be the widow of my old Colonel!" exclaimed Maude.

"Why, Mrs. Percival Wigmore's aunt is a Mrs. Hautecombe, and lives in Brompton," said Rosamond. "I have heard him talk about going to see her. He always tells people where he goes and whom he sees, whether they care to know or not."

The daughter of a Bishop, the widow of a Colonel, and the aunt of "an Honourable!"

Lady Lowry was surprised, but was equal to the occasion. "Mary can have the carriage to go and see you, and Rosamond may come too," she said, with the deliberate gravity of a judge summing up. "As for me, you will excuse me; I am not equal just now to paying many visits."

"Certainly, Lady Lowry, I shall excuse you from returning my call. To say the truth, I had not the least expectation of your doing so. I wish you good morning."

"Hautecombe," murmured my lady, fingering the pages of the Red Book, whilst Mrs. Flint was yet descending the stairs. "Oh, here it is! 'Alberic, sixth baronet—second son, George—married Maria, eldest daughter of'—why then she *is* Percival Wigmore's aunt! Dear me! However did Mrs. Flint come to know her, I wonder! I almost think I *will* call."

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE fact that Sir Rupert Lowry had made a will subsequent to the one proved and acted upon seemed to be ascertained to his son's satisfaction. But when he had got thus far, Sir Cosmo found himself not much advanced towards the bettering of his fortunes. Before-hand he had said to himself that when once he should be assured of the fact that his father had made a will within a year of his death he would have made a great stride towards his goal. But now he knew, or thought he knew, that fact, and the goal seemed to be as far off as ever. It is a common experience: a kind of optical delusion with which Hope is wont to cheat us. We all know how near the mountain tops look when we start to reach them, and how provokingly—even maliciously—they recede as we climb. Here was Sir Cosmo in possession of his coveted fact, wondering how it was possible that he could

ever have thought it would do him any good to get at it!

Not so my lady. She was satisfied with the result of the interview with Mr. Quickit, as detailed to her by her husband, and was not sparing of triumphant "I told you so's!"

"Well! And what then?" cried Sir Cosmo testily. "Supposing that we knew with certainty that my father made a will the very day before he died,—what then?"

He desired nothing better than to believe as Sarah believed, but the very strength of his desire made him affect a sort of contemptuous incredulity.

"Well, then, the next thing is to find out where the will is," returned my lady stolidly.

"Really! You don't say so! Only that? Nothing easier, of course!"

"Well, Cosmo, easy or difficult, that is the next thing. You thought at first, you know, that we should never find out that your father did make a will so lately; but we have. And as the spirits have done that much for us, we ought to have faith that they'll do more."

"The spirits have got bodies attached to them, and breeches pockets of a rather insatiable sort."

"Of course you must pay something for

information. You would have to pay six-and-eightpence for only asking an attorney the commonest question. I know; because father went into Lambrook once to speak to Mr. Sprott, the lawyer, about a right of way. And I'm sure Mr. Sprott couldn't have told you what Dr. Flagge has told you."

"Can Flagge tell me whether that will my father made in London was destroyed or not?"

"He is pretty sure it wasn't."

"Pretty sure! He makes a pretty guess. I could guess myself, if that were all."

"But when you did guess,—about your father having made the will, or not having made it,—you guessed wrong, you know! And all because you wouldn't believe what the spirits said. If you don't take care, your father will be quite offended, and won't give us any more manifestations. I wouldn't if I was him, and so I tell you, Cosmo!"

"I'm sick of the whole business. I shall wash my hands of it. I'm ashamed to hear you talk the d—d nonsense you do about it."

"You won't be ashamed to take the money when we get it, Cosmo," returned my lady without any ironical intention. "And if you ask *me* what ought to be done, I say there

ought to be a thorough search made at Lowry Place, *in your presence*. What became of that will? You don't suppose your sister destroyed it, do you?"

"Sarah! My sister Mary Lowry——!"

"Well, women have done such things before now, and I dare say they were somebody's sisters! However, I'm not accusing any one. Only I say, if the will wasn't destroyed it's in Lowry Place; and if it's in Lowry Place it can be found by looking."

"All my father's papers *were* looked through——"

"Who by?"

"By Mr. Flint and my sister."

"Mr. Flint? Oh yes; Mr. Flint!"

"And they were all found to be in perfect order. His desk and writing-table were sealed up, and even his study was locked, and the key kept in Flint's office at Elcaster until my arrival."

"*You* didn't see the papers examined."

"Besides—you talk very much at your ease of looking through Lowry Place, but you seem to forget that Lowry Place belongs to my sister, and that I have no right to go and search her house."

"Not without her leave, I suppose."

“And how could I have the face to ask her leave for any such purpose?”

“I don’t see why not. *I* shouldn’t mind asking!”

Then Sir Cosmo walked out of the room, angry, humiliated, troubled by suspicions that he was ashamed of,—troubled, too, by involuntary sentiments of respect and confidence which he grudged,—but feeling, nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart a hope that Sarah’s expectations would be fulfilled, and a conviction that Sarah would do her utmost towards their fulfilment untrammelled by scruples.

This conviction was certainly well founded. But before Sarah proceeded to active measures she thought it desirable to consult the spirits. Accordingly, she sent for Dr. Flagge, and desired him to obtain Sir Rupert Lowry’s opinion as to what had better be done next. “You can make Miss Balasso clairvoyant, you know. Sir Rupert always communicates more clearly by her mouth than by any one else’s, or by the table, or writing, or anything,” said my lady.

Flagge had not seen Enone since the day of his declaration to her; and he now paused, revolving in his mind his course of action. Lady Lowry’s proposition gave him a chance



of having a private interview with C  none, which he could not bear to let slip. After a minute's reflection, he told Lady Lowry that he would try to do as she wished ; but that he advised her to send for C  none without letting her know that he was there. "And," said he, with an almost imperceptible hesitation, "I think you'd better let me see her alone first. She has taken a kind of an antipathy to me lately. Such whims are not uncommon with mesmeric patients. But I can influence her if I'm left to do it my own way."

"I have no patience with a person in Miss Balasso's position presuming to give herself airs," said my lady. Nevertheless she complied with Flagge's suggestion, and leaving him in her boudoir, betook herself with no very gracious mien to Sir Cosmo's library, which was then untenanted ; and at the same time she sent a message to Miss Balasso requesting her to come downstairs forthwith.

Mary, Rosamond, and C  none were together in the dressing-room of the former. C  none passed hours there now, sitting with her hands holding an unopened book upon her lap before her, and neither speaking nor moving. Rosamond had just been making a sort of *amende honorable*. That outspoken young lady had

declared on several occasions that she couldn't bear Dr. Flagge: that she was sure all the mesmerizing had made Nona ill: and that Dr. Flagge talked nonsense on purpose to deceive people, and even,—she added with her frank eyes full of honest indignation,—even told right-down stories! But now she had to own that Dr. Flagge showed a great deal of feeling about Ænone, and had inquired about her health every day since her fainting fit. And she said as much to her Aunt Mary and to Ænone herself. “Do you know that yesterday, when that tiresome Mr. Wigmore was in Lady Lowry's boudoir,—but after all, even Mr. Wigmore showed kindness and feeling for Nona! Everybody showed feeling except—— Well, I won't say any more, Aunt Mary. But do you know, Nona, that yesterday when Dr. Flagge asked after you, there were tears in his eyes! Real, actual tears! I almost liked him when I saw them.”

“I don't want his tears.”

“No, of course you don't *want* Dr. Flagge to cry about you! But although it may seem a little queer and different from our ways, still it shows that he is not quite a selfish stone, like some people.”

“You know that I have no favourable

opinion of the man," said Mary, "but I do believe he is touched and remorseful at the idea that his tricks and mesmerizings, and the rest, may have injured your health, Ænone."

Ænone gave a strange look—a smile that was sadder than tears. "His mesmerism has done me no harm," she answered.

"How can you know that, my child? You are not strong, and your nervous system has been completely over-excited."

But to all such speeches Ænone made no other answer than the strange smile which moved her lips, and left her forehead drawn into folds of painful thought.

Such a look was on her face when the servant brought a message to the effect that Lady Lowry desired to speak with her in the boudoir.

"I wonder what she wants!" cried Miss Rosamond. "I dare say it's something of no consequence at all. Ought Nona to be made to go up and down stairs when she's so weak? Ought she now, Aunt Mary?"

But Ænone rose at once, and bade the man say that she would come immediately.

"I think I know the business Lady Lowry wants to speak to me about," she said. "I have asked her to get music lessons for me.

Mrs. Wigmore thought she might recommend me. I cannot remain here. I have told Lady Lowry so."

"Why will you not accept my offer, and come down to Lowry with me for a while?" said Mary. But Enone merely shook her head with a slight haughty gesture, and left the room. She had not yet closed the door behind her when she returned, and taking Mary's hand between her own hands, raised it to her lips. "I am not so base as to be ungrateful," she said; and was gone again.

Meanwhile Flagge was pacing up and down the boudoir, turning and turning in the narrow space like a beast in a cage. He could not sit still. He could not stand still. All his peculiar coolness of manner had deserted him;—that peculiar manner which seemed the result of a certain phlegmatic indifference of mind, combined with irritable nerves and emotions. He was restless, anxious, self-distrustful. Yet at the same time there was an almost fierce gleam in his eyes, like the eyes of a man who, although he would scarcely have force to take a desperate resolution, yet might very easily yield to a desperate impulse. All at once he stopped near the door, and placed himself so that a person

entering the room would not at once see him. The next moment the handle was softly turned, and Enone came in. She walked straight onward, and seated herself in a chair close to the fire. She was always sensitive to the cold; and she spread her thin white hands over the flames, and huddled herself in a large white fleecy shawl which covered her shoulders. The shawl was Mary Lowry's: and Flagge, despite his perturbation, recognized it at once in a quick mechanical way, as though his eyes were endowed with some power of observation apart from the rest of his spirit.

Enone remained with her face towards the fire, and did not see that there was any one besides herself in the room. It was no new or unexpected circumstance that Lady Lowry should keep her waiting, and she sat there with an air of quiet weariness, bending her eyes on the glowing fire. At a slight movement of Flagge's she suddenly turned those wonderful eyes and looked full at him. He stood with his back towards the door, but not so close to it as absolutely to bar the passage of any one wishing to approach it. Enone did not rise, nor speak. She grasped the two arms of the easy chair she sat in, and re-

mained quite still, looking solemnly at him with those wonderful eyes.

Flagge, after a space of time which the clock might have registered as five seconds, but which his pulses counted as a long period of painful apprehension and yearning that made his heart ache, stretched out his hands towards CEnone. He did not stretch them out with the gesture of one who supplicates or calls. He held the palms of them turned outward as if he would have warded off, or shielded himself from something.

"Won't you hear me say a word to you, Nony?" he said, mumbling his words as though he were too nervous to articulate with even as much as his usual distinctness.

"Yes, I will hear," answered CEnone.

Her quietude surprised him; so did the absence of anger in her face. He had seen those great dark eyes flash with scorn and indignation. They did not so flash now. They simply regarded him with a steady and calm gaze; and Flagge could not divest himself of a strange impression that they were looking at him *from a long distance away*. He passed his hands over his forehead. "I wonder if I'm going mad?" he said quietly. "Shouldn't much wonder." Then after an

instant's silence: "Look here, Nony, I want to say that I laid a trap for you;—that's true. But if you move your little finger to show that you choose to leave the room, I ain't a-going to move mine to stop you."

"I will hear you," she answered once more.

"I've been a'most out of my mind with worrying about you, Nony. It's true, as sure as——"

"I believe what you say."

"They wouldn't let me get to see you."

"I did not wish to see you."

"How you say that! Letting your words drop down like icy water on a burning wound! I dunno but there's something mean in a man loving a woman that cares not one straw for him, as much as I love you. But I do love you!" he added quickly. "Guess that must be writ down somewheres in the eternal nature of things, just the same as that fire's hot, or snow cold. 'Tain't left for me to choose, one way or the other. I begin to believe in destiny."

"*Begin* to believe in it? I have always believed in it. But we can resist Fate, if we can't conquer it. Even gods and heroes may be conquered, but they resist to the last, and then Fate has a poor triumph: it can but kill."

He looked at her young face, so wan and haggard, but lighted up now with innocent enthusiasm, and he knew not whether pity or admiration predominated in his heart. She had the soul of a brave woman with the inexperience of a child. He acknowledged with a curious tenderness that C  none believed in all sorts of high-flown and poetic theories, which in another might have excited his ridicule, but which in her seemed to him at once pathetic and adorable.

“Well but, Nony,” said he with a sad smile, “if it’s my fate to love you, I don’t know as I want to resist it. That’s the strange part of love. It burns us, but we don’t want to fly away any more ’n the moth wants to fly away from the flame of the lamp. Between scorching and darkness it chooses to be scorched :—so do I.”

“Have you said what you had to say ?”

“Said what I had to say ! No ; nor a hundredth part of it. Oh, Nony, Nony, if I could say ‘all I have to say,’ it might melt a little corner of that block of pure ice you call your heart. But listen here, I must say this one thing. I want you to forgive me for the words I said——”

She put her hand out with a sudden im-



perious gesture, and her face flushed hotly, and then grew white again. "Hush!" she exclaimed tremulously. "I cannot bear to hear of it!"

"No, Nony, I shall say nothing to hurt or offend you. God knows I'd rather cut off my right hand than hurt you of set purpose! But I was feeling so badly,—I was real mad, Nony. I want you to say just this: 'I forgive you.' Say it, Nony, just out of pity, won't you?"

"Forgive? Yes; I suppose I forgive. If it is forgiving to bear no malice, and feel no anger, I forgive. Now speak no more of that. Let me forget it."

He took an end of the large white shawl she was wrapped in, and put it to his lips. Then he said, "Are you feeling stronger, Nony? You look so white, just like a snow-drop! You ought to have change of air."

She shook her head. "No, no! I don't wish it. I don't need it."

"Wishing and needing are two. Some of these fine folks that call themselves your friends might think of giving you a change. But though they may be the bluest-blooded aristocrats under Heaven, they none of 'em care for you as poor Flagge does. No, they

don't, Nony ;—not one millionth part ! How should they ? ”

“ They have thought of giving me change. It has been offered to me.”

“ And you refused ? ”

“ I refused. I am going away from this house. I am going to have done with it altogether.”

“ Where to ? ” asked Flagge, eagerly and quickly.

“ To the Czernovics. At least for the present.”

Flagge's heart gave a great throb. She was coming to live beneath the same roof with himself ! But he suppressed any too eager manifestation of joy from the fear of startling her. He felt as if she might easily be scared away, like some wild woodland creature. It occurred to him, indeed, that it was possible she was not aware that he lived in the same house with her old friends of Bohemia. “ Do you know where the Czernovics are living now ? ” he asked, cautiously.

“ No ; I have not seen them for a long time. But it will be easy to find them.”

Flagge was struck as Vincent Maude had been by the cool indifference of CEnone's behaviour to the Czernovics, and by her quiet

assumption that they would be ready and willing to welcome her back amongst them at the first hint of her intention to return to them. She seemed to have no more doubt about it than one might feel as to whether a horse would allow himself to be saddled, or a dog come at call.

"Yes," said Flagge, "it will be easy enough to find them. But, Nony, theirs is no home for you."

"Home? No! I have no home."

The instant she had said the words she repented them, for they offered Flagge an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself. He began at once to plead his cause, humbly, with much self-abasement and casting of himself at her feet, as it were; but earnestly, passionately, and persistently. Why should she not have a home? She was worthy of the best on earth; but if she would share his, he would try to make up in devotion what it lacked in material luxury. He would take her away to Italy or Greece, amongst the beautiful things with which Art and Nature had endowed those lands. He would tend her, and wait on her, and be her slave. She should live in an atmosphere of music and poetry. She should enjoy the

exaltation of spirit which riches cannot give, and which was her birthright; and he would minister to her with faithful affection. Nor was all this said with conscious untruthfulness. He warmed his own fancy by his fluent words, and pictured himself basking in the light of the poetic influences which C  none loved, as if Bourbon whisky and tobacco had never made the chief part of his daily enjoyments.

“No,” answered C  none in a faint, hoarse little voice. “No, no, no. I wish you could believe me!”

He dropped his face in his hands for an instant, and when he looked up again his eyes were wet. “People change their minds, Nony,” he said. “You may change yours. I ain’t a-going to despair.”

“But,” said she, earnestly, looking at him with a mixture of solemnity and childlike candour, “it is not ‘changing my mind,’ as people say. I shall have to change my whole self!”

“You are cruel, Nony—but you don’t know how cruel. I s’pose a white-winged angel that had never been incarnated on this earth might look and speak so, and wonder to hear mortals talk of the heartache. But as to ‘changing your whole self’—that ’ud be about

‘ the only thing as could cure me, Nony ! So long as you’re you, so long I’ve got to love you, and there’s no two ways about it.”

She rose up slowly from her chair, and held out her hand. He little guessed the effort which it cost her to submit to his touch. “ Good-bye,” she said.

“ Not ‘ good-bye,’ Nony ! Not ‘ good-bye ! ’ ”

“ Yes, good-bye. I am going away. I don’t think we shall meet. I hope not. It would do you no good. If you mean what you say—well, no ; I do not intend to doubt you ! I believe you do mean it. But that is all the more reason why we should keep apart.”

“ Would *you* run away from any one whose face was the light of your life ? ”

She coloured with a painful flush. “ Yes ; if it would do that some one good. But women are different. They can sit still and suffer, and that hurts nobody but themselves. Men are not resigned. They keep striving. Good-bye. And—and—if you can be true, and not deceive people, and rise above things that are false, you will be happier, and I shall be comforted to know that all your thoughts of me will not be painful. They may be sad,

but you will not be ashamed of them. If I were going to live a long time perhaps I should not venture to speak to you so. But as it is, you will forgive me, won't you? Now, good-bye!"

He stood still as if he had been stricken into stone. Her words "if I were going to live a long time" seemed to affect him like a physical chill. Before he could recover himself, Ænone had glided past him and was gone. He was startled by the rustle of a dress and a voice close in his ear. "Upon my word, Dr. Flagge, I don't understand what you mean by keeping me waiting in this fashion whilst you stand there as if you were moonstruck! What have you been about? Where's Miss Balasso?"

It was Lady Lowry. Flagge turned round with a start. He had totally forgotten her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

LADY LOWRY was very indignant, and a little puzzled. Flagge cared no jot for her indignation, and might at another moment have been amused by her perplexity. But it did not suit him to quarrel with her; so he recovered his usual manner,—or something so nearly like it as sufficed to prevent Sarah from discovering his perturbation.

“Where is Miss Balasso?” repeated my lady, staring round the boudoir as if she expected to descry CEnone under a table, or behind a sofa cushion.

“She’s gone upstairs again. It’s best not to worry her any more just now.”

“But did you mesmerize her?”

“Oh yes,” answered Flagge. Almost as the words passed his lips, however, he remembered CEnone’s ingenuous pleadings that he should try not to deceive people, and to rise above things that were false, and he felt an

odd and unaccustomed sense of shame. Not that he intended for one instant to tell the truth to Lady Lowry ; but he hoped that Enone might not hear of the lie.

“ Well ? What did the spirits say ? ”

“ They said,—their answers were nebulous. There was a want of distinctness, arising from a species of haze in the mental atmosphere of the medium, lady.”

“ And what makes her so hazy ? I really think she might exert herself to keep her mind clear instead of being ‘ hazy ’ after all I’ve done for her ! ”

“ The physical conditions of the medium are beyond her control. And they act and react on the spiritual elements, so as to cause a condition resembling that of the moon a-shining through mists which prevent the rays having their full expansion and illumination. There are difficulties to the carnal mind in conceiving these impalpable influences ; but to you, lady, who have considerable of a transcendental nature, they will reveal themselves as the conditions of a higher intellectual sphere than ours, and you will understand ’em.”

But Sarah was not to be coaxed into good humour by even such flatteries as attributing



to her a peculiar comprehension of "higher intellectual spheres."

"I've no doubt I should understand what they said well enough if you'd only tell me what it was," she returned curtly. "You can't expect any one to understand what they've never heard a word of, can you, Dr. Flagge?"

Perhaps Dr. Flagge, whose mind was in constant communion with beings not amenable to the laws of common sense as accepted among mortals, *could* expect something of the sort; for he made no reply, but smiled vaguely and tossed his self-locks back from his forehead with an air of abstraction.

"I'll trouble you to let me know at once—at once, Dr. Flagge—what Sir Rupert Lowry has been saying, or if he has been saying anything at all, and in short what the spirits advise us to do next. If they've no suggestion to offer we must decide for ourselves, and it'll be no good their blaming us afterwards, you know!"

Upon this, Dr. Flagge roused himself to speak somewhat more to the purpose. It was difficult, indeed, for him to give her ladyship any categorical instructions, whether purporting to come from the spirits or not. But

he spoke to the following effect: that so far as they had gone, the investigations carried on by Sir Cosmo Lowry, respecting his father's will, were eminently soothing and satisfactory to the spirit of the departed: that he thoroughly approved of them, and desired that further inquiries might be made: that he could not for the present indicate the whereabouts of the missing will owing to sundry "conditions" of the spiritual sphere which he then inhabited; but his dear Cosmo and Sarah might be very sure that whatever difficulties they encountered in prosecuting their inquiries were merely intended to try their faith.

"Well," said my lady after a little reflection, "that isn't so vague;—not so very vague. I wish he could have told us where the will is, though, and what is in it. For as to trying our faith,—Sir Cosmo has paid handsomely for the information you got him, and I don't see how you can prove your faith better than by paying! However, Sir Rupert means us to go on: and that's the main thing."

How to "go on," however, was not easy to be decided on. Lady Lowry, in speaking afterwards to her husband on the subject,

suggested that he should see Mr. Flint, and communicate to him simply the fact that Sir Rupert had made a will in the July before his death. That would be at least a beginning.

“See Mr. Flint? That’s easily said, Sally,” cried Sir Cosmo. “Do you suppose I’m going to undertake the journey to Elcaster in this weather, and be poisoned by bad wine at the beastly hotel there?”

But Lady Lowry hastened to inform her husband that Mr. Flint was expected in London:—nay, probably was in town already; and that nothing would be easier than to appoint a meeting with him. Sir Cosmo began to swear under his breath, and to suggest obstacles and difficulties, until Sarah exclaimed, “Why, I can’t make out why you’re so unwilling. I suppose you ain’t afraid to speak your mind to Mr. Flint?” And the fact being that Sir Cosmo was more or less afraid to speak his mind to Mr. Flint, he repudiated the suggestion with a fresh access of petulant ill-humour.

But Sarah, of course, prevailed. She prevailed not only because her husband had taken the habit of yielding to her, but because in this instance her importunity was backed up by his

own greed, and his secret belief that some discovery valuable to himself would surely be brought to light, if he troubled himself to seek it. Accordingly he wrote a note requesting Mr. Flint to do him the favour to call on him on a certain day, at a certain hour, and he sent the note to the care of Mrs. Hautecombe at the address written on Mrs. Flint's card.

It chanced that when the baronet's note was delivered to Mr. Flint in Mrs. Hautecombe's drawing-room, there were several afternoon visitors in it. There was Miss Lowry and Mr. Percival Wigmore, and another gentleman of our acquaintance who had recently been revisiting the glimpses of polite society, and who had recognized an old connection of his family in the widow of Colonel Hautecombe. This gentleman was Cassius Demayne. His clothes were now perfectly fashionable, so that it was impossible to distinguish him from the Wigmores of the world; particularly since whatever zest or interest the back slums of Europe might have imparted to his conversation was suppressed in Mrs. Hautecombe's drawing-room, and he said the sort of things which the Wigmores of the world say, with an air of wooden stolidity which many a Wigmore might have striven in vain to achieve.

Not that our special Wigmore "went in" for that sort of thing. Nature, to be sure, had saved him the trouble of assuming vacuousness of mind. But his temperament was cheerful and buoyant, and utterly alien to the languid superciliousness of modern manners. And as to affecting boredom lest society should despise him for being too easily amused, so vulgar a pretension never entered into the head of our Percival. Snobbery, like genius, is confined to no social sphere, but, as Dogberry says of reading and writing, comes by nature; and Percy was quite free from it. Indeed, his own freedom from pretension made him fail to appreciate the talents and industry of those who schooled themselves into a state of outward impassibility, which, if genuine, would have argued the absence not only of sentiments but of sensations. And he was wont to say of Cassius Demayne, for example, that he was an uncommonly good fellow, only "rather stoopid, don't you know."

Amidst this company Mr. Flint, newly arrived from Elcaster, was sitting when Sir Cosmo's note was brought to him. He read it in silence, and then carried it to his wife and put it into her hand. Mrs. Flint was conversing in an undertone with Miss Lowry.

“I think, my dear,” she was saying, “that I never saw such a singular face. Such eyes, and such a bloodless-looking skin, as if it was made of parchment, and such a strange, solemn manner for a young girl! The poor thing looks frightfully ill. If she were a child of mine I should send her to Madeira. Well, to be sure there’s no accounting for tastes—especially men’s tastes! But it does seem astonishing to me that a fine soldierly-looking Englishman like Major Maude should be attracted by that poor skinny little foreign creature. Eh? Do you want me, Samuel? Oh, a note from Sir Cosmo! This will be about your business now, Miss Lowry.”

“Is it my brother who writes to you?” asked Mary of Mr. Flint.

“Yes; Sir Cosmo wishes me to appoint a morning for calling on him. No doubt it is to settle the terms of the tenancy of Lowry Place.”

“Cosmo has said nothing to me on the subject recently.”

“Has he not? Still, I know no other business on which he can want to see me. It must be about that, I suppose.”

“I suppose it must.”

“And it is much better that I should treat

for you than that you should discuss the terms yourself. I think Sir Cosmo is right in not talking to you on the subject."

"I suppose so. Yes, I dare say he is."

"I say, Miss Lowry, is it really true that you're goin' to run away and bury yourself in the country?" cried Wigmore suddenly.

He was apt to utter the thought that came uppermost, regardless of its want of connection with the preceding subject of discourse, which gave his conversation the piquancy of unexpectedness at least, if it lacked that of wit.

"Not quite to bury myself, I hope," returned Mary with a little smile.

"But you really are goin' into the country? At this time of year! Why, what on earth shall you do with yourself? You don't go in for huntin'!"

"I shall have a card sent me every week with the various appointments for the foxhounds, and I can read that, you know. It will be some comfort."

"Miss Lowry of Lowry will be at no loss for society and amusement if she will only deign to be sociable, and accept them," observed Mrs. Flint.

"Won't she? Jove! *I* should. I never know what to do with myself in the country."

"I dare say," replied Mrs. Flint drily.

"Unless it's at a big house full of people, don't you know? Then it's pretty nearly as good fun as bein' in town. In point of fact, you'd scarcely know you weren't in town if you didn't look out of the window. But a quiet family party in the country—why, when I go down to Wigmore's place—I don't often, but sometimes when I want—ahem! My wife says it's better to keep up family connections, don't you know?—and so we do sometimes run down for two or three days at a time. And I give you my word of honour it's enough to kill a fellow. Wigmore's billiard-table is the beastliest thing you ever saw. And he's got a chamber-organ in the library, and Lady Wigmore plays on it—psalm tunes and things of that sort; she's regularly Evangelical, and I'll declare to you you hear this thing begin mooin' like a melancholy mad cow before eight o'clock on a Sunday mornin'! and some of the notes have a rumblin' kind of sound that regularly makes you quiver in your bed like bein' on board a screw steamer. Oh no, I can't stand the country."

"We will trust that Miss Lowry's rural experiences are of a less appalling nature," said Demayne. He had been presented to



Mary by Mrs. Hautecombe, and had carefully abstained from mentioning the only circumstance which could have been likely to make her cordial and interested in him, instead of merely courteous and tolerant,—the circumstance, namely, of his friendship with the Peppiats. He knew, of course, that Miss Lowry had some family connection with the Captain and his wife, and that she sometimes went to see them. But he piqued himself on his knowledge of the world, and was not going to commit the blunder of alluding to lodging-house keepers in Bloomsbury as the friends of so well-born and high-bred a lady as Miss Lowry of Lowry. You see, this knowledge of the world, of which some folks are so proud, and which they deem so useful, can but be after all the knowledge of that which our own little mental mirror will reflect for us. This world that we boast of knowing is mainly a Berkleian kind of universe which depends on our consciousness for its very existence!

“My rural experiences,” said Mary, “are the experiences of all my life until last September, for I was never in London before that time.”

“La! Never in London? Oh yes; by-

the-by, I think Lady Lowry did mention it," said Percival. "Ah, well, you see Lowry Place was your home,, and all that kind of thing. That's different, of course. Oh I remember it used to be jolly enough at our place in my father's time before Wigmore had it. We boys used to have great fun. I recollect one day when we were home from Harrow. Wigmore was lungin' at me with a pitchfork they'd left beside a haycart in the paddock, and, by Jove ! he ran one of the prongs clean through the fleshy part of my leg ! You can see the mark to this day. Oh yes ; I don't mean to say you can't enjoy yourself in the country, you know. Only you ought to have a decent billiard-table, and no organ, if your wife happens to be Evangelical."

"No wife, perhaps, might be a better recipe for jollity," said Demayne.

"What a very ungallant speech !" exclaimed Mrs. Flint. She was not inclined to hear marriage sneered at—especially not in Mary Lowry's presence, for she was impatient to see her friend reigning triumphantly over one of the finest establishments in the county. She certainly sincerely desired Mary's happiness, but at the same time her eagerness that Mary should make a splendid marriage was

spurred on by a wish that Lady Lowry should be mortified and put down to a degree of which she was herself quite unconscious. "A country house specially requires a mistress to make it pleasant."

"You have tried your own recipe, Mr. Demayne," said Mrs. Hautecombe, a gentle old lady, with soft dark eyes and an old-fashioned muslin cap tied under her chin.

"And it hasn't produced the jollity, you mean? Well, I own that's a fair hit. But I dare say I'm jollier than I look. A man who has knocked about the world as I have don't acquire a soft and genial expression of countenance. If you play hand fives long, your palm will get to be like leather. I've been playing hand fives with the world until I'm a perfect moral rhinoceros."

"Thick-skinned, eh?" said Percy, with an air of being rather pleased with himself for seizing so rapidly on the meaning of Demayne's metaphor. "Ah, well, bein' thick-skinned's all very well in some things, but at times it's a noosance. Now, there's a fellow at my club—Junior Georgic, an uncommonly stoopid club, I think—a man with a mania for political economy, who will talk statistics. Well, I give you my word that man's so thick-skinned

it's impossible to make him understand that he's borin' you. Only the other day he button-holed me in the smokin' room—he was on customs, and tariffs, and things of that sort, don't you know—and began borin' about jute. Don't even know what it is. And I asked one or two fellers, and they didn't know. One of the Dabley boys said it was something connected with jetsam, don't you know—but that was only his fun. However, it shows that a man may be too thick-skinned, don't it?"

"Percy, you are acquainted with Major Maude, are you not? Mrs. Flint has been telling me that she met him at Lady Lowry's. Ask him to come and see me. Your uncle and I were very fond of him in old times," said Mrs. Hautecombe. "I thought he was in India."

"Oh, la bless you, no! He's in Piccadilly. Oh yes. Maude's a very nice feller. You know him, don't you, Demayne? He didn't hit it off with Flagge altogether, did he, Miss Lowry? Maude's a capital feller, only he takes things a little too seriously sometimes. Now, with sayuneses that won't do."

"With what, Percy?" asked his aunt.

"Sayuneses. Spirits, don't you know? It's no good borin' on about whether it's all true

or not. It's a sort of thing that ought to be taken lightly,—just touch and go. Then it's amusin'. But if you insist on believin' or disbelievin', and probin' things to the bottom, it becomes a noosance, don't you know."

Upon this there arose an animated discussion on the subject of spiritism. Mrs. Flint thought it distinctly irreligious, and considered that "mediums" and "clairvoyants" and persons of that kind ought to be solemnly condemned by the Bench of Bishops. Mrs. Hautecombe wondered whether there was anything in it, and hoped it was not wrong to wish there might be found some means of communicating with the departed. Mr. Flint observed that by the very nature of the case there was hardly any conceivable evidence which would convince a jury of sane men that spirits unenclosed in mortal bodies were communicating with mankind. Mr. Demayne shrugged his shoulders with his self-repressed air of having found out all about everything, but, not choosing to destroy other people's illusions, he remarked that the thing was as old as the hills, and had been done in India from time immemorial. Miss Lowry alone was silent, and looked grave. "Why, my dear," said Mrs. Hautecombe, turning to

her, "I am told that your sister-in-law, Lady Lowry, is quite a leading personage among spiritists; and that she has converted her husband to believe in it all. You must see and hear a great deal of it."

But Mary was averse from speaking on the subject, and took her leave very shortly. Before she went away Mr. Flint told her that he would send a note to Sir Cosmo in the course of the afternoon, appointing a day and hour to see him.

Percy Wigmore and Demayne walked a short distance together as they left Mrs. Hautecombe's house. "Wonderfully handsome woman, Miss Lowry," said Demayne.

"Oh yes; she's awfully good-looking. So's her sister-in-law."

"Ah! But Miss Lowry has 'that thoroughbred air that I dote upon,' as Byron said."

"Did he? Oh, well, Byron was a poet, you know. I don't care about women bein' so awfully thoroughbred and all that. I like Lady Lowry. She never gets on the high ropes, don't you know. And she has a skin that makes these London women look ghastly almost."

"Person of no family, isn't she?"

"Oh, well, I don't care a straw about her

family. And I don't think the world does either. That sort of thing's going out a good deal. Look at the dinners you get given you by fellers that never had a grandfather! Reg'lar low fellows in some respects, but everybody eats 'em;—I mean their dinners. Oh, family's all very well, but you can't live on your family. At least I believe some fellers do; but I know *I* can't. Wigmore's wife would see me—further first!"

## CHAPTER XV.

THE meeting between Sir Cosmo Lowry and Mr. Flint took place two days after the afternoon chronicled in the last chapter. Mr. Flint prepared himself for some haggling, for several disagreeable speeches, and for a general unpleasantness of manner on the baronet's part. But for the communication which the latter really did make to him he was totally unprepared; and it robbed him for the moment of his self-possession. However, the loss of his self-possession was only mental. It did not extend to his outward manner, which continued to be grave and steady as usual. And during the pause which ensued after Sir Cosmo had finished saying what he had to say, Mr. Flint recovered his presence of mind. He had not, indeed, collected his thoughts sufficiently to have formed a plan of action, but he was able to resolve that he



would not be hurried or surprised into any course without taking due time for reflection.

"You had no idea, I suppose, that my father had made a will so recently," said Sir Cosmo, watching him furtively.

"Of course not! How was it possible that I should have had such an idea? Nor do I think the circumstance one of very great importance—supposing it to be true."

"It's quite true, and it strikes me as being of considerable importance," returned Sir Cosmo with a sniff.

"I think not, for this reason: if your father had intended that will to be acted upon, he would certainly have informed me."

"You would have said yesterday that if my father had made a will so lately as last July he would certainly have informed you. Yet you see he made the will and told you nothing about it!"

"The two cases are not quite analogous, Sir Cosmo. But if your father did make a will in July, he certainly destroyed it before his death."

"I'm not at all certain about it."

"Why, what do you suppose he did with it if he did not destroy it? And why should he not have mentioned it to me? I saw him

—he was in my office three days before he died.”

“He did write a letter to you on the last evening of his life. He evidently wished to make some communication to you. I have a copy of that letter, you know, Mr. Flint. It strikes me that that letter adds enormous weight to Mr. Quickit’s statement.”

“Of course I remember furnishing you with a copy of that letter. Well, Sir Cosmo, what is it that you expect, or propose to do?”

“If my father made a will subsequent to the one which was proved, and if that later will is extant, it ought to be acted on.”

“Oh, certainly—*if!*”

“Perhaps the first thing to be done is that you should satisfy yourself that such a will really was made and witnessed. I will give you Mr. Quickit’s address, if you like.”

“What does Miss Lowry think of the tardy revelation of this Mr.—of this witness?”

“Mary knows nothing about it; but I don’t doubt she would desire to act honourably, and to carry out Sir Rupert’s wishes.”

“Oh, so then you conceive this later will to have been more favourable to *your* interests!” said Mr. Flint quickly.

“I say I am quite sure that my sister

would wish to act honourably in the matter, Mr. Flint."

"Act honourably! The phrase sounds almost offensive to my ears, Sir Cosmo, as implying the possibility of Miss Lowry's acting otherwise than honourably! Not that such an idea would be likely to cross *your* mind, of all men's in the world."

"Of course my sister will have to be told if we set inquiries afoot; and if—if we make a search for the will, you know."

"Where do you think of making a search for the will, Sir Cosmo?"

"In Lowry Place. Naturally, that is the place to look for it in!"

"Yes; as you say, of course Miss Lowry will have to be told. Indeed, she must be told in any case. But—excuse me for saying so—I think you and Lady Lowry are setting off on a wild-goose chase, and preparing a disappointment for yourselves."

"That is my business, Mr. Flint."

"As to making a search—you are aware that Sir Rupert's papers were carefully and minutely inspected after his decease?"

It rose to Sir Cosmo's lips to say, "*I* did not inspect them." But he refrained, and merely answered, "Of course there was no

search for a will, you know, because my father's last will and testament was supposed to be safe in the strong box at your office! Consequently there was no need for the sort of search which I intend to have made."


"If Miss Lowry permits it."

"Mary will scarcely refuse, for her own sake. It would have a very odd appearance if she showed any reluctance, you know."

If Mr. Flint had had a more intimate acquaintance with Sarah, Lady Lowry, he would have recognized her influence in the tone, nay, in the very phrase of this speech. He walked away from Sir Cosmo's house in anything but a pleasant or comfortable frame of mind. He tried to recall the wording of that letter which his old friend had written to him on the night preceding his death. But—not having studied it with the same attention as Lady Lowry had bestowed on it—he did not succeed very well. He only retained a general impression that Sir Rupert wished to communicate to him some arrangement or disposition which was likely to incur his (Mr. Flint's) disapproval. It might have been about the terms of sundry leases then to be renewed, and as to which the old baronet and his lawyer had not been quite agreed. It might

have been about fifty matters of more or less importance, which came crowding into Mr. Flint's mind as he walked along Piccadilly. But as to a new will—if Sir Rupert had wished to make a new will, or to reveal the fact of his having made a new one, why had he not plainly said so? The whole proceeding was unlike all that Mr. Flint knew of Sir Rupert's fearless, dogged, overbearing character. But then Mr. Flint did not know every secret recess of the old man's close-shut heart. And Mr. Flint was obliged to confess to himself that the course of his experience, and the results of his most sagacious observation, tended to the conclusion that in the matter of testamentary dispositions there was no reasoning *à priori*. "In fact," said Mr. Flint to himself, "I'm rapidly arriving at the conviction that in the two most important actions of life, choosing a wife and making a will, men are incapable of ratiocination, and are given over to the promptings of some familiar spirit, good or bad—generally bad!"

He went to Howard Buildings, and had an interview with Mr. Quickit. And as the first result of that interview he asked to see Dr. Flagge, who, however, the slatternly servant maid declared, was not at home. Mr. Flint



felt rather doubtful of the statement from the manner in which it was made. However, he had no remedy, and was walking along the narrow entrance passage towards the street door, when some one ran quickly downstairs and overtook him. It was a tall, bearded man, whose face Mr. Flint could not well see by the dim light which filtered through the dirty glass above the hall door, but whose figure and height made him jump to a sudden conclusion as to his identity.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Flint, making way for the stranger in the narrow passage, "but could you inform me whether Dr. Flagge is within?"

"No; I'm sorry to say I can't," returned the other. "I have been seeing some people who live in another part of the house." Then, after an instant's hesitation, he added, "I don't think I'm mistaken; you are Mr. Flint, of Elcaster?"

"Of course I am Mr. Flint of Elcaster, and of course you are Mr.—I should say Major—Maude! I knew you instinctively." The two men shook hands, and left the house together.

As they walked up Howard Buildings towards the Strand Mr. Flint, whose mind was

entirely preoccupied by one subject, asked Maude if he happened to know anything of the person who called himself Dr. Flagge. He received in reply as accurate an account of that celebrated medium as Maude was able to give him. It did not take long to rehearse. Mr. Flint listened attentively, with a grave and anxious face.

"The man's an unscrupulous impostor, then," said he, when Maude had finished. "That's the summing-up, I take it."

"I take it so, too."

"How on earth did he get into the Lowrys' house?"

"Some friends of Lady Lowry brought him there. This spirit medium business is very fashionable."

"A nice importation they've sent us from the other side of the Atlantic!"

"Oh, well, as to that," returned Maude, "I don't think we can complain. We have home-bred 'mediums,' too, by the score. And to say truth, the chief difference I find between the native article and the Transatlantic original is, that the latter do their tricks much the best. Our people—those whom I have seen, at least—are far clumsier."

"I'm glad to find that you don't believe in this nonsense, at all events."

“Not in Dr. Flagge, certainly.”

“Nor in any performer of the same kind, I hope? I have a horror of the whole thing—clairvoyance, mesmerism, and all the rest of it! It’s all humbug.”

“I don’t know that I am prepared to make so sweeping a profession of unbelief. For instance, there is a young lady whom I have just now been seeing, who lives at present with a family in Quickit’s house, and I believe her to be what is called a clairvoyante when under the influence of mesmerism.”

“Humph! I don’t know the young lady, of course. But I may be allowed to say without offence that young people sometimes have a curious gratification in deceiving; the sense of power pleases them, I suppose.”

“Miss Balasso does not consciously deceive. She may be played on by these mediums, she may be an instrument in their hands, but never an accomplice.”

The two men parted when they reached Charing Cross, and Mr. Flint walked back to Brompton in so deep a reverie as to risk being run over once or twice, and to draw down on his unconscious head the ready and fluent anathemas of divers cabmen and omnibus-drivers in the course of his progress to Mrs. Hautecombe’s house.



He was disquieted for more reasons than one. His wife had not failed to give him her impression of Sir Cosmo Lowry's household, and her impression was not an agreeable one. She had also called his attention to Mary's altered looks, and the air of languor which had come over her, and which was very different from the serene repose, the quiet cheerfulness of her former manner. "But yet," Mr. Flint had said to his wife, "Miss Lowry's life at home with the old man was not a very gay or pleasant one."

"Not gay, perhaps. But at least she had no Lady Lowry to shock her taste and hurt her feelings every hour of the day."

"Nor a thoroughly heartless, selfish brother to disappoint her hopes and repulse her affection, Bertha."

"As to that, Sir Cosmo wouldn't be half so bad if it were not for that dreadful woman. You have no idea what a creature she is. And to think of her being a Lowry! I'm sure it's preying on Miss Lowry's mind."

Mr. Flint, after he had been a day or two in London, began to have some secret and half-formed misgivings that there might be another cause for the change which he could not help observing in Mary Lowry. But he did not

! speak of this misgiving to any one. His wife had told him of Major Maude's singular infatuation for the little foreign girl, and he had this day been told by Major Maude himself that he had just been to see the little foreign girl whose name was fixed in Mr. Flint's tenacious memory. Was it possible that Mary Lowry was fretting and pining from unrequited love? Mary Lowry! The thing seemed incredible. But Mr. Flint, as he walked to Brompton, reflected that several things which he would have deemed incredible a short time ago had actually happened, or were actually happening. Sir Rupert Lowry had made a will without his (Mr. Flint's) knowledge—Quickit's testimony had convinced the old lawyer on that point—and Miss Lowry of Lowry, the beautiful, high-born, noble-hearted Mary Lowry, might actually live to see herself neglected for a little nondescript, white-faced, foreign music teacher. "Yes; it is so," said Mr. Flint to himself as he stood on Mrs. Hautecombe's doorstep waiting for admission. "I begin to believe in sober earnest that in making a will and choosing a wife the majority of mankind are given over to the promptings of the devil!"

After luncheon and two glasses of certain

special sherry which the late Colonel Hautecombe had left in his cellars, Mr. Flint admitted that there were exceptions to his diabolical theory. But he was still sorely disquieted by the anticipation of the effect which the revelation he was bound to make would have on Mary Lowry. She would be told that her father had made a will, the making of which will he had kept secret from his friends and family; that the document was supposed to be still in existence in some unknown hiding-place; and that she was required to submit to a thorough search being made in her own house for an instrument which might altogether change her fortunes and position.

“Though, indeed, as to that, I don’t believe—I cannot believe—that Sir Rupert died knowing that there existed a will subsequent to the one in my office, and made no sign!” said Mr. Flint to himself, changing from one view of the case to another, with a seesaw of indecision very unusual in his well-balanced mind. “He made the other will in London in a fit of temper—I remember he threatened something of the sort once—and then put it in the fire as soon as he got home. July! That was six weeks before he died. No; he

never would have kept it secret all that time, in all the talks we had together. The thing's impossible. Nevertheless, Miss Lowry must be told, and there's no better way of telling her than for me to write her a note. It will be less trying to both of us than talking of it.—Ah ! ”

And with a sigh and a rueful shake of the head, Mr. Flint sat down to write to Mary Lowry.

## CHAPTER XVI.

ENONE had made a great resolve. In Lady Lowry's house she saw Vincent Maude frequently, almost daily, and the moments which she passed in the same room with him were the only ones in all her life which she longed for before they came; although they too often left her sadder and more sore-hearted than ever, when they had passed. Nevertheless she was resolved to give up those bitter-sweet moments, and voluntarily to withdraw herself from the sphere which Maude frequented. She would plunge down again into the depths of a world which he only touched casually, and at its surface; and the waters would close over her, and her place would know her no more.

The sense of her own loneliness oppressed her hourly. And yet she was impelled to hide herself in still deeper loneliness. O for the touch of a loving hand!—a hand she could cling to and caress, and which should come

empty of all gifts save love ! The affectionate kindness of friends, and benefactors, and those who bestowed boons—what were these to her young ardent nature hungry for love,—yearning to be nearest and dearest to some human heart ? There rose up in her thoughts the image of Flagge. But it only made her tremble and shudder, even whilst she pitied him.

All her highly-wrought resolves, all her romantic visions of self-sacrifice, had been, she felt, a mere mirage of the mind, a delusion of her fancy. She could, she thought, even now do some heroic deed for one she loved ; but, alas ! no heroic deed was demanded of her. She had but to sit apart, and let the happy folks who loved each other pass by in the sunshine. Yes ; one thing she could do : she could withdraw far enough from them to keep her shadow from darkening their bright path. Poor slender little shadow !

Often latterly her thoughts had turned towards her absent father. She had but a dim recollection of him, but she seemed to remember beautiful dark eyes—Greek eyes—and a soft voice speaking to her mother in a language which CEnone did not understand. If her father would but come to her ! Or, better still, if she might but go to him ! He

must lead a strange adventurous wandering life out in those Eastern lands. Cenone knew that he was a merchant, and travelled hither and thither into many wild countries. She would not be afraid of hardships; she would not be a burthen on him. If need were she could lie down uncomplainingly to die in some desert place, with the sand beneath her and the sky above her, and her tired head resting on a heart that loved her, and that she had the right to love and trust to.

She made up her mind that she would try to write to her father. The Czernovics would be able to give her the latest address they had from him, and Cenone would send a letter thither. It might be like shooting an arrow into the air, but she would try. The first thing to be done, however, was to get at the Czernovics. She put a letter in the post for Papa Czernovic, directed to St. Cecilia's Hall. The letter simply set forth her desire to return to them for a time, and stated that next day she and her trunk would be ready at three o'clock, if some of them would come to fetch her. Accordingly she quietly prepared and packed her clothes,—no long or laborious task,—and, at the time fixed, carried her hat and gloves down into the hall, and taking up

her station in the dining-room, waited in the assured expectation that some of the Czernovic family would appear in answer to her summons. Nor was her expectation disappointed.

A few minutes after three she heard a ring at the door bell. She had posted herself in the dining-room on purpose to be able to hear the arrival of her foreign friends, and to go to their assistance in case any difficulty should arise between them and Lady Lowry's servants. A murmur of voices was heard in the hall, and Eneone gliding quickly and quietly out of the dining-room, found Papa Czernovic talking fluently and politely to a footman, who stared at him in genuine surprise, whilst Lobley looked on, majestic and supercilious, from the background.

"Ach, mein kind, dere you are!" cried Papa Czernovic. "Well, ve are in time, eh? It is pùnt dree. How of your dronk, mein kind?"

"My trunk is ready, Papa."

"Ah, dat is goot. Will dis gentleman now carry it to de keb? Ve hev a keb here."

The "gentleman" in plush breeches, at whom old Czernovic looked insinuatingly with his head on one side, stared helplessly back again, and then glanced appealingly at Lobley



for advice. That grand creature stepped forward. "May I ask, Miss Balasser," he said, "what it is that this person wants?"

Czernovic made him a profound bow. "Ah, goot day, goot day," he said, with infinite suavity. "Vill dis young mensch bring de dronk to de keb, sir?"

"I want my box carried downstairs," said Enone curtly. "I am going away."

"Going away, Miss Balasser! Does—excuse me, but does my lady know?"

"No. It is no matter. I am free to go as I choose. Can James carry the box for me?"

"Ah, see here, mein kind, no need to drouble de young mensch. I have Sacha here wiz me. He carries your dronk in one hand and you in de oder. Come here, Sacha. Come here herein, mein sohn!" And Papa Czernovic opened the hall door and revealed the tall figure of Alexander Czernovic, familiarly called Sacha, standing on the steps keeping watch and ward over a red-faced cabman, who, having descended from the box of his vehicle, was leaning against the area railings and observing Sacha with true insular mistrust and disdain. Sacha's appearance, it must be owned, was outlandish. He wore a long green coat of his father's manufacture, coming down to his

heels, a red woollen scarf round his throat, and on his head a round black cloth cap like a skull-cap, edged with grey astrakan fur, from beneath which his long fox-coloured hair and beard flowed down in wavy disorder. Sacha was smoking a large meerschaum pipe, and looking straight before him with his keen light blue eyes.

On hearing his father's summons, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the railings, put the pipe in his pocket, and walked into the hall, removing his black cap in token of salutation to Enone, but neither looking at nor speaking to any one else. He kept his eyes fixed, indeed, on his father, who said a few words to him in Russian very rapidly.

"Vere is your room, Nona? Ah, op high? Ja so!" Then he said something more in Russian to Sacha, who forthwith proceeded across the hall towards the staircase.

The footman, and an inquisitive housemaid who had joined the group, and Lobley, had all been standing with an air of bewilderment, looking on at the proceedings of Papa Czernovic. But at this crisis Lobley roused himself to interfere with authority. He placed himself in front of Sacha, and said with as much dignity as he could manage to assume, "Excuse

me, young man, but I cannot allow of your walking about the 'ouse in this free and easy fashion. I must speak to my lady. If Miss Balasser's box is to be brought down, it will be brought down by the proper 'ands. You had better step outside again, and wait for further orders, if you please."

Sacha looked down on the top of Lobley's head with imperturbable nonchalance.

"Stand steady, Sacha, my son," said the old man, still speaking in Russian. And Sacha stood like a rock.

Enone turned to the butler. "What do you mean by this?" she said haughtily. "Do you imagine that any one here has the right to detain me for an instant?"

"No, no!" cried Papa Czernovic emphatically, but still with a smile of perfect good humour on his face. "Ah, no! no! Not detain! Ah, Gott, dese gentlemen would not dink——! It is a choke, ha!" And he included the three servants in a circular bow of immense suavity. At this moment the door of the boudoir was flung wide open, and there appeared on the threshold of it my Lady Lowry herself, gazing in unspeakable surprise and indignation on the group in the hall.

Enone remained still in her place. She

had seated herself wearily on a large carved settee in the hall, and, with the exception of the few words she had spoken to the butler, seemed to be looking on as at a scene in which her part was that of a mere spectator. The Czernovics would do and say any hard or disagreeable thing that needed to be done and said on her behalf. She had at once resumed her old habit of letting them do her liege service, as a matter of course. But Lobley went up to his mistress, and with bated breath explained to her the state of the case so far as he was able.

“Going away!” reiterated my lady, nearly breathless with dignity and surprise.

“I told you I was going, Lady Lowry.”

“Told me you were going! You mentioned something about it, and I said I would speak to the Honourable Mrs. Wigmore, and endeavour to get you pupils, and so forth;—but anything so sudden, and so sly as this, I never imagined. Never! And where are you going, pray? I never heard of such behaviour.”

Papa Czernovic, who had been observing my lady with an air of good-humoured shrewdness, now went up to her, and bowed several times in a manner only comparable to that of a buffo singer at the Italian Opera. “She

go wiz me, honourable lady. 'Ow do you do?"

"Go away! How dare you? Who is this person, Lobley? Why are such persons let into my house?"

"Miss Balasser's papa, my lady," began Lobley in a low voice, when Czernovic interrupted him. "Goot, goot! Dat is good choke! No, I am not Mees Balassopoulo's papa! I am Herr Fedor Czernovic, of de Saint Cecilia Hall. You have hear of de Muscovite Minstrel? Well, it is me and my wife and my sons and my daughters, ja!"

"The—a—individual's son was going upstairs to fetch down Miss Balasser's box, my lady," resumed Lobley, "but I thought it my dooty to inform your ladyship before I allowed—why, where is he?"

Sacha, on a sign from his father, had marched straight upstairs to the top of the house, as soon as the general attention was diverted from him by Lady Lowry's appearance. And he was now seen coming down again cool, clear-eyed, and stolid as ever, bearing CEnone's little trunk on his shoulder.

"Oh, you—you sly minx!" exclaimed my lady, provoked into a touch of nature, which if it did not make her kin with the whole

world, at least roused a responsive chord in the breast of her housemaid. "The idea of your running off in this way! The idea of your not saying one word about it! It isn't respectable, positively; not really respectable!"

The housemaid tossed her head corroboratively. She had been obliged to make Miss Balasso's bed, to her great disgust. And now she hoped my lady saw what came of harbouring such creatures. And yet if Miss Balasso had but dined in the servants' hall instead of at the master's table, Polly's sympathies would have been all on her side. Polly epitomized a good deal of social rancour in that shake of the head.

"It is useless to speak to me so. Your anger is trivial, and you express it coarsely. I owe you nothing, not even a farewell. I am tired of this house;—wearied to death. And I go." CEnone spoke with unfeigned contempt. She was not irritated. Lady Lowry could not touch any sensitive point in her singular nature. Her genuine disdain for my lady impressed even Polly; and Lobley secretly admired her for it very much. What was odd was that Lady Lowry's heat of anger seemed cooled by CEnone's contemptu-

ous calm. Sarah reflected—half unconsciously, perhaps—that a girl in Miss Balasso's position would never be so independent if she had not some secret source of power. "She knows that I have depended on her a good deal to hear what Sir Rupert had to say," thought my lady. The thought did not mitigate her indignation against Enone, but it softened the expression of it, especially since Lobley and the other servants were all eyes and ears, and my lady felt that it would never do to cut a bad figure in the eyes of *that* audience.

"Well, you always were a peculiar girl," said she. "And I can't treat you as I should treat other people. But for your sake, you—you inexperienced child, I insist on knowing who these persons are that you are going away with."

"You know them very well. They are the Czernovics—the Russian people I have lived with from a child. That is enough to absolve you. Your servants have heard. Come, Sacha."

Papa Czernovic could not endure to make his exit in ill humour. As Sacha, shouldering the box, coolly opened the hall door with his disengaged hand, and went out, his father turned to the little group in the hall, and

made a speech, addressing himself mainly to Lady Lowry, but including the others by a dexterous use of eye and voice.

“Goot-bye, honourable lady,” he said. “You must not take ill dat Nona cannot live no longer wiz you. Nona is artist—born artist, and all what is doll is death to her. Dis your house is full of comfortable, but doll, dear lady—doll; *ach langweilig* is dis house for artists! So a lady as you cannot understand perhaps Nona. Nona is a very ve—ery fine little violin what must be tooned and touched wiz delicate fingers. She is all artist; but she have a goot heart. I know de world, honourable lady. I see how you are respectable and surprised at Nona; but dere is natures what cares not for boarding, cares not for lodging, cares not for washing, in comparison wiz dere imaginations. I—ach Gott, I am old. I like dinners, ja! I love de comfortable. I am de big drum in de orchestra—de kettledrum, ha! I am not sensitiff. I stand de drubbing, ja! But Nona!—A fine little violin, honourable lady. If you play him well it is music to bring your soul in your ears:—if you play him bet, he squeak like de devil! Goot-bye. I dank you for Nona.”

With these words, and an almost affec-



tionate wave of the hand which comprehended James and the housemaid—greatly to their confusion—Papa Czernovic bowed himself out of the house. Sacha had already handed Nona into the cab, and as soon as his father entered it, he climbed up on the box and they drove away.

Enone had left a note for Rosamond in Miss Lowry's dressing-room; but she had purposely timed her departure at an hour when she knew the aunt and niece had arranged to be out, so as to avoid seeing them. As she was being carried towards the Strand with Papa Czernovic seated beside her, she leaned back in the cab and closed her eyes. The old man did not importune her with questions. "You not wish to talk, eh?" he said; "Goot!" Then he philosophically plunged into his own reflections, assisted by a cigarette.

She was received by the whole family with the same quiet acceptance of her moods, and the same absence of expressed curiosity as to her motives. That Nona should come back to them when it so pleased her seemed to be a fact as little open to discussion or criticism as that grass should be green. Their minds asked no explanation of such natural phenomena. The mother and her daughters

squeezed themselves into one sleeping chamber; the father and sons shared another; and thus a bed-room—the best and airiest—was left for CEnone, and she was installed into the possession of it without further formalities. “Mother has had your room swept, Nona,” said the eldest daughter, speaking in a sort of *lingua franca* compounded of French and German. And Mamma Czernovic added in her native Russian dialect that she had even had the wooden floor scrubbed on the previous evening, and had kept a fire burning there all night to dry it; as she supposed that CEnone, after a prolonged residence amongst thoroughbred English people, might probably have adopted some of their prejudices and customs.

In the evening, before going to St. Cecilia’s Hall, old Czernovic drew CEnone aside, and put into her hand three sovereigns. They were what remained, he said, of Belassopoulo’s last remittance, after he had repaid himself sundry small expenses incurred for CEnone on her leaving Miss Cribb’s school for Lady Lowry’s house. “Keep them,” said CEnone. “You must be paid for having me here. And three sovereigns will go but a little way towards reimbursing you.” But Czernovic positively refused. They were doing well, he

said; very well. They were saving money every week, and there was some talk of his getting a partnership in the business of a musical instrument seller, and retiring with his wife from public life after this season. The young folks would still form an excellent quartet, and would easily get engagements. "Ta, ta, ta," said he in reply to CEnone's remonstrances. "Vot is dis, mein kind? Are you not one of us? Are ve Philister? Ven you was rich, I don't say; I take all you giff. But ve is not honourable Lord Lowrys dat you need dreat us so lofty!"

"When did you hear from my father last, and where was he? I want to write to him, Papa Czernovic."

The old man looked at her in amazement. It was the very first time in his remembrance of her that CEnone had expressed such a wish. He was unable to give her any precise information. The latest address he had was to the care of certain Greek merchants at Constantinople; but that was a long time ago. However, CEnone could write if she pleased, and he would forward the letter. "Do you be tired of dese English respectable Philister, and want to go away in foreign parts, Nona?" said Papa Czernovic, looking at her shrewdly.

"I am tired of myself, I think ; and I want to get away from *that* if I could," answered CEnone with smiling lips and serious eyes.

"Ach Gott, you should hev studied de clavier mit earnest ! Dat is your real self vot your play on de clavier. You should have been a great virtuosa, Nona. You should have been a woman Lizst, ha ! And den wiz hard work you not never be tired of yourself, ja !"

"No ; it is *not* my real self that I play on the pianoforte. Music is not my life. But it does not matter. I shall write to my father at once."

So CEnone settled herself once more in the midst of those people, whose ways and manners and mixture of simplicity and cunning were at once so familiar and so strange to her after the very different scenes and people she had been living amongst.

## CHAPTER XVII.

CENONE had not been four and twenty hours in Mr. Quickit's house before she received a note from Rosamond. It had been enclosed in one to Mrs. Peppiat, and had been left at Howard Buildings by Captain Pep himself. It was written in Rosy's usual impulsive and outspoken fashion, and plainly showed that events were happening in Sir Cosmo Lowry's household which threw the circumstance of Cenone's abrupt departure into the background. "Aunt Mary is going away back to Clevelen almost directly," wrote Rosamond; "and I am not to go with her. Grandpapa's will isn't his real will, it seems, and they are going to look for it; and Mr. Flint came and stayed two hours this morning, and Aunt Mary looks worried to death. And oh! Nony, to think of your going away and leaving me like that! I am all by myself now, or shall be when Aunt Mary goes. I don't wonder at

your wanting to get away from this house ; but you need not have gone so suddenly, and you might have told me where to write. I send this to Aunt Leonora, for I think she will know where the Czernovics live ; and I know you are with them, for the servants here are talking of nothing else but those queer people whom you went away with. Lady Lowry's maid asked Aunt Mary's maid if they really were Russians, for she had heard so, and could not believe it. Just as if it was disgraceful to be a Russian ! But that Moore is a stupid creature, and gives herself such airs that she is quite insupportable. Oh dear, what shall I do when everybody is gone ? As to papa, I never see him ; and he does not talk much when I do. I am screwing up my courage to ask him to let me go and pay a visit to Aunt Leonora, and then you can meet me there. Wouldn't that be lovely ? And who do you think is undertaking to convey this and another little note to Aunt Nora's house ? But you would never guess. Why, Mr. Wigmore ! And he's as good-natured as ever he can be to me, and spoke so kindly of you that I'll never laugh at him any more, although he does talk nonsense, and thinks Lady Lowry such a 'delightfully natural

woman,' he says. He doesn't know her one bit. Though, indeed, for that matter, all sorts of horrid things are *natural* enough, I suppose, and people too! Mind you write to me directly, and then perhaps I may forgive you for running away. If you can't come to see me, do go and see Aunt Nora and Uncle Pep. They are so kind and sensible that I am sure they would help you and advise you if you would only let them. Don't be a proud ancient Greek, now, Nona! What's the use? We might just as well have been carved in white marble if we were meant to stand in an attitude stiff and cold like gods and goddesses. But, on the contrary, we are all made of warm flesh and blood—or *almost* all of us. I have my doubts about Lady Lowry. I think she is only pink wax and white leather and sawdust."

There was not a word in the letter about Major Maude. That was the first thought which occurred to poor CEnone as she read. Why should not he have been entrusted with the note for her, instead of that frivolous, chattering Wigmore? Perhaps he had not been to Green Street since she had left it! There was a subtle comfort in that thought. To be sure it was best, far best, that Maude

should not have been entrusted with Rosamond's note, or with any missive which should bring him into communication with herself. She had resolved to disappear from his world. But still she could not help being comforted by the thought that he was not constantly with Mary Lowry. Yes; it was best, far best, that she should not see him. The sight of her pale face would only vex him, and he would ask her to be careful of her health, and try to get a situation to go abroad. And she could not tell him what made her so wan, or why she pined and woke in the long nights, and felt listless and hopeless in the dim days. She could not even say to him that she longed to go away, and share her father's wandering life. He would oppose it, and question her, and advise her, and speak to her with the grave, soft kindness of an elder brother to a wayward child, and——no, she could not bear it! It was far, far best that he should not come; and then as the jangling door-bell sounded suddenly through the house, her heart fluttered painfully with the unreasoning hope that it might be he!

The Czernovics were all away at their morning concert in St. Cecilia's Hall. They sang there twice a day now, and were very



successful. Enone was alone in the dusty, shabby sitting-room, trying to mend a poor, frayed, little black silk jacket which had seen better days ; but her thin hands, which looked as if they were the hands of some mediæval ascetic saintly figure carved in ivory, dropped wearily on to her lap at every few minutes, and she leaned her head back against her chair and breathed heavily. The jangling bell set her pulses beating fast, and the sharp, discordant sound seemed to be tingling through her veins. If it might be he ! It was absurd, unlikely, undesirable even : yes, she knew all that. But—if it only might be he ! A step came quickly and lightly, though with strength, upstairs. It was so like his step ; but, of course, that was only her foolish fancy. It came nearer swiftly to the landing, to the door. Enone put out her hand as if to stop the approach of something that she feared—a hand knocked, a voice spoke ; in a second Vincent Maude was in the room, holding her hand, looking down upon her, speaking she knew not what ; she only saw and heard through a strange mist. But then the mist cleared away, and he was there still, sitting near her, and talking to her in his kindly, manly voice.

He was not talking of herself. His mind was preoccupied with another topic. He did not reproach her with having left Green Street. He did not say, "Why did you not tell me, or send for me, Nona?" in his old way. He was talking of some annoyance and trouble in the Lowry household. That was what interested him most in all the world. Eneone's heart swelled with a hot, bitter pain. He did not care for *her*. No one cared for her!

"And I am afraid, Nona," said Major Maude, "that that fellow Flagge is at the bottom of it all. It has annoyed her a great deal."

"Annoyed whom?"

"Did you not understand? I say that Miss Lowry has been so vexed and hurt, less at the fact itself than because it was, in the first place, kept from her, and then told her in such a way, and put in such a light."

"Oh, Miss Lowry? Yes."

"Now, I want you to tell me frankly, Nona—but I need not say that, for you are always as true as steel——"

She bowed her head and dropped her eyes. "What I do say shall be true. That at least I can promise. As to frankness, that is different."

"I want you to tell me, my dear child, what Flagge has been saying to you on the subject; how far you were acquainted beforehand with what has been going on."

"I—don't know. What is it?" asked Ænone, passing her hand over her eyes and forehead.

"Why, this whole story of the missing will. Have you not understood me all this time, Nona?"

"Is there a will missing?"

"I am glad to find that you know nothing of the matter. I should have been terribly put out by the idea of that fellow mixing you up in his plots and plans."

Then Maude briefly told her of the facts revealed to Sir Cosmo by Quickit. Mr. Flint had had an interview with Miss Lowry that morning, and was half inclined to suspect a conspiracy in which Flagge had an active part. Ænone's name had been mentioned. Mr. Flint would probably wish to see her sooner or later; and if so, Maude was sure she would give him every assistance in discovering the truth. The girl bent her mind to follow what he was saying, and her natural quickness helped her to a tolerably clear view of the case. There were details which she

did not understand. But she had constantly been witness to Lady Lowry's discontent with the provisions of her father-in-law's will, and now many of her words and hints were explained.

"Well," she said, coldly, "what is it to me?" she had nearly added, "or to you?"

"In the first place, it is a matter which closely concerns Miss Lowry, and I am sure, Enone, that you are not ungrateful for all her goodness to you."

He made a little pause for her to speak, but she remained silent. Then he went on, "And in the next place, you would desire—all your friends would desire—that you should appear clear from the slightest—what shall I say?—connivance, even passive connivance, with Flagge's machinations."

"Oh! who suspects me of—connivance?"

"No one! I hope no one. But of course a fellow like Flagge will endeavour to draw you and every one else into the net. The more people are mixed up in it the more he shelters himself in the crowd."

"Has Dr. Flagge said anything about me?"

"Not that I am aware of. But there has as yet been no opportunity. Lady Lowry

declares that Flagge's information was given to him by the spirits from your mouth."

"And the information is that the old man who died made a will here in London, and that the landlord of this house witnessed it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that information seems to be true, whoever gave it."

"If one can trust Quickit's testimony."

"Well—and what more can I say?"

"Flagge says that the spirits—I am ashamed to echo his jargon—have been talking through your mouth. Do you remember saying anything to Flagge about Sir Rupert Lowry?"

"If I have spoken it must have been when I was in the magnetic sleep. How can I tell what I said?"

"I wish to heaven, Nona, that you had never had anything to do with this thing!"

"Why? Because it may do Miss Lowry harm?"

"Because it may do you harm, Nona!"

"That does not matter."

"It matters a great deal! Why do you speak so, CEnone? It is not kind to those who are interested in you. The Czernovics are really devoted to you. Why should you speak in that tone?"

"Tell me, at least, what harm *you* think can come to me because I have been mesmerized, and because I am a clairvoyante—if I am one."

"It is not merely the mesmerizing, Nona. It is the fact of being brought into constant communication with a man like Flagge which seems to me so bad. It is bad in every way. He is thoroughly unscrupulous, he is greedy of gain, he will lie and cheat, and make you a seeming accomplice in his lies without remorse. Any confidence with such a man is dangerous—and even humiliating."

"I do not believe that Dr. Flagge would sacrifice me 'without remorse,' as you say, either to Lady Lowry or to any one else."

"He is a low fellow, Nona."

"He is not so low as Sir Cosmo Lowry's wife."

"I can't discuss that with you."

"There is no need to discuss it. You know it is true. Every one must see it who knows her."

"But that is not quite to the purpose. The man cannot help being ignorant, but he can help being an impostor and a liar."

Enone turned round with a quick impulse. "It is easy to say all that," she cried, "but

is it so sure that he is an impostor? If he had discovered a great fortune for Miss Lowry, would he have been an impostor? All that he has told hitherto has been proved to be true. There is a witness to corroborate his words. Perhaps they think I am an impostor, too!"

"Ænone!"

"Dr. Flagge has more heart and feeling than many who think themselves his superiors. Lady Lowry would trample over me if I were in her path, and never turn her head to see whether I were alive or dead. She is coarsely insolent, and not high-minded or truthful,—and yet I have not been told that intercourse with her is dangerous and humiliating!"

"I am sorry, Ænone, that you were so unhappy with the Lowrys," answered Maude, gently. "I had no idea that your feelings were so much hurt and irritated by Lady Lowry as I now perceive they must have been. I had fancied that the companionship of—of your friend Rosamond would have made your stay there pleasant to you."

What dim, unacknowledged perception of the truth made Vincent Maude refrain from mentioning Mary's name? It had hovered on his tongue when he spoke of the com-

panionship which might have made CEnone's stay with the Lowrys pleasant. But he had checked its utterance. The poor girl was in a strange, unhappy, morbid state of mind, he said to himself, and he would treat her with the tenderest gentleness: he would spare her any word which might hurt her overstrained sensitiveness. But how could Mary Lowry's name hurt it? He did not put that question to his reason, but followed a sympathetic instinct, and forebore to speak to CEnone of the one being with whom his thoughts were just then so anxiously occupied.

"Since you had made up your mind to leave Green Street, the best thing you could do was to come at once to the Czernovics," he said, assuming a more cheerful tone.

"When did you arrive here?"

"Yesterday."

"And what is your present plan of life?"

"You wouldn't approve it. I would rather not tell you just yet."

"As you please, Nona."

"You are not offended with me?"

"Offended? No." But his tone showed that he was a little hurt, nevertheless. CEnone put out her poor thin hand and timidly touched his sleeve. "Pray do not be angry with



me!" she said. "I don't think I *could* bear that."

"My child—angry! I should never think of being angry with you, Nona."

"No; I am not worth being angry with. No, no, I don't mean that! I did not intend to speak harshly. I think some evil spirit is prompting my words to-day."

Maude looked at her pityingly and anxiously. "My poor Nona, I am convinced that something is preying on your mind. I have seen it for some time past——"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Mind, I don't want to force any confidence from you, my child. I have not the slightest right to do so. But remember that if you want any help or advice, such as a brother might give you, you must frankly ask me for it. Will you promise that you will ask me?"

"I—I can't. I'm afraid to promise. But don't be angry with me, pray don't be angry with me!"

The tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she turned her eyes with a pathetic pleading look up to his. Maude stood up, and taking her head between his two hands, kissed her forehead. "My dear girl," he said, "it is impossible that I should be angry with

you! What, my own little Nona, whom I have known ever since she was not higher than my knee? No, no; you and I are too old friends, and too fast friends, to quarrel, foolish child! But I want you to understand that you can give me no task I would more willingly undertake than to help you and advise you. I am an awkward fellow, I dare say, and perhaps I make blunders now and then, and don't express myself as I would. You're such a sensitive little plant, you see. I feel as if I were handling the wings of a butterfly with my clumsy fingers when I talk to you. But you understand me, don't you? Come, come, Nona, don't cry! Don't cry, my darling! You're harassed and worn out, and over-excited, what with one thing and another. Don't cry, little Nona!"

He still had one hand upon her head, and Enone had taken the other hand between her own, and pressed it to her lips, sobbing convulsively. "I wish I could die now," she murmured; "I wish—I wish—I could!" But after a little while she became calmer, and laid her head back in her chair, still holding Maude's hand with a clinging grasp. Maude waited, gentle, patient, and compassionate, until the short struggling sobs ceased,

and the thin little hands relaxed their pressure. "There, there," he said soothingly, "you were fairly overwrought, and the tears won't do any harm—only we don't want any more of 'em, eh, Nona? I'm afraid I have vexed you by telling you of this business at the Lowrys. But you need not fear that any one in that family will connect you for an instant with Flagge's underhand doings."

"Will Miss Lowry be poor if they find another will?"

"Who is to say? But it is not that which frets her. It is the thought that her brother behaves badly to her—even distrustfully. He's the most—never mind! Let us keep a calm sough, as they say in the North. All I wanted to be sure of was that that black-guard Flagge hadn't dragged you into his intrigues. Keep clear of him, Nona. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Remember me to the Czernovics."

"Stay one instant."

There was a pause, during which Enone kept her eyes fixed on the ground. All at once she raised them and said, "I hope no evil will come to Miss Lowry through all this. You know I could not help what I spoke in

my trance. She has been good to me, and I hope she will be happy. Tell her that I said so."

The look, the tone, the manifest effort and struggle with which she spoke, suddenly transformed Maude's dim instinctive perception of the truth into a clear and vivid conviction. Enone was jealous of Mary Lowry, and her better feelings warred with her jealousy, and tormented her.

Jealous! Poor, foolish, romantic child! "It is all as fanciful as a fairy tale, in her inexperienced mind," said Maude to himself. "But she is fretting, and pining, as if it were real and serious enough. How could one have guessed——?" The Major did not finish his sentence even mentally, and there was a hot flush on his forehead when he came upon Mr. Flint at the bottom of the stairs.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"WELL," said my lady triumphantly, "I hope you're satisfied now, Cosmo, that I was not quite a fool, and that I did right to believe in the spirits!"

Mr. Flint, from being the object of her dislike and suspicion, was very nearly transformed into a Daniel come to judgment by his unexpected adhesion to her hypothesis that Sir Rupert Lowry had made a testament subsequent to the one proved and acted on. His interview with Quickit had indeed convinced Mr. Flint that such was the case. He had gone to Quickit prepared to unmask a conspirator, but he had come away satisfied of the man's honesty. Astonishing and vexing as the discovery was, he could not honestly refuse to admit his conviction that Sir Rupert had made a second will, and had kept the fact that he had made it secret from his old friend *and* family lawyer. Mr. Flint could not

honestly refuse to admit this much—to his mind the admission by no means involved all the consequences which Lady Lowry would fain have deduced from it—so he did admit it; and by so doing gained Lady Lowry's favourable opinion as to his intelligence. Of his honesty she did not think so highly.

“You see, Cosmo,” she said, “this Mr. Flint thinks you stand a very good chance of being whole and sole master at Lowry, and of having other good things besides. There'll be leases, and contracts, and deeds, and all manner of law business to do; so, of course, as he knows which side his bread is buttered, he don't want to make an enemy of you.”

“Pooh! Mr. Flint wouldn't care one straw, Sally, whether I give him my law business or not.”

“Oh, that's nonsense! If he wouldn't care a straw, why should he keep an office in Elcaster, and pay clerks and all that? Of course he looks to have your patronage, and I don't blame him for that. You may depend his behaviour in this matter shows which way the wind blows. If he thought Mary was going to get the upper hand he would turn up his nose at the spirits and at Mr. Quickit, and all, just as—some other folks did at first. But

it's too late for *you* to pooh-pooh the thing now, Cosmo, at all events."

Sir Cosmo in truth no longer even affected to pooh-pooh it. He sneered, because nature and habit had made it impossible for him not to sneer; but he treated the question of his father's will as one of vital importance. There was not one of his waking hours in which the subject was not present to his mind. He was continually making mental calculations of the arrears of interest that would be due to him on the money which Mary inherited under the present will, and building castles in the air with tall columns of arithmetical figures. This and that investment which he had already dabbled in should be added to. Such and such shares would yield such and such profit. He should be able to afford to place a few sums in speculations of greater risk, and proportionately greater gains, than the miserable three, four, or five per cent. which he could now have with safety. He grew leaner and more haggard day by day. In a word, he was being devoured by the slow fever of avarice.

And yet at the same time, by a strange contradiction, there grew up in the very innermost depths of his conscience a sentiment of

respect and sympathy for his sister Mary stronger than he had ever felt before. It was true that he allowed his wife—emboldened by the success of her investigations so far—to utter, unchecked, very broad insinuations to the effect that Mary must have known something about that London will, and that she certainly had very strong motives for concealing its existence, and possibly even for putting it out of the way. He longed, with all the strength of the strongest passions within him—greed and love of power—to gain possession of the home which now sheltered his sister, and of the greater part of the income which she now enjoyed. He would have struggled as ruthlessly as Sarah herself (although with less force and singleness of purpose) against any attempt to quash the search for the missing will. But yet he secretly resented all Sarah's coarse and unfeeling words about Mary; and he secretly—half unconsciously—began to appreciate his sister's fine qualities, and to take a queer sort of pride in the superiority of her behaviour throughout these circumstances to the behaviour of his wife. Mary was a Lowry, thoroughbred. Mary was incapable of vulgar littleness. Mary's sore feeling on the subject



was the result of what was good, and not bad. She resented the intolerable suspicions which Sarah had neither the will nor the power to conceal from her. It was the want of confidence which hurt her, not the fear of loss. All these considerations, whilst they became clearer and clearer to Sir Cosmo, by no means influenced him so as to make him pursue his purpose in a manner less offensive to his sister's feelings.

Mary resolved to leave London on the eighteenth of December. She had always intended to spend Christmas Day at Clevelen, and recent events had made her desire to get away from her brother's house with as little delay as might be. She was thoroughly unhappy there. She did not, indeed, delude herself by supposing that happiness awaited her at Clevelen; but there would be at least solitude, if she chose to have it. The moral atmosphere of the house in Green Street had become insupportable to her. She felt sometimes as if her physical respiration were actually oppressed there. How little she had guessed, when she first received the announcement of her brother's marriage, and so generously responded to it by welcoming his young wife to her home, what a dark shadow entered

her life with that rose-cheeked, fair-haired woman! There were moments when Mary felt ashamed to think that her sister-in-law possessed so much power to wound her—moments when she declared to herself that she was abased by giving any heed to Sarah's coarse and clumsy thrusts, and when she resolved to keep her mind in a region above their reach. But of course such resolves were vain. Sarah was always able to strike at her feelings through Cosmo. The thought that the brother to whom she had been so loyal and loving through many weary years should repay her with coldness, ingratitude, and even suspicion, pierced Mary's heart. Her affection for Cosmo—that sisterly tenderness which had survived so long a separation and so many adverse circumstances—had certainly not remained the same since she and her brother had met again. It was impossible to love Cosmo present as she had loved Cosmo absent. But it was also impossible for Mary to shut her heart against him utterly, or to look on his conduct with the same cool and clear-headed disapproval with which she might have regarded it in a stranger.

There are women who would have cried and talked copiously to two or three intimate friends

—or, such not being within reach, to friends who were not intimate,—and would thus have obtained solace. The mere utterance and iteration of words seems to have a soothing effect on the troubles of some persons, and lulls them like the unmeaning hush-a-bye of a nurse to an infant. But Mary's temperament was not of the kind which can take comfort in saying over and over again that it is unhappy and ill-used. And your silent sorrows are ever the most obstinate. There was only one person near at hand in whom Mary felt impelled to confide even a small portion of the cares that oppressed her spirits, and that person was Mrs. Peppiat. The two had become great friends, although they had been able to meet but seldom. Mrs. Peppiat was at once remote from, and interested in, the circle of persons amongst whom Mary was now living, and this combination made it tempting to talk about them to her. She was sufficiently removed from their stage to have a just focus in looking at them: and sufficiently near it to appreciate even the slightest traits of their behaviour. No by-play of these actors was lost on Mrs. Peppiat, and, moreover, she understood all that Mary did not say about the family in *Green Street*, quite as well as that which she did say.

"Bless you, Northam," she would say to her husband, "Cosmo Lowry hasn't changed really, since the old Malta days. Not a bit of it! He is just what he was then, *only a good deal more so*. I always hated his grudging way of talking of his sister Mary. And poor Bell could have told a tale of his sneering, dissatisfied, suspicious temper."

To say truth, "poor Bell" had told many such a tale, not being either reticent or dignified. But to one who had lived in such close intimacy with Cosmo and his family as Leonora Peppiat had done in the days of Cosmo's struggling poverty, the tale was one which told itself. And now the same nature was showing a fuller development under the circumstances of rank and an unexpected inheritance; but it *was* the same, as Leonora declared. She and Pep were not quite agreed in their estimate of my lady. Usually, the fact of being a woman enlisted all Pep's sympathy, and he had made excuses for feminine shortcomings before now with the gallantry and irrationality of his chivalric temperament. But on Sarah, Lady Lowry, he had no mercy. He attributed all the troubles that happened in Green Street to her whole and sole influence. Cosmo was

of a dry, grudging temper, if you liked :— a curmudgeon, in fact. Of course he was ! But as to that woman—— Pep could not trust himself to put into words what he thought of “that woman.” He seemed to resent the very fact of her being a woman, as though she were claiming his forbearance on false pretences. He and Mrs. Flint would have cordially joined in loading her ladyship’s plump white shoulders with all the unpleasant circumstances which had happened, were happening, or might ever happen in the Lowry family. In vain Leonora—who certainly did not love Sarah, would endeavour to represent to him that the latter was ignorant of the world, narrow-minded, and inexperienced ; and that it behoved her husband to oppose and guide her when she was going wrong, and not to accept with avidity all the advice she proffered, provided it did but follow the course of his own desires.

“ ‘Oppose and guide !’ ” cried Pep, stuttering with impatient indignation. “Did—did—did ye ever hear of opposing and guiding a vigorous young porker on his way to market ? ”

“Northam ! I’m ashamed of you, sir ! ”

“By the—the—the Lord Harry, I’d rather drive ten pigs ten miles than my Lady Lowry

one, there! I would, upon my sacred word of honour!"

"Northam, Northam, she's a horrid woman, and I don't defend her. But I know that men can always get their own way when they want it enough. If she asked Cosmo to settle an annuity on us, do you think he'd do it? No, no; she must have more obstinacy and force of will than I give her credit for if she could induce him to give away money. Getting it is another matter. Folks are not hard to persuade to what pleases them."

"I think, Leonora," returned her husband with a profound shake of the head, "that you don't make sufficient allowance for the power of stupidity. It's an enormous force in this world;—quite awful. Now, Cosmo has some brains, and that puts him at an immense disadvantage with his wife. Oh, by Jove! when you get pure unalloyed stupidity like Lady Lowry's, it's an awful power! It's Heaven's own mercy that it's generally adulterated with a gleam or two of intelligence, or I don't know what would become of us! I tell you what it is, Nora; there's a great deal of talk about the intellectual development of women—higher education, and all that—but if the sex knew where real power lies they'd

try to keep stupid." And the Captain retired behind his pipe, lost in the tremendous vision his fancy had conjured up of a world in which all the women should be Lady Lowrys.

He was still absorbed in this conception of a state of things from which all feminine brightness, tact, and insight should be utterly banished, when Mary Lowry drove up to the door, and asked to see Mrs. Peppiat. She had come, she said, to say "good-bye." Mrs. Peppiat received her in Herr Schulze's front parlour, whose tenant was absent at his occupation in the City, and where Herr Schulze's harmonium was at present reposing in silence, and leaving Juno's nerves unruffled by what Rosamond called the "quivery stop."

"And you are really going away so soon, dear Miss Lowry," said Leonora, looking at the beautiful pale face before her, with so sweet and candid an expression of ungrudging admiration as made her own homely countenance very pleasant to look upon.

Yes ; Mary was going away very soon. She had always intended to be at home by Christmas. She would not leave London without coming to say farewell at Nelson Place. She spoke with her usual serene cheerfulness, but to Norah's quick eyes and

ears her face and her voice betrayed that she was ill at ease. "I fear," said Mrs. Peppiat, "that your visit to London has not been a pleasant one."

"I cannot say that it has been pleasant. But I have had one great comfort in being near Rosamond, and in finding she is quite unspoiled by the change in her worldly fortunes."

"Oh, Rosy, bless her, is too sound-hearted for that. I think it must be a very poor, narrow, pitiful nature that doesn't grow sunnier in the sunshine."

The instant she had said the words Mrs. Peppiat's honest face flushed scarlet. How could she have made so heedless a speech? It was worthy of Northam himself, who was always blurting out what seemed to be cutting allusions, and being all the while very innocent of any malicious intention.

"I'm afraid so," answered Mary gravely.

"I mean—particularly at Rosy's age, you know. As we grow older, years and the world make most of us sourer and harder."

"I'm afraid so," said Mary again.

"Your old friend Mr. Flint is in London, I hear. I am glad of that."

"Yes; it is fortunate for me that some business of his own should have called him



to town just now, for his advice and his presence are a great support to me. Of course you have heard——?” Mary paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

“Of course I have heard something—a good deal—of what has been going on in Green Street. But pray don’t think yourself bound to say one word on the subject to me more than you are fully inclined to say. It is very pleasant to give and receive confidence when it is quite spontaneous. But there is nothing I have a greater horror of than levying confidences as a kind of black mail from one’s friends. I hope Northam and I never do it. But there are people who take your silently minding your own business as a personal affront! If I could help you, or do the least little thing for you, dear Miss Lowry, I hope you would let me. My poor sister Bell left me a legacy of gratitude to you. Almost the last thing she spoke to me about was your generous and staunch behaviour to her and hers.”

The contrast between this abundant recognition of her sentiments on the part of a stranger and the cold suspicion with which she was regarded by her brother made itself powerfully felt by Mary. The tears sprang

to her eyes. She took Mrs. Peppiat's hand. "I should like to talk to you about it," she said simply. And then in a few minutes she related the story of the missing will so far as she herself was acquainted with it.

Mrs. Peppiat listened quietly. Much of the tale was not new to her, and she showed no surprise in hearing it; only a steady, undemonstrative kind of attention. "And what do you think of it yourself, Miss Lowry?" she said.

"Think of it?"

"Of the statement made by this Mr. Quickit. I don't ask you what you think of Dr. Flagge, because I shouldn't like to insult your discernment by such a question."

"What can I think of it? It is more to the purpose what Mr. Flint thinks of it, and Mr. Flint believes it."

"Would you mind, dear Miss Lowry, my calling Northam for a minute? Since you *have* spoken of this matter, I should like to hear what Northam has to say. Of course I should not have let you leave the house without his seeing you; only I thought I'd let him just finish his pipe and get rid of the smell of tobacco a little first. But if you wouldn't mind——"

Mary assured her that she was quite ready to condone and endure the tobacco, and by her own suggestion accompanied Mrs. Peppiat into the back parlour, where sate the Captain plunged in smoky visions.

The Captain, after he had expressed his delight at seeing Miss Lowry, his fear of offending her by the odours of his pipe, and his regret at her approaching departure—all expressed somewhat incoherently, but with much heartiness, and in the soft, winning manner which the sight of a pretty woman always elicited from Pep—entered very eagerly into the topic of Sir Rupert's will. Mary was surprised to find how copiously it had been discussed in the Peppiats' circle. Nothing is more surprising to persons of simplicity and small experience of the world than to discover how interesting their private affairs are to people who care not a straw for themselves personally. Demayne had talked of it; Bob Doery had talked of it; Mr. Quickit had talked of it—but with considerable oracular reserve. And latterly Mr. Quickit's utterances, whatever they were, had not come under the Peppiats' notice, inasmuch as the Captain had not been to Howard Buildings for some time.

"As for me," said honest Nora, "I never should attach weight to anything that was said by Mr. Quickit—never!"

"Pooh, Leonora! Why not, my dear? That's nonsense."

"Why not? Because he's connected with a set of blood-suckers; usurious horse-leeches! I'd Castor and Pollux them, indeed! You'll never persuade me that it's legal, Northam. Or if it is—more shame for the law, that's all!"

"We won't go into questions of political economy, my dear—nor private economy either," added the Captain hastily. The Loan Society was a sore subject with his Leonora, and Pep's negotiations with Castor and Pollux in old days had been conducted in opposition to her warning and advice. "The point is now Quickit's credibility, and as to that, Nora, I suppose you'll admit that Mr. Flint is a better judge than either you or I."

"That is what I say, Mr. Peppiat," said Mary. "Mr. Flint is satisfied that the witness is speaking the truth. And indeed what motive could he have for giving false testimony in the matter?"

"Why, as to that, there's no knowing

what——” Pep was beginning with a significant grimace, when his wife stopped him by a look. He had been about to pour forth his opinion that Lady Lowry was capable of conspiracy, bribery, corruption, or almost any other offence, for the purpose of securing the inheritance. But, checked by Nora’s eye, he paused, and added with two or three little nods, “To be sure !”

“And of course,” continued Mary, quite simply and earnestly, “my sole desire is that my father’s real will may be carried out faithfully.”

“To be sure !” cried the Captain once more, but with a very different emphasis.

“It—it—almost seems,” Mary went on, speaking as though she were thinking aloud, “as if they fancied I wish to smother the investigation, and keep the truth from coming to light.”

The Captain made a most curious gurgling noise in his effort to swallow down a too energetic expletive that rose to his lips ; and Mrs. Peppiat exclaimed indignantly, “Oh, that’s impossible—impossible !”

“You think so ? I am glad to hear you say it. You do think that it is impossible

for—for any one who knows me to entertain such an idea ? ”

“Quite impossible !” answered Leonora vigorously. Her husband said afterwards that he thought there was no one like your habitually honest spoken folks to tell a lie heartily at a pinch.

“I am morbid, perhaps, and fancy things. But the truth is, that it has hurt me that this discovery should have been kept secret from me even for a day. Surely I ought to have been told at once. However, I don’t desire to dwell on that.”

“And what is the discovery worth now they have made it ? ” said Pep. “Nothing more likely than that Sir Rupert should have made three or four wills, or three or four dozen wills for aught I know, and destroyed them again.”

Mary shook her head. “I do not think so,” she said. “That is not like my father. He was not irresolute.”

“But, my dear Miss Lowry, what is your theory, then ? You believe that Sir Rupert did make a will in London ? ”

“Yes.”

“And you know that he never revealed

that fact either to his confidential lawyer or to you?"

"Yes."

"You know, too, that after his return from London, he, directly or indirectly, admitted that the will there in Mr. Flint's possession, and subsequently proved and carried out, was in truth his definite last will and testament?"

"Yes; at least he never hinted at the existence of any other, when Mr. Flint alluded to the disposition of his property."

"Well, then——!"

"But I think," pursued Mary in a low voice, "that he had it in his mind to tell us of some change in his arrangements before he died. I think that at the very last there was something which he longed to say, and could not. I never shall forget the strange yearning look in his eyes. I told Mr. Flint of it at the time. But I little guessed then what it might mean."

Pep's countenance fell as he listened. My lady had a case, then, after all! And a pretty strong case, apparently! That was the thought which passed through the Captain's mind.

"But, after all," said he at length, "conjecture is vain in such a case. The law cannot concern itself with what might have been. Nor—if you will allow me to say so—need you do so, either."

"Of course not! Quite right, Northam," said his wife; and she nodded approvingly. Northam had so much ability when he gave it fair play! And expressed himself so admirably!

"I cannot tell, of course, whether the will which my father made in London is still in existence. But I have firmly resolved to spare no pains in searching for it. If it is in Lowry Place, it shall be found."

Pep and his wife exchanged glances. Of course, that was what was to be expected from a woman like Mary Lowry, thought Mrs. Peppiat. Pep thought so, too; only—only if there was an unjust, cantankerous will in existence which deprived that delightful creature of her ancestral home and the luxuries which so exquisitely became her high-bred style of beauty, would it be an unforgiven sin to put the said cantankerous document in the fire, and hold one's tongue about it for evermore? That was the thought



which vaguely and mistily passed through the Captain's Celtic brain, as he glanced from Mary to his wife. And it recurred again, when Miss Lowry took her leave, with the cordial sweetness and unaffected grace which had captivated his admiration from the first moment he saw her.

END OF VOL. II.

# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

BY

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ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.



## CHAPTER I.

THE passion of love, like the sunshine and the rain, falls upon the just and unjust. It distinguishes not between the ugly and the beautiful, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish. It inspires all sorts and conditions of men either with light that transfigures, or fire that scorches; and furnishes the theme for more varieties of the human drama than are enumerated by Polonius—including the “tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited.” All the world is agreed that love, in the beautiful young damsels and noble youths of romantic aspect, is a fitting subject for poetic treatment; and that even in the humbler classes it may (any too rough and

rustic details being duly kept in the background) inspire sweet pastorals in prose and verse. But the god knows no such limitations as his eulogists. He is as universal as the air; nay, he seems to please himself by selecting the unlikeliest subjects for the full exercise of his power.

Obadiah Flagge would certainly have been deemed an unlikely subject for love by nine persons out of ten. "A crafty customer; a fellow who knew which side his bread was buttered; a cool card; a regular Yankee humbug; a low schemer;"—such were some of the epithets by which Obadiah Flagge was frequently described. Even those who believed in his power, not only to "call spirits from the vasty deep," but to make them come at his call, by no means credited the self-styled Doctor with any lofty qualities of mind or heart. It was curious, they said, to see how entirely the mediumistic power was disconnected from moral or intellectual worth. There were clearly certain occult physical conditions on which mediumship depended. Flagge was vulgar. Oh yes, certainly! He was ignorant, cunning, far from disinterested, possibly an habitual liar, probably unscrupulous in eking out his genuine gifts by impos-

ture ; *but* he was a medium. One could not explain it.

His most gullible clients delivered up the man's character to you without a struggle. Their candour and liberality in this respect were quite astonishing. So was their faith. But if you had told any of these same individuals that Obadiah Flagge was an unhappy lover, they would have laughed the statement to scorn. That, indeed, would have been too much for their credulity. Dr. Flagge ready to sacrifice his interests for a romantic passion ? The idea was too absurd ; too unlikely. It would be a curious speculation to inquire on what some persons found their theory of probability. Experience would appear to have little to do with it, since facts loudly pronounced to be unlikely, are constantly occurring with most obstinate pertinacity.

At all events love, impartial as the sun and the rain, cared nothing for the absurdity or unlikelihood of the notion, but caused Obadiah Flagge to endure many a heartache, many a hot and cold fit of hope and despair, and to thrill at the sound of a voice and the sight of a face, as much as if he had been handsome, noble, young, possessed of twenty thousand a year and the entrée into the most

aristocratic society. He had felt something like timidity in anticipating what would be Œnone's mood when she discovered that he was living in the same house with her. Would she be angry? Would she be disgusted? Would she insist on removing herself from his neighbourhood? For three or four days he abstained from attempting to see her. Nay, once, when he thought she was passing down the stairs, he hastily shut the door of his sitting-room and hid himself: feeling afterwards very unreasonably disappointed when, on opening the door again in a second or two, and peeping out, he saw, instead of Œnone, the eldest Czernovic girl, who turned to smile and nod at him. But his self-denial gave way after a short time, and he went upstairs to pay a visit to Papa Czernovic.

Œnone received him with quiet indifference. Yes; she had learned that he lived in that house, she said, almost immediately after her arrival there. Had she been angry? No; why angry? He could not help living there. It was a chance. It did not matter. Flagge tried to flatter himself that in this indifference there was some indication that Œnone was becoming reconciled to his presence. And

being reconciled to his presence meant being, in some measure, reconciled to his suit. "She knows right well that I keep on loving her, same as I keep on breathing, and if she can only get used to the idea! If it was so dreadful to her as she used to say it was, surely she'd never bear to see me constantly around, and be so calm and gentle. She's kinder in her ways to me than she was, too." So ran Flagge's reflections in the main, although dashed here and there with fits of despondency.

But he did not know that CEnone's calm endurance of his presence resulted chiefly from the hope she nourished of speedily being carried far away from him, and from all the persons associated with her present life. She lived on the expectation of a letter from her father, and counted the days to discover when it would be possible to receive one from him. This hope had become the point on which her thoughts concentrated themselves, and it grew stronger day by day, and more over-mastering. It was an outlet, an escape, from troubles near at hand. There were very few topics connected with her life in England which did not carry a sting in them for CEnone. The kind hands which had given her generous



gifts had unconsciously brought poison with them. Friendship and gratitude contended against jealousy and pride; and love itself had put a cup of bitterness to her lips. Her youth still asserted itself in the eagerness with which she looked for her father's answer to her letter. Somewhere, at some time, lurking a long way off, in the dim vistas of the future, there might be—if not happiness, yet—peace. The weakness of her body made her instinctively turn that hope into an image of rest, which in one more strongly animated by health would have assumed the form of active enjoyment. “She’ll get used to the idea of me loving her,” thought Flagge. The truth was that she was getting used to another and very different idea: the idea of an existence in far foreign lands, in a world apart from the world where she had known him. Her mental vision scarcely wandered from two subjects of contemplation;—in the past, Vincent Maude and the scenes in her poor existence wherein he had figured; in the future, her father, and the scenes she hoped to dwell amidst with him. About the present she concerned herself but little. When her attention did rest on those around her, she felt as one feels who knows himself to be on

the eve of an eternal separation. It is easy to tolerate that which we are about to part from for ever. Yet a little while, and all these figures would recede from her as the cities and the shore recede from a ship putting out to sea. There was a softening influence in the thought. And then moreover,—CEnone was scarcely conscious of it, but there was a subtle balm for wounded pride and sensitive egotism in the love so lavishly given to her by this man whom she looked down on. She told herself that she wished from her soul he did not love her : and she told herself truly. But yet there was so much of unheroic human nature in poor CEnone, that to know herself genuinely loved, even by Dr. Flagge the medium, was sometimes as a cordial draught to her spirit.

Flagge, however, being ignorant of CEnone's hope of leaving England, did not guess that her gentleness to him was the gentleness of an eternal farewell. By degrees he took the habit of going to sit with her during the hours when the Czernovics were at their afternoon concert. He had discovered that there was one pleasure which he could give her : CEnone was passionately fond of flowers ; and flowers in a great city are a luxury unattainable by

narrow purses. Flagge daily brought a flower to Enone. It did not occur to her that, in taking a dainty hot-house blossom from Dr. Flagge, she was accepting a costly gift. She was very ignorant of many of the details of daily life; for although poverty is in general an efficient teacher as to the value of money, yet Enone had been shielded from learning it by personal experience, thanks to the Czernovics. "Doing without things,"—pretty, pleasant, and artistic things,—had made up the sum of her sufferings from poverty. The struggle to get necessities with scanty means, she had never known. She had, indeed, an idea that elegant bouquets such as were thrown to a *prima donna* on the stage, or carried by a belle in a ball-room, were expensive luxuries. But a simple Gardenia, or camellia, or white moss-rose, or a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, suggested no thought of its money-value to her. And then Flagge offered them in a quiet, matter-of-fact way. Sometimes he took them from the button-hole of his coat; sometimes he brought them in his hand. Generally he would lay his flower down on the table beside her, or place it in a glass of water, without a word. Love is, perhaps, a still more efficient teacher than

poverty, and love had taught Flagge some subtle and delicate traits of behaviour towards CEnone.

Three weeks had elapsed since a letter had been despatched directed in CEnone's handwriting to Signor Spiridion Balassopoulo, care of a Greek banker in Constantinople ; and the girl's impatient longing for an answer possessed her like a disease. But she consumed herself in silence, being averse to taking any of the Czernovics into her inmost confidence, and having a proud disinclination to complain, under all circumstances. And so the days went by, and their chief incidents for CEnone came to be the appearance of Dr. Flagge and his hot-house flower.

"Guess you might come out of this everlasting old rat-trap, Nony, and get a breath of air," said he one day, as he placed an exquisite white hyacinth on the table beside which CEnone sat at work.

"Air?" she repeated, with a significant glance out of the window.

"Well, that's true, too," returned Flagge. "'Tain't much of air, and less of sunshine, that's to be had in this coaly climate. But to-day the atmosphere is a trifle more diluted than usual. I mean you might ladle it out

with a spoon 'stead of cutting it with a chopper. And there's a patch of pale lemon-colour visible above the chimney-tops, which the natives suppose to be the sun. And it froze in the night, and the ice in the parks will bear skaters. And altogether it's what they call in these diggings a fine day. And I don't see as you mightn't as well come out for half an hour, any way."

"No; I shall not go out."

"It would do you good, Nony. You look whiter than that hyacinth."

"How sweet it is!" she exclaimed, touching it—almost caressing it—with the tips of her fingers. "And how beautiful!"

"I am real glad you like it, Nony," said poor Flagge, anxious to persuade himself that her words implied some approbation of the giver as well as the gift.

"Like it! No; that is not the word. It is a poem: a thing to be adored and taken into one's heart. Things so beautiful have something sacred in them. "After a moment or two, a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and, turning to Flagge she asked abruptly, "Where do you get these flowers?"

"Oh—where do I get 'em? I get 'em in Covent Garden, from a—a friend of mine."

“Does he sell them?”

“Well,—not to me. He’s used to supply the Duchess of Belturbet when she’s in town, and he knows me right well. I never go by his store but he sticks a flower in my button-hole. Sometimes I give him a cigar. But he ain’t much of a smoker.”

“But people do pay a great deal of money in London for such flowers as this,” persisted Ænone.

“Well, I b’lieve they do, when they can’t get ’em for nothing,” returned Flagge, coolly. Then he added, bending slightly forward, towards the flower which Ænone was still touching. “’Tis a pretty bit of moulding in wax:—real cunning!”

But that the eulogium was intended less for the hyacinth than for the delicate hand which caressed it, the reader may perhaps divine, although Ænone never guessed it. Then his glance rested on her thin, wan face; and he reluctantly acknowledged to himself how sadly it was changed, and how the stamp of suffering had been deepened in it even within the last few weeks. “I do wish you’d try to get out into the air, Nony,” he said once more.

“Why?”

“’Cos you look to be in need of it. You look—kinder fagged.”

"And why should you suppose that to walk out in these dreary streets would make me look less fagged? Besides,—I can't walk now; I get so tired."

The words gave him a sharp pain at the heart. "Well, but you ought to get the air, anyhow," he said. "If you were well wrapped up,—I've got a buffalo robe somewheres, that 'ud do first-rate to cover you over in a carriage,—you might have a ride."

"Do you mean that I should take a drive? You are dreaming. How am I to take drives?"

He would fain have answered, "By letting me pay for them," but he did not dare.

"Would you drive with Miss Rosamond if she came here for you?"

"They would not let her come. Besides, this is all idle. I don't wish to go out. I am tired. I shall stay quiet here."

Flagge made up his mind that if the spirits retained any influence over Lady Lowry, they should induce her to send the carriage for CEnone before long. But he said no word of the sort. "Why, it's my belief as England don't agree with you, Nony," he observed. "A warmer climate would set you up, famous."

The words touched a chord that was easily set vibrating.

"Yes," she answered, with unusual quickness of response. "Yes; another climate,—sunshine,—and great mountains or the sea to look at instead of these black crowded walls!"

Flagge's face brightened. "Guess that's jest about what's the matter, Nony," said he eagerly. "Sunshine, and soft breezes, and the almighty big hills. California, now;—there's not a climate in the world to beat California. And then the flowers——!"

But CEnone had relapsed into languid indifference, and did not respond. He sat watching her, and not speaking again until it should please her to speak, with an humble self-effacement that was the more eloquent from its contrast with the usual demeanour of the man. All at once CEnone raised her wonderful dark eyes, and looking full at him asked, "Do the spirits come to you in dreams?"

"Why, no; I can't say as they do. Although I have had queer dreams too, before now."

"Dreams of warning?"

"Sometimes."



“Dreams that told you things you wished to know?”

Flagge paused for a second or two before answering. “Look here, Nony! I remember of you saying something to me once about speaking the truth right out at all hazards, and I’ll do it;—to *you*, any way. I can’t say as I’ve ever had dreams as were of any use or help to me. I have had strange kind of sensations in my sleep of being carried up out of my body, and floated around, and seeing myself lying there on my bed all the time. But whether it was really my spirit unloosened from the flesh, or jest a dream,—I dunno. To some folks I wouldn’t own as much, but I tell you the truth.”

“Enone sat with her hands folded over the sewing which she had let fall on her lap, looking at him abstractedly. “You never,” she said in a low voice, “see a spirit that comes in your sleep to tell you things; that returns again in the same shape and with the same words; and that will not be disregarded or forgotten?”

“That’s not a common case,” said Flagge. He was perplexed and surprised by her manner.

“But it happens.”

"Yes? Well,—yes! I s'pose it may happen."

"It has happened to me."

He instinctively refrained from exclaiming aloud, or showing any strong emotion, but he was greatly surprised, and not a little curious. Ænone went on after an instant's silence:

"I tried for some time to put it out of my mind, and to think it merely a dream like another, that came by chance, and would cease by chance. But it persists. And, as I might not be here to speak myself—I—I have thought that perhaps I ought to tell some one:—you perhaps."

She spoke in a musing tone, as if she were rather debating a question within her own mind, than taking counsel of another.

"Nony," said Flagge, "I dunno as there's anything I *can* do or say to be of use to you;—I wish to God there might be! But if you will only let me try, you'll do me a kindness that I shall be grateful for!"

His voice supplied any fervour that might be lacking in his words, and Ænone was startled back into haughty reserve in a moment.

"You can do nothing for me," she answered.

"If the matter concerned myself, I should not speak of it to you."

"You're hard,—cruel hard, Nony," he said, while a quick flush of pain covered his sallow face. "I don't believe I've quite deserved that at your hands. If there's a man on earth who would hold his own feelings in a tighter grip for fear of hurting yours than I've done, and do——! But I don't complain of that, Nony," he added, hastily interrupting himself, "nor I don't mean to reproach you. Whatever you say I ought to do, I'll try to carry it through. And if there's anything you choose to confide to me, it'll be kept safe and silent until you give me leave to speak. I can hold my tongue. It ain't a common accomplishment, nor yet an easy one; but my life hasn't been a common nor an easy life, and it's taught me that anyhow."

"Yes; I think I ought to speak. I might not be at hand by-and-by,—and it might be too late——"

Flagge waited, leaning his head on his hand, and looking, not at Enone, but at the dull fire in the grate.

"See,—you will promise me to keep what I am going to say secret?"

"Yes, Nony; I could swear it if you liked,

but if you don't trust me without an oath, you wouldn't trust me with one :—and you'd be right enough, too."

"Listen, then. The second night I slept here after leaving the Lowrys' house, I had a dream. I dreamt of the old man who died, and whose will they are looking for."

Flagge moved one of his legs that was crossed over the other with a quick jerk, and glanced for an instant at Enone. But he said nothing.

"Well, I was not greatly impressed by that at first, because my mind had been full of all the talk about the will, and—and some one had been speaking to me of it that very day ; and I thought that had brought the dream. But the next night it came again, clearer and stronger ; and again the next night ;—and every night !"

"Strange ! And do you see the old man ?"

"I see a face,—a pale wrinkled face,—coming out of a kind of mist. At first the face used to be dim ; but now it is clear and vivid, like a transparent picture with a light behind it."

"Why do you think that the face is the face of Sir Rupert Lowry ?"

"It is like a portrait of him that Miss

Lowry wears in a bracelet, only older, and besides,—I have an irresistible, inexplicable conviction that it is he.”

“Does he speak?”

“At first he did not. But latterly he has spoken every night, always saying the same words, in a strange voice that seems to float in the air above his head, instead of issuing from his lips.”

“What does he say?” said Flagge, almost in a whisper. He was greatly impressed and disquieted. He had juggled with the supernatural, as a conjuror juggles with a pack of cards; but Superstition lurks in the dark corners of many a mind where Reverence has no abiding place.

“He says, ‘Search the walnut desk.’”

“The walnut desk! That’s in the study at Lowry Place. I’ve heard Lady Lowry speak of it a score of times!”

So had Ænone. And my lady had heard the “spirits” speak of it through Dr. Flagge’s mediumship; describing the study and the walnut-wood desk with considerable accuracy, almost in her own words, to her great wonderment and admiration, and to the confirmation of her faith in Dr. Flagge.

“Now I think,” pursued Ænone, “that the

missing will must be in existence, and must be there, and that Sir Rupert lays upon me the charge of discovering it. I *think* so; but I may be wrong; I may be the victim of a delusion. I ask myself why should I be chosen for this task? And then I remember Lady Lowry said that the communications from Sir Rupert were generally given by me when I was in the magnetic sleep."

Flagge winced a little. He knew how much of the communications which he had been used to repeat to Lady Lowry had really been uttered by CEnone. But this knowledge did not make him the less liable to be impressed by CEnone's dream. He felt somewhat like the ghost-seer who, preparing to raise a counterfeit phantom, is aghast at the unexpected and awful apparition of a real one. Then, too, this discovery opened to his imagination the possibility of extracting much money from the Lowrys. It was a golden gate to fortune;—or might be, if he dared to use it. He felt his promise to CEnone as a trammel already.

"What shall you do?" he asked her abruptly.

"I have tried to decide, but it is difficult. You may think it easy enough. You may

say, 'Go and tell Sir Cosmo Lowry your dream simply and straightforwardly, and it will soon be known whether it be a true revelation or not.'

"No; I'm not sure as I should exactly say that," returned Flagge drily; thinking within himself that such ingenuous measures were not calculated for dealing profitably with Sir Cosmo Lowry. Then he said, "As to the walnut desk, that's just the very place they're sure to look in. My lady's head was running on nothing else but that desk all the time."

"I do not wish to appear in the matter. I—do you think the finding of the will would be bad for Miss Lowry?"

"She ain't likely to find it particularly pleasant to lose money and house, I should think!"

"I wish I never had known or heard about this! I wish I had never known the Lowrys!"

"I'd say so too, Nony;—if it wasn't that I used to see you there."

"Will you do this:—will you keep yourself informed of what goes on at Lowry Place, and will you, if the paper they are in search of cannot be found, urge them to look once again

in the walnut desk,—even to take it to pieces ? ”

“ Lady Sarah won’t require much urging to do that, Nony ! If her sister-in-law ’ll let her, she’ll pull the house to pieces rather than give up.”

“ Will you do what I ask ? ”

“ If it’s for your sake, Nony,—yes.”

“ For the sake of right and justice.”

“ Well,—no ; I guess *not*. How do I know where right and justice lie ? I know that I’d do anything on earth for you, though. There’s no element of uncertainty about *that* ! ”

After a short hesitation, Ænone agreed to let the matter rest on that ground. Flagge was triumphant at having gained so much. Ænone had begged him to do something for her sake. That meant a great deal, he thought. On her part, she reflected that she would soon be far away, and it was not worth while to struggle for a word. “ And how soon may I tell Lady Lowry ? ” asked Flagge, getting up off his chair.”

“ As soon as you hear the search has been vain, and has been given up.”

“ And, Nony,—do let me ask you one question, won’t you ? ”

“ Well ? ”



“ You said a word about not being here by-and-by, and not being at hand to speak ; now I want to know if you’ve made up any plans, or what was in your mind, Nony. You must know how it weighs on my heart when I hear you talk like that. I can’t help it.”

Ænone paused for a minute looking at him. “ I might die, you know,” she said, “ and carry the dream away with me.”

“ Die, Nony ! ”

“ Yes ; did you think I should never die ? But there is no need to look so frightened I should not be frightened,—nor even sorry,—if I were told that I must die to-morrow. Go away now, please.”

And Flagge went away with a sense of oppression at his heart ; but with his brain busily occupied by a hundred schemes and conjectures.

## CHAPTER II.

SARAH, Lady Lowry, was not given to meditate upon abstract questions, nor to the indulgence of unprofitable curiosity as to the hidden causes of any phenomena, social or other, which met her observation. Else might she have speculated somewhat as to the kind of life which Dr. Flagge the medium led, during what may be called the subterranean portion of his existence ; and have investigated a little the sources of the knowledge he possessed about things interesting to the House of Lowry.

Mr. Quickit, indeed, was proved to have given the most important bit of information yet revealed on the subject of Sir Rupert's will. But Lady Lowry's faith in the medium was preserved by an anachronism. She represented the transaction to herself thus : Dr. Flagge was told of the will by the spirits,

and Mr. Quickit confirmed what they said. Whereas the real chronology of the matter was that Dr. Flagge had first heard of the missing will from Mr. Quickit, and the spirits had confirmed what *he* said. But my lady clung to a theory which was consonant with her wishes, prejudices, and self-conceit; and the spirit theory flattered all these. She wished her husband to be master of Lowry Place; she had nursed various prejudices against Mary until they flourished with extraordinary vigour and obstinacy; and her vanity was gratified by the notion that affection and esteem for herself had mainly moved the spirit of the proud and stiff-necked old baronet to communicate with his family.

Percy Wigmore observed with an almost infantine expression of countenance, that "it had got to be reg'lar mania with Lady Lowry about the spirits, don't you know?" "Jove!" said he, "I never was more surprised than at her goin' in like that for 'em. I like 'em myself, in moderation, and in a quiet way," added Percival candidly, as if the spirits in question had been of an alcoholic nature. "But not to go in for 'em to that extent. It becomes a noosance. And—and 'pon my soul a feller, might get into a scrape goin'

revealin' and accusin', and all that, don't you know?"

Mrs. Wigmore demanded of him, with some acerbity of manner, what sort of scrape he imagined the spirits could bring Lady Lowry into; adding that for her part she was sure Lady Lowry had the cunning of her class—the sort of thing one found in servants and people of that kind, and was able to take care of herself very perfectly. From which it will be seen that the warmth of the Honourable Alexandrina's friendship for our Sarah had cooled down to a very low temperature. Still it must not be supposed that Mrs. Wigmore spoke to her friend in anything like the same arctic tone which she used in speaking *of* her. Mrs. Wigmore was a great deal too well bred for that. Lady Lowry, on her side, had discovered that she had the power of being useful to her high-born friends; and the discovery was at once appreciated at its full value by her practical mind. It might suit her to have the Wigmores on a visit to Lowry Place when she should be mistress of it:—it might suit her for a time at all events. But if they came there they should be yoked to her triumphal chariot in the sight of all men. She would not only patronize the

brother and sister-in-law of a real live peer of the realm, but she would be known to patronize them. Sarah had made rapid progress in the lore of fashionable society in the course of a few months. But then it must be owned that Nature had provided a very favourable soil for the seeds of this education.

Lady Lowry and her experiences with the spirits had become celebrated, and were discussed during that winter in many a country house full of aristocratic visitors. Men talked of the affair in the hunting-field; ladies gave each other new and confidential versions of it over afternoon cups of tea; and there was scarcely a servants' hall in the kingdom—of any pretensions to quality, that is to say—in which the most astounding particulars about the Lowry family and Dr. Flagge did not circulate freely. Much agreeably shuddering excitement was developed among the maids. They declined to go about old-fashioned staircases and corridors alone after dark; and listened greedily to vivid particulars of phantom hands, and spectral faces, and hollow voices, which were said to have manifested themselves through the mediumship of Dr. Flagge. These menial persons were not sufficiently cultivated to content themselves with

ghosts who merely tapped on tables, or tipped them up, or wrote not very startling messages through the fingers of the medium; but preferred to have their supernatural excitements, like their food and drink, of a strong, not to say coarse, flavour. But whether "upstairs, or downstairs, or in my lady's chamber," the Lowrys and Dr. Flagge the medium were discussed with immense relish. Mrs. Wigmore achieved a considerable reputation by the letters which she wrote to one "nobleman's" or "gentleman's seat" after another upon the subject. She even received an invitation to spend one week with her aunt, the deaf old Marchioness Dowager of Dulldrum (who generally snubbed and scolded her, and turned the deafest of her two ears to any hint of inviting the Percy Wigmores to Dulldrum), in order that she might tell the Marchioness *viva voce* all about "those people who forged the will and were found out by the spirits."

Mrs. Wigmore bitterly regretted that the affair had not happened a little earlier,—before the end of London season, in fact; as in that case it would have enabled her to pass the autumn in making a round of visits to "nice" people, going from house to house in a sort of triumphal progress, and working her dear

friend Lady Lowry as an exceptionally rich and almost unexplored mine of gossip. However, she promised herself a great accession of importance in the coming season from her acquaintance with the Lowrys. She had really been a prominent figure throughout the case; had absolutely been the first person to introduce Flagge to Sir Cosmo's house; had been present at the first *séance* he gave there; and could give authentic and minute particulars at first hand about all the parties concerned. It had really been a splendid opportunity, and Mrs. Wigmore was resolved to make the most of it.

Meanwhile the family mansion in Green Street was not an altogether pleasant abode. Miss Lowry was gone away. Enone was gone away. Lady Lowry was not as strong as usual in health, and much stronger than usual in obstinacy and self-assertion. Sir Cosmo, with a slow fever of avarice always on him, and with the undeveloped symptoms of another mental malady latent in him,—a malady which was more complicated, which combated the other, and which was compounded of anxiety, despondence, and something very like remorse,—was unbearably irritable, and bitter of tongue. Poor Rosamond regretted

the humble contentment of Nelson Place a hundred times a day; for the delight of rustling a long dress over the drawing-room carpet (although undoubtedly seductive) did not compensate to warm-hearted Rosy for the absence of affection and communion of minds.

As Papa Czernovic had candidly declared to her ladyship, Green Street was dull,—deadly dull. And even the visits of Percival Wigmore became pleasant to Rosamond as bringing suggestions and reminiscences of an outside world where there were people who read, and chatted, and ran, and laughed, and loved each other. None of these things took place in Sir Cosmo's house; unless some of them happened in the servants' hall.

The experience of life comes to many of us with an impression similar to that which we feel on seeing with our bodily eyes scenes and places made familiar to our fancy by pictures and descriptions. Certain general truths are the common heritage of all educated persons, as certain famous spots are made known to all the world by pen and pencil. But when we see them for ourselves, they are at once like and unlike to the image formed beforehand in the mind. Thus, although Rosamond had accepted mechanically various philosophic



propositions as to the powerlessness of wealth to give contentment, and so forth; yet she undoubtedly felt a good deal of *naïve* surprise at discovering for herself *how* weary, depressed, and dull it was possible to be in a very long silk gown with a great many flounces: and that one might pass hours in alternating listlessness and restlessness, surrounded by the most expensive upholstery, and ministered to by attendants accustomed to the best families.

There were long consultations with Dr. Flagge from which Rosamond was excluded, and long colloquies in the library between Sir Cosmo and his wife, which were also kept secret from her. An air of secrecy pervaded the comings and goings of several persons whom my lady admitted to her presence. My lady kept her room a good deal, and passed most of her time on a sofa, and the house was hushed until the very air seemed stagnant. Lady Lowry did not treat her step-daughter unkindly. She grudged nothing for her material comfort;—often, indeed, insisting on more liberality in the matter of her dress, and so forth, than Sir Cosmo was willing to show, and desiring that Lobley himself should accompany the carriage whenever Miss Rosa-

mond Lowry drove out alone with the maid. But there was one circumstance which made it impossible for Rosamond to be on pleasant terms with her step-mother;—the circumstance, in a word, that Lady Lowry was herself, and not somebody else !

The days dragged their slow length along wearily. Rosamond's sole amusement consisted in being taken out to drive occasionally by Mrs. Wigmore, at the instance chiefly of the good-natured Percival. The Honourable Alexandrina blinked her white eyelashes at Rosamond, and talked to her with considerable condescension at first. But she soon found that Rosamond was not an agreeable companion. The girl was docile and well-behaved indeed ; silent too, and a good listener. But somehow or other Mrs. Wigmore was conscious that she was not making a brilliant impression on her young friend. And then Rosy was not amenable to that process in conversational mechanics, vulgarly termed pumping, and in which Mrs. Wigmore was an adept. And she had an unpleasant and utterly unworldly way of replying straightforwardly to any polite hints of a tortuous nature, that she would rather not tell so and so ; and that she thought Papa, or Lady

Lowry, or Aunt Mary, or Enone,—as the case might be,—would not like her to talk about their private affairs.

“Tut, tut, my dear,” said Mrs. Wigmore to her one day, being much discomposed by some plain rebuff of this sort, “you mustn’t talk to me in that way! It’s bad manners.”

“I’m very sorry,” answered Rosamond flushing. “I did not mean to be ill-mannered.”

“I hope not. But as to not liking to talk about private affairs—that sort of thing may be all very well with—with your inferiors and juniors; but my case is very different.”

“I know you are a great deal older than I am, of course,” said Rosamond.

Mrs. Wigmore looked out mistrustfully from under her white eyelashes, but the simple honesty of Rosy’s face could not be mistaken.

“Certainly I am older than you. Every one who is out of their teens is older than you. You are a mere chit, my dear. And—to return to what I was saying, you have not tact enough, it seems, to make distinctions. You ought to try to acquire a little more *savoir faire*. Now Lady Lowry is a very intimate friend of mine, and has perfect confidence in me;—perfect.”

“Well, then,” said Rosy,—not without a touch of malice, for she did not like being called a “chit:” a girl of fifteen and three-quarters, and in long dresses too!—“well, then, if she is so perfectly confidential with you, she will tell you what you want to know if you ask her yourself, Mrs. Wigmore.”

Upon which the Honourable Alexandrina looked out of the carriage window for a quarter of an hour in high dudgeon. She told her husband afterwards that she thought she should have to drop the Lowrys altogether: for, what with the growing presumption of that vulgar little woman, and the stolid stupidity of that lout of a girl,—who positively was not possessed of average powers of brain in Mrs. Wigmore’s opinion, and whose bringing up amongst all sorts of savage tribes inhabiting the unexplored and central regions of Bloomsbury had made her perfectly *impossible*,—the whole thing had become a bore and a strain on Mrs. Wigmore’s nervous system.

All this, however, was of course only Mrs. Wigmore’s way of blowing off (if the phrase may pass) the ill-temper into which Rosy’s awkwardness had put her. And Percy quite

understood it in that sense. He protested, indeed, with some spirit against the injustice of Alexandrina's next proceeding, which was to tax him with being wholly and solely responsible for whatever annoyance she might suffer at the hands of the Lowrys; and he declined to exhibit any concern whatever as to the strained condition of Mrs. Wigmore's nervous system. And indeed it was astonishing what an amount of strain Mrs. Wigmore's nervous system had been known to stand when there had been either pleasure or profit to be got by standing it.

However this might be, Mrs. Wigmore continued to visit Lady Lowry. But she relinquished her drives with Rosamond; and that young lady was thenceforward only allowed to look at the world from the windows of the house in Green Street, or from behind the railings of a certain spot in the Park where she paced up and down daily for an hour in the congenial company of Lady Lowry's maid, Miss Moore.

But one day she received a sudden and delightful shock of surprise from the following announcement made to her by Lady Lowry: "You will be ready to travel next week, Rosamond. I have given Moore orders what

things to pack for you. We are going to Elcaster."

"Oh!"—a long-breathed, joyful exclamation. "To Aunt Mary?"

"Well,—we shall see. We are not going to stay actually in Lowry Place just at first. But I think,—and your papa thinks,—that it is desirable for us to be on the spot."

## CHAPTER III.

A VERY brief consideration of all the circumstances sufficed to convince Dr. Flagge that there was no reason on earth why C  none should possess a monopoly in dreams. Flagge said to himself that he could dream too. He would not betray "Nony's" confidence, but—he would dream a dream. Indeed, it demanded no ingenuity and little cunning to invent such a dream as C  none's: for the walnut desk had figured largely in all Lady Lowry's talks and conjectures on the subject of her father-in-law's will. That repository was quite sure to be searched whenever the missing will should be sought for. He could not help perceiving all this, and yet—explain it who can—it is certain that Dr. Obadiah Flagge the medium clung with superstitious credulity to C  none's dream, and more than half believed it to be a supernatural revelation. But meanwhile it was necessary to prosecute

his trade with vigour; and Dr. Flagge no more permitted his vague faith in the supernatural visitant of Ænone's visions to interfere with the practical conduct of life, than a great many other much more respectable persons allow their creed to override their greed.

He was not apt to waver, or deliberate irresolutely, and a course of action having presented itself to his mind, he proceeded to carry it out without delay.

"Look you here, fair lady," said he to Sarah, "the developments are assuming a character of lofty elevation, and sensational interest, such as I do not remember of ever having experienced before."

He was sitting in Lady Lowry's boudoir. There was a huge fire, and my lady was reclining on a sofa with a fur rug over her. The atmosphere of the room was dim, fragrant, warm, and altogether conducive to drowsiness. And in fact my lady had been taking a nap after luncheon. No ordinary visitor would have been admitted to disturb her; but Dr. Flagge was privileged, and enjoyed the *entrée*.

"Is there anything new?" demanded my lady, raising her head a little higher by means of a cushion.

"Why, yes; there's a good deal that's new.



My organism has been, as it were, taken possession of by a certain spirit, in a way which is unparalleled in the whole of my psychical experience. The influence is uncommon powerful ;—most uncommon powerful.”

“But does it say anything positive? Does it give you anything to *take hold of*? Sir Cosmo says he’s quite tired of talk, and should like to see some facts. And I must say I consider Sir Cosmo to be quite right there.”

Flagge looked at her with a cool, keen, slightly contemptuous glance; nor did he take pains to disguise the slight contempt that was in it. He flattered himself that he understood the fair Sarah Lowry very thoroughly.

“Well, I guess some folks don’t know a fact when they see it,” said he. “A stiffer, tougher bit o’ fact than Quickit’s witness to the will, I don’t know as I ever came across. But *I* understand all about it, Lady Lowry. I ain’t going to say that you are unreasonable. You’re a lady of remarkable strength of mind and force of character. There are transcendental elements, too, that surround the rugged force of practical abilities with a gem-like halo in *your* case, ma’am. But there are other natures not so fort’nately amalgamated up :—natures full of material alloy, to which the

impalpable influences of an unseen world appeal in vain. So Sir Cosmo wants facts—does he? Why, there's facts as cannot be weighed and measured in material balances, lady, but which nevertheless are full of fateful force. You can't weigh out evidence by the pound; but it's heavy enough sometimes to turn almost any scale. You apprehend this, lady?"

"Of course I do," returned Sarah, with a little extra emphasis, resulting from some secret doubts in her own mind as to whether she did apprehend it or not.

"Well, I tell you that when I am asked for facts, and talked to 'bout facts, and taunted with producing no facts, I feel like giving up the whole thing in disgust."

"Oh, don't talk like that, Dr. Flagge."

"Well, lady, it revolts the feelings to be eternally dunned at for facts. It turns the sympathetic currents of your natur back upon yourself, and leads to the inquiry why in thunder you should loaf around one 'special fam'ly, and devote the highest psychological developments of an exceptionally gifted organism to their all-fired kettle of fish without a corresponding compensation; yes ma'am."

"Oh, well," returned my lady stolidly, as

being somewhat brought to bay, "but you have been paid, Dr. Flagge. You know you have."

"Why, I have received a sum stipulated beforehand, in return for a very valuable and extraordinary piece of information. How far my time has been remunerated, reckoning it a guinea an hour, which I can procure without difficulty from the enlightened and aristocratic members of fashionable society, and be cracked up with the most exalted appreciation over and above, is a question which I will not require you to answer—to me. Put it to yourself, lady, and judge of the purity of my motives for pursuing these inquiries."

"I suppose it answered your purpose in some way or other, or else you wouldn't have bothered yourself."

"That's what Sir Cosmo says, is it?"

My lady looked up surprised.

"Oh, I recognize his note well enough. Sir Cosmo is a gentleman of refined education, but he's no more transcendental than those chimney-pots. You are organized different. And I'll tell you what, lady; if it wasn't for having found in you sympathies of a superior and immaterial kind, the spirits would no more have manifested themselves in

this house than you'd go and visit around in St. Giles's."

"Well, I have told Sir Cosmo that he may thank me if Sir Rupert has revealed as much as he has."

"Yes, lady; that is a sunlight truth. The spirits have been treated by other members of this family in a manner calculated to raise the dander of a sensitive organization."

"I've said so, to Sir Cosmo, over and over again."

"And where the moral atmosphere is not congenial, the spirits will not produce developments of any value; they'll see you—further first."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry if the spirits have had their feelings hurt, but it has not been my doing. And I think they ought to have sense enough to know the difference. I can't be responsible for everybody, though as the mistress of the house I seem to be expected to be. But I am fully acquainted with the duties of my position, and if the spirits will muddle everybody up together I cannot help it. I have the comfort of knowing that I am not in any way to blame," said my lady, with a slow and steady outpouring of words. Whatever might be my lady's veneration for

and sympathy with the spirits, she reserved the strongest manifestations of those qualities in this, as in every other case, for herself.

Flagge proceeded to justify what he called the purity of his motives, on the grounds that although he had got something by interpreting the utterances of Sir Rupert Lowry, utterances of a nature highly benevolent towards my lady, and likely to be substantially beneficial to Sir Cosmo, yet he might meanwhile have been getting more by interpreting the utterances of other and more frivolous spirits, who had no scope in view save the amusement or bewilderment of various fine ladies and gentlemen. "And if taking one dollar where you might be getting two ain't purity, I should like to know what is," said Dr. Flagge.

He then inquired whether any steps had been taken in earnest to seek for the will, and was told that Miss Lowry had expressed her anxiety to have a thorough search made in Lowry Place. . Flagge shook his head sceptically. He had not much belief, he said, in the anxiety of any heir to find a document which might disinherit him. And then—Miss Lowry was a particularly earthly and material-minded person, and the spirits on the whole had but a poor opinion of her.

Now Lady Lowry's faith in the spirits was established on the broad and rational basis of their expressed high estimate of herself; and scarcely anything could have enhanced that faith so much as their expressing a low estimate of Mary.

"Well," said she, "I should wish to be guided by Sir Rupert's advice. But what can we do? I believe it's against the law for us to search the premises ourselves without Mary's leave. And a very shameful law it seems to me!"

"Couldn't you be present, anyhow?"

"Well,—I—you see Mary has not asked us. Sir Cosmo did say something about running down to Clevelen in the spring weather."

"In the spring? Why, there's time enough between now and what you could call spring weather in this climate for—for anything to happen to the will, supposing it's in that house."

My lady turned pale. "La!" she exclaimed faintly; "why—what do you mean?"

"Well, the house might be burned down and the will with it," returned Flagge, drily. "I tell you I have had revelations of a startling character."

“La !” ejaculated my lady again, and her eyes grew rounder and rounder.

“Yes ; but I ain’t a-going to impart them gratis, Lady Lowry. If Sir Cosmo and I can make a deal,—good. If not, I’ve made up my mind to go abroad.”

“Go abroad ?”

“Yes ; the season here don’t begin till May or April. Everything’s very flat and dull now. The aristocratic classes with whom I chiefly sympathize—not from any servile prejudices, for I am a Republican who has snuffed the free air of the Western prairies, and scorn the feudal trammels of an effete civilization,—but because I find their minds refined up to the point of appreciating the phenomena of spiritism, and paying for ’em,—well, there’s scarce any of ’em in London. So I’ve made up my mind to go across to Paris. There’s a field there. I can have letters to the fashionable world there from the Honourable Lady Wigmore and from others. I may go on to Italy afterwards. Florence or Nice or Rome or Naples might suit me. There’s a good deal of gaiety amongst the English and Americans in those southern cities, and I’ve observed, as a general rule, that wherever people have nothing to do but amuse them-

selves, the spirits are popular. It's a beautiful law of nature when you come to think of it. Directly the sordid business of life recedes into the background, the soul kind of hankers after spiritual pabulum. And I can give it 'em."

Sarah was aghast at all this. The idea of Flagge's leaving London and going away out of her reach had not occurred to her as probable. And he spoke now in an assured, easy, cool manner, neither too emphatic nor too careless, which persuaded her that he meant what he said.

"Oh, but it wouldn't suit me at all for you to go away before this business is settled!" she cried, with a blunt directness caused by surprise.

Flagge shrugged his shoulders.

"At all events not before you've told what these 'startling revelations' are," pursued Sarah.

"Well, Sir Cosmo Lowry has got a certain amount of information already; and he's got it dirt cheap, too. P'raps that may be enough for him. If it turns out so, all the better."

"No, but I want to have you here to help me to keep Sir Cosmo up to the mark," persisted my lady. "Because I know how



it will be if the thing's let to dawdle on, and he isn't spurred up; it'll just die off altogether. There will be some sort of a search made in Lowry Place, and nothing will be found, and then Sir Cosmo will turn round on me and say I've been humbugged, and the spirits are bosh, and then nothing will induce him to take any more trouble about it, and there'll be an end!"

"Well, I guess that's so. You've about stated the case, lady. The perceptive faculties of the feminine intellect are awful quick, and desperate 'cute," returned Flagge quietly.

"And so we're to sit down tamely, me and mine, cheated out of our property, and Sir Rupert, poor dear old gentleman, not able to rest in his grave! It's very easy to talk so coolly about it, Dr. Flagge, but I should consider it downright wicked and irreligious to give everything up in that milk-and-water manner, and so I tell you."

My lady in her energy had sat upright on the sofa, and, what with the heat of the evening, the heaviness of the fur rug, and moral indignation, her cheeks were burning red, and her eyes glittered.

"Well, you'll see what'll come of the search in Miss Lowry's house. It *may* be satisfactory, you know."

"Oh no, it won't! You said yourself that—that anything might happen to the will when there's none of us there to overlook things. I'm sure you think there'll be foul play."

"Stop, lady! I wouldn't have the unpremeditated outpouring of a fervid temperament betray you into saying anything that might lead to an action for damages. 'Foul play' is one of those expressions which the cold administrators of terrestrial laws are apt to object to pretty strong:—it's libellous, lady, that's a fact."

"Why, *you* said so!" replied my lady a little glumly.

"I'm prepared to take my oath I didn't—so there would be a disagreeable discrepancy in our evidence, if it came to that."

"Upon my word, Dr. Flagge——"

"It's best to be plain and clear on some points. The element of vagueness is delightful, but it may be carried too far; especially whilst we're living under the conditions of this earthly sphere. Look here, Lady Lowry, you can just set before Sir Cosmo Lowry, Baronet, the following facts:—I've got fresh information; I'm prepared to impart it on moderate terms. I can't afford to waste my time in London any longer; if he offers a suitable

remuneration to me for assisting to ferret out the missing will, by spiritual revelations, and material investigations, I'm willing to pursoo the inquiry. I've helped him to something tangible before, and may again. As to the respect due to the wishes of his late father, and the dooty of carrying out his real testamentary arrangements, you'll say as much or as little of that as you think fit. It don't matter a red cent to me what Sir Cosmo's individual opinion of me may be. There ain't any magnetic sympathies between our organizations, and when I have to deal with the unspiritually minded, I make it a rule to do so on the basis of dollars, or whatever may be the currency of the country in which I am located for the time being. I shall remain in London till the end of the current week. After Sunday next it will be too late to negotiate."

"Sunday next? Dear me, that's very soon!"

"Well, I guess it ain't very long first; no. But I am rapid in my resolutions and in my actions. I have careered along the interminable plains of the Far West mounted upon the fleetest steeds of the warlike Appanawchees, and something of their fierce and

lightning swiftness has entered into my blood, lady," said Dr. Flagge in the very slowest and most melancholy of drawls, and with a face and attitude expressive of hopeless languor. "And see here, I want you to lend me your carriage every morning for the next few days."

Lady Lowry stared in genuine amazement.

"Lend you my carriage!" she cried. "Oh dear, I hardly think I could do that!"

"Well, I reckon you could;—yes."

"But—what to do?—where to go?"

"Well, to come to my house every morning, say at eleven o'clock, and drive for one hour in the Regent's Park."

"Goodness! I never heard such a strange request!"

"I am emancipated from the trammels of a hollow conventionality, lady; and when I want a thing I go right ahead to get it."

"And should you drive about the Regent's Park by yourself every morning?" asked Lady Lowry, after a minute or so of perplexed meditation.

"'Tain't for myself at all. It's for Nony."

"Miss Balasso!" almost shrieked Lady Lowry. "Then I positively refuse. And I wonder how you can think of asking me such a thing. Little ungrateful hussy! She left

my house in the most abominable way, and brought a dreadful old foreign man here to insult me before the servants. You can ask Lobley what he was. Why, he actually made bows to my footman and housemaid before my face! Low bows!"

It was a queer and characteristic trait of the accomplished Mrs. Bolitho's training, that after stating old Czernovic to have insulted herself, Sarah considered that a further climax of horror could be reached by declaring he had been civil to her servants.

"Possible? Why, on'y think! Well, I can conceive of it's having riled a lady accustomed to the refined and polished intercommunications of the wealthy and the great. But respecting the carriage, lady, I want to have you do this thing a little for me, and a good deal for yourself."

"I feel quite certain that it won't do me the least good to lend Miss Balasso my carriage," answered Lady Lowry emphatically.

"Why, it might now. Nony's out of health a good deal,—so much as to have lost in part her mediumistic power. If she gets real sick it'll go altogether, and—I don't mind telling you that it's from her I have derived the most important communications from Sir Rupert."

“What, lately?”

“Well, within a comparatively recent period. She’ll get back the power entirely if she can have air and gentle exercise without fatigue. Sir Rupert has a very remarkable sympathy with Nony.”

“It seems to me that you have a very remarkable sympathy with her, Dr. Flagge,” returned my lady, staring at him. “And it’s more than I have, I can tell you.”

“Well, see here, I can’t undertake to carry this investigation through without the assistance of a first-rate sensitive. You’re a lady of a powerful grasp of mind, and you ain’t a-going to allow your personal feelings to interfere with your interests. If sending your carriage to take a young girl a drive in an unfrequented locality, at an unfashionable hour, will assist your views and forward the carrying out of a sacred dooty, I guess you’re going to send that carriage.”

“Dr. Flagge, I *can’t* do it;—I really can’t! Just consider my servants. I put it to you—for although you do not belong to my set, you have some experience of society,—I simply put it to you, what *do* you suppose Lobley would think?”

A very vigorous and comprehensive devo-

tion of Lobley and all his compeers to the infernal deities, expressed in the raciest idiom of New England, was with difficulty suppressed by Dr. Flagge. He stood silent for a few minutes, looking at Lady Lowry, mentally opposing her dull cunning with his keen cunning, her thick-blooded obstinacy with his nervous eagerness. Finally, he said, "You rent your carriage and horses, don't you?"

"What?"

"You hire 'em,—they ain't your property?"

"Sir Cosmo has not purchased an equipage for me yet. Just for the present, we thought——"

"Now then, see here. You write a line to the stableman you deal with, and tell him to send round a nice trap with one horse to be at my door at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Your servants don't need to come; nor know anything of the matter. I require Nony's assistance, and if Nony's to give it she's got to get stronger. And if you like to put it so, I'll accept the use of your carriage as part payment for myself; but it's got to be sent, and there's no two ways about it."

And so the matter was agreed upon; my lady, however, making inviolable secrecy a

*sine qua non* for her fulfilment of the bargain. For, as she said, it wasn't so much that she minded making this concession to Miss Balasso, after Miss Balasso's conduct to her, but it was the look of the thing which would be so bad if it were known.

And when Flagge was gone, she had a rather stormy interview with her husband, which resulted in that determination to be "on the spot" which she communicated to Rosamond, recorded in the last chapter.



## CHAPTER IV.

It must not be supposed that Clevenal was so "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," as not to have enjoyed its share of the scandal about Sir Rupert's will. The Sydenham Spencers knew all about it; Mrs. Scarsdale, the naval officer's widow, talked it over with the vicar's wife; and it was a standing and substantial dish of gossip at every tea-table in Clevenal and Elcaster. Mr. and Mrs. Flint had rather a hard time of it in those days.

"I really know nothing of the matter," Mrs. Flint would say majestically. "What notions the present Lady Lowry may have taken into her head I cannot tell. Nor does it appear to me to be of much consequence."

Upon which some curious and disappointed female friend would exclaim, "Oh, but you have been amongst them all up in London, Mrs. Flint! You surely must know whether it's true that Lady Lowry has taken to

spiritualism, and had all sorts of things revealed to her by a medium ; and whether she attacked Miss Lowry before a whole roomful of people, and threatened to go to law with her ; and whether Sir Cosmo hunted out a witness—brought him back from Australia or America, some say—to swear that Sir Rupert made a will just before he died, leaving Lowry Place and all the settled property to his son ! ”

All of which was unspeakably annoying to Mrs. Flint. Her husband was not assailed so directly ; or, if he were, he could intrench himself behind the professional etiquette which forbids a lawyer to chatter about the affairs of his clients. But still Mr. Samuel Flint by no means escaped the hearing of much gossip that vexed and troubled him.

“It disgusts me with human nature, Bertha,” said Mr. Flint to his wife, “to see the eagerness with which all this miserable business of the Lowrys is seized upon and discussed by people.”

“The world will talk, Samuel. And the Lowrys hold, and have held for generations, a position which makes them persons of mark in the county. If Mr. Sydenham Spencer died, and there was any dispute about his will,

I don't know that it would become matter for public comment."

"The worst of it is, that what gives zest to the scandal is the suspicion——"

"Suspicion, Samuel!"

"Yes; the suspicion of—of some unfair dealing—of foul play, in short," replied Mr. Flint, unconsciously echoing my lady's phrase. "It makes me sick to see the eagerness with which people fasten on it, and fatten on it, like crows on carrion. Would it be so if news came that Sir Cosmo had begun to treat his sister with fraternal confidence and affection? Or that Mary was going to marry a Duke?"

"I'm sure they'd talk enough about that, Samuel."

"Perhaps; but they wouldn't enjoy it so much! Ugh! Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness!"

"Samuel—what *could* be expected when Sir Cosmo married that woman?"

If the plague had broken out in Clevelen village, or a thunderbolt destroyed the church, I am afraid that Mrs. Flint would have attributed the disaster to that terrible *mésalliance* of Sir Cosmo Lowry.

To Mary herself there came but few and faint glimpses of the excitement which her

family affairs were causing in the neighbourhood. She lived now in the old house much as she had lived in it in her father's time. Of course there was a great difference between the position of a dutiful daughter, living under the authority of a tyrannous old man, and that of the sole mistress of Lowry Place, of the grounds which surrounded it, and the dependents who lived in it. But it was a difference which made itself felt very quietly, and was hardly visible to a stranger's eye. Few strangers came to behold the difference—few persons outside of Miss Lowry's household, that is to say; for of real strangers, in the full sense of the word, very few ever came to Clevelen, and none to Lowry Place. The "county families" called on her, driving over in state, and paying short and formal visits. There was nothing new in this. The long seclusion in which Mary had lived during the latter part of her father's life had prevented her from being on intimate terms with any of her neighbours. But she was Miss Lowry of Lowry, and hitherto had done nothing to forfeit the respect due to that position.

She had done nothing to forfeit it, so far as the county families knew. To be sure, there were ugly rumours afloat. People

talked of some trickery concerning a will. Some said that Sir Rupert had lost his strength of mind towards the last, and had had undue pressure put upon him by his daughter as to the disposition of his property. It is true that he might have left her everything he had in the world,—except the bit of entailed land, which was worth nothing,—because Mary Hovenden's marriage settlement had left a discretionary power in the hands of the surviving parent as to which of her children should inherit the property, and in what proportions. But then that would have been going too far. And, after all, though Sir Rupert might be childish to a certain degree, yet there had probably been a point at which he would have resisted, had he been urged too far. It was a queer business altogether. But the Lowrys were a queer family, and always had been. However, as they had been settled at Clevenal since before the Conquest, it behoved people to treat Miss Lowry with civility:—at all events for the present. And as to Lady Lowry, if she should come to live among them, it would then be time enough to decide how to treat her. And of course if she came one must call on her, if it were only to ascertain what she was like;—mustn't one?

Mr. Flint had to fight a great many battles, and to exercise a great deal of self-restraint and discretion in the midst of the various currents of opinion. He was a popular man in his way, and personally acquainted with half the county; and, moreover, he was known not only as the lawyer, but as the friend, of the late baronet and his daughter. He was loyal and staunch in his championship of Mary; but he felt that a too loud and eager championship of her would be injudicious. There are some accusations which it is wise to ignore, unless they are made with unmistakable openness. It would have been very dreadful to Mr. Flint to have to declare that Mary Lowry was a well-principled, honest woman, incapable of a lie or a theft! Would your chosen friend deem you very loyal to his honour and reputation if you vaunted him behind his back as one who might certainly be relied on never to commit a felony? And the place which Mary Lowry held in old Samuel Flint's esteem and affection was such as to make it painful to him—and very acutely painful—to have to admit that a defence of her against vague calumny might possibly become necessary. He had held her up as a paragon among women:

pre-eminent in beauty, and goodness, and sense. There had been perhaps a little jealousy in the breasts of some of their Elcaster cronies at the intimacy of Mr. and Mrs. Flint in Lowry Place. For although there was scarcely a man or woman in the little town who would not have found it very disagreeable to sit at dinner there whilst Sir Rupert lived, yet there were almost equally few who would not have found it very agreeable to say they had done so. The Lowrys of Lowry were big people in their own corner of the earth.

One ray of comfort came to Mrs. Flint in the midst of her troubles about Mary, from the fact that the old Countess of Elcaster and my lord her son were spending the winter at Elcaster House, and that the Countess had struck up something like an intimacy with Miss Lowry. The Earl of Elcaster was a rather dull man of five and forty, who had devoted the energies of his character from an early age to those pursuits which are compendiously included under the name of "the Turf." It was not very often that he honoured Elcaster House with a long visit. But this year he had been ill; and during the weakness of a slow convalescence

had yielded to his mother's wish that she should carry him down to Clevelen, there to live quietly and breathe the country air, until such time as he should feel strong enough to travel to the south of Italy. People said that the Earl's illness was due to mental rather than physical causes. Some declared that he had not been ill at all; merely cast down by heavy losses on the Turf during the late autumn meetings. He had truly lost a good deal of money:—a good deal of money even for an Earl of Elcaster. But his losses had not been so fatal as to break him down. A sharp attack of rheumatic fever had in truth more to do with prostrating his lordship's strength than the tremendous *fiasco* of that celebrated daughter of Atalanta by Æolus, on whose fleetness he had staked—and lost—a large sum of money. When Miss Lowry returned to her home from London, there were the mother and son living in her immediate neighbourhood, and the old Countess, as has been said, struck up something like an intimacy with her.

Lady Elcaster was a thin, sharp-tongued old lady, who had been a great beauty in her youth, and of the world worldly. She was of ancient lineage but poor; and when she



condescended to accept several hundred thousand pounds, clogged with a plébeian husband (he was not Earl of Elcaster in those days, and his father was a brewer), she set about making amends to her private feelings for the sacrifice, by consistent and haughty insolence to every one—her husband included—whose pedigree was not as good as her own. Her only son Basil inherited rather his father's temperament than hers, much to her ladyship's chagrin. He displayed the roughest indifference to the claims of rank and fashionable society; and whenever he particularly desired to punish his mother for some sarcastic speech, would discourse by the hour about his grandfather the brewer, and relate a favourite anecdote of how he had discovered a second cousin of his own in the village shopkeeper who supplied his trainer with soap and candles. Nevertheless, it may be believed that my Lord Elcaster had quite as high an estimate of his claims on the consideration of the world as his lady mother had of hers.

“I'm sorry we have not been better acquainted all these years, Miss Lowry,” said the Countess on the occasion of her first visit to Lowry Place. “But I have not been a

great deal at Clevelen; and then—to tell the truth—Sir Rupert always snubbed us a little!”

“My father saw very few people; and no strangers, Lady Elcaster. He was disinclined for society in his latter years.”

“Yes, yes; no doubt. I understand. Well—we all have our troubles. But I hope that you and I may be good friends. It will be charitable of you to come and see an old woman.”

Mary did not, perhaps, feel much inclined to let her charity flow out in the direction of Elcaster House. But the Countess had taken a fancy to Miss Lowry; and the Countess, when she took a fancy into her head, was not apt to be easily turned aside from gratifying it.

“I don’t know when I’ve seen anything so thorough-bred, Basil,” said the old lady to her son. “She’s perfectly delicious, with that stately turn of the head, and that apparent unconsciousness of self in all her movements which is *the* most difficult thing in the world to acquire—especially for a beauty.”

“We don’t want her here,” growled Basil, whose taste in women lay by no means in

the direction of the "stately" and "thoroughbred" sort.

"*I want her. And I mean to have her. I cannot stand these Clevelen creatures, my dear. Miss Lowry is at least delightful to look upon. Do you know that I had a severe bilious attack after the visit of that Mrs. Spencer Sydenham, or Sydenham Spencer, or whatever the woman's name is? I attribute it entirely to her green and yellow gown.*"

Lady Elcaster knew Mr. Flint very well. He had been employed on various business connected with that part of her son's property which lay in the neighbourhood of Clevelen. And the next time she saw Mr. Flint, she talked to him about Mary Lowry.

"And what is she going to do? She can't live there all alone. It would be preposterous. They tell me she's thirty. But that's nothing. She's a great deal younger than many girls I know, of three and twenty, who have hacked themselves out, season after season. And as to beauty—I'm sure in the days of chivalry Lowry Place would have been besieged by an army of knights, eager to carry off such a princess!"

"The princess will take care to have a say

of her own in that matter of the carrying off, Lady Elcaster."

"Is there any one? Any favourite knight in the field, eh?"

"Not that I know of. Indeed, so far as I am aware there are no besieging knights at all. I only meant that Miss Mary will be likely to have a strong opinion of her own, in that as in most other matters. She is the most admirable lady in the world—goodness itself! And I've known her from a child. But she has her share of the Lowry strain in her; and the Lowrys have never been very malleable in their natures."

"Humph! The present man seems weak enough! To think of his making two such marriages! And they say this dairymaid whom he has taken for his second wife has him completely under her thumb. Not that I know anything about it."

"Sir Cosmo is very different from his sister," returned Mr. Flint gravely.

"I should think so. I wonder she never married. Although, to be sure, her father almost kept her under lock and key, as if she had been a real princess in a fairy tale. He was a terrible tartar, that old Sir Rupert!"

"He was a very old friend of mine, Lady Elcaster."

"Oh, I don't mean to disparage him. People have to be tartars sometimes. And it was enough to sour his temper, the way that son of his behaved. The Lowrys have good blood in their veins."

"Some of the best blood in England, Lady Elcaster."

Something of this conversation was revealed to Mrs. Flint by her husband; and the good lady felt a gleam of comfort.

"You may depend on it, Samuel, that Lady Elcaster wants Mary for her daughter-in-law," said Mrs. Flint.

"I should be sorry to 'depend' on anything so unsubstantial as that notion, my dear."

"I feel a *conviction* that it is so, Samuel. And where could she do better for her son? Lord Elcaster is an earl, and a wealthy earl, but I don't know that he could do better than marry Mary Lowry if he searched all England through from one end to the other."

"Do better? No; but I scarcely know where she could do worse!"

"I should prefer Sir Thomas on the whole, certainly," replied Mrs. Flint with an air of candour. Sir Thomas was the landed pro-

prietor whom Mrs. Flint had entered on the tablets of her mind as the second possible candidate for Miss Lowry's hand. And after that Mr. Flint said no more.

But Mrs. Flint in the pride of her heart, and smarting under the sting of several disagreeable speeches which had recently been made to her about "her dear friends the Lowrys," could not refrain from dropping a hint here and there to the effect that it would be Miss Lowry's own fault if she didn't wear a coronet before long. And thus there was added an additional tit-bit to the already unusually succulent dish of gossip prepared by kind Fortune for the delectation of Elcaster, Clevenal, and the adjacent parishes.

Meanwhile Mary was living in her old home with a heavy heart and a weary spirit. Life seemed very hopeless and sunless to her. And certainly the prospect of becoming Countess of Elcaster would not have availed to brighten it, had such an idea entered her head. It had not entered her head. Neither, it may be said, had it entered Lord Elcaster's head either. Thus, as it often happens, the two principal parties concerned in the matter were the only two persons in the whole countryside who were ignorant of the destiny arranged for them by

the public voice. As to the old Countess, she was not without a dim and floating idea on the subject. But she kept the idea to herself, feeling that any open interference on her part would be highly injudicious. It must not be supposed that Lady Elcaster had any defined plan of inducing her son to marry Miss Lowry. But the thought certainly had crossed her mind that the arrangement might be a good one. Basil was no longer young. It was time he should marry, and highly desirable that he should marry a "nice" person. Basil had displayed a taste for persons who were not "nice." That was an evil at which his mother was able to shrug her shoulders very philosophically; but unfortunately he had once upon a time manifested symptoms of intending to make a person who was by no means "nice" the Countess of Elcaster. His mother had had a terrible fright on that occasion, which she had never forgotten. Now Providence seemed to have thrown this handsome, stately, well-born woman in Basil's way, and if Basil would but profit by the chance, his mother acknowledged to herself that she should be satisfied with such a daughter-in law as Mary Lowry. Twenty years ago she might have been more exigent in the matter of money;

and, perhaps, of title. But Basil was forty-five, and then the old lady remembered their narrow escape from the person who was so far from "nice." That any opposition might come from Miss Lowry—that certainly had not entered Lady Elcaster's head.



## CHAPTER V.

YES; Enone was discovering day by day how difficult it is to be heroic. As she had said to Miss Lowry, doing things was so different from thinking beforehand that one would do them. "Things"—circumstances in general—would not present themselves after a fashion which admitted of heroic treatment! She had felt it to be rather heroic to cut herself off from all communication with the Lowrys, and still more with Major Maude. But the excitement and support of this feeling soon grew cold and dead under the conviction that her disappearance from their circle was looked on as a matter of no consequence. No one missed her, no one tempted the strength of her resolution by trying to coax her back among them. Since that little note from Rosamond she had heard no more from Green Street; and after that one visit of Vincent Maude—made, as she bitterly remembered, not for her

sake, but for Mary Lowry's—there had been no need of putting in force her stern resolve not to see him,—for he had not come again! If only she could get that longed-for letter from her father! The sickening, wearying hope deferred ate into her life like a file.

Perhaps—so dependent are we on those things which we call trifles—the one circumstance which refreshed her spirit with strength to live and hope on, and to keep her thoughts fixed, poor child, on the loftiness of her inheritance as a Greek, was Obadiah Flagge's daily gift of flowers. Without this delicate incense for her proud and sensitive self-love she might have sunk down hopeless and helpless altogether. Her countrymen of old believed that their deities were actually fed upon incense and the smoke of sacrifice, and that when once the altar fires were cold the god would die. Poor CEnone's divinity was not self-sustaining enough to live without some whiff of praise and love. The perfume of Dr. Flagge's Gardenia faintly nourished the day-dreams of her Greek superiority, and her Greek delight in beauty. But still she found it very difficult to be heroic.

Dr. Flagge told Papa Czernovic of the arrangement he had made about a carriage

for CEnone to drive in every morning. That is to say, he told him as much of the arrangement as seemed good to him; but he made it appear that the carriage was sent by Lady Lowry's spontaneous will. He imagined that CEnone would spurn the favour if she thought it came from him. Papa Czernovic probably guessed the truth. "*Nein!*" said he afterwards, to Bob Doery; "dat woman could not have dat thought nevermore! She is so a Philister what I have never knowed; and doll,—Ach Gott, how is she doll, dat woman!" But he accepted Dr. Flagge's statement without remark, and agreed with him that CEnone ought to avail herself of the opportunity of getting some fresh air without fatigue. But he disappointed Flagge's calculations by declaring himself certain that CEnone would never consent to use the carriage if she believed it to be supplied to her by Lady Lowry.

"Why in nature shouldn't she?" urged Flagge. "She's earned more'n that at Green Street at a fair market price. They got a deal out of Nony among them, one way and another. Why, she taught that apple-faced English girl to play music an hour every day." Dr. Flagge did not put forward her services as

a *sensitive*, according to his own phraseology ; not being fond of touching on those topics with Papa Czernovic, who was apt to grow watchful, and to get a cool, fox-like glitter in his old grey eyes when they were mentioned to him in connection with Enone. But in his own mind Flagge seriously considered that the price of a carriage for an hour every day during the rest of her life would not be an adequate payment from Lady Lowry to Enone for services rendered.

"I dunno as I'm particularly fond of Lady Lowry myself," said he, argumentatively, "but I don't see as that's any reason for not getting all you can out of her. It's the principle *she* goes on, anyhow! And when people stroke me the wrong way, why, they've got to pay for it."

But Papa Czernovic persisted that this was a view of the matter which it was hopeless to present to Enone. "She vill not ride in de coach of dat voman," said Papa Czernovic. "Nona hef de artist temperament. A fine, *fine* little sensitiff fiddle. But if you play him bet, he vill squeak, ja!"

"Then what the devil *are* we to do?" asked Flagge, in a tone of disappointment that was almost pathetic. Pathetic, too, was

the appealing look he gave to old Czernovic as though begging for help; at least, it might be so to those who knew the self-reliant, unscrupulous adventurer in his everyday aspect, and who understood that his present phase of irresolution was due to—to love, in short, sheer love, such as school-girls learn from old-fashioned novels written in the days before mankind was supposed to have outgrown that romantic sentiment!

“Vell, my friend, dere is a vay——”

“Is there? Go right ahead!”

“You might say dat de Major” (Papa Czernovic pronounced the word *Mah-yor*) “our goot friend have provide de coach for Nona.”

“I’m damned if I do!” returned Flagge in a singularly quiet voice.

“Aha! So? Vell, but Nona would ride in de coach from de Mah-yor. He is a goot Mensch: *vortrefflich*!”

“Well, I’m damned if I say it, Papa Czernovic! That’s so!”

And this second time Flagge’s voice was almost flute-like in its softness.

Old Czernovic began to understand the position. “Tell Nona dat you hef de coach yourself, and offer her to ride in it,” said he.

"She'll refuse," said Flagge with a wistful look.

"Ve can dry," returned Papa Czernovic with his usual imperturbable good-humour. "Vot it cost to dry?"

So they proceeded upstairs to make the proposition to Enone. Just as they reached the door, Flagge pulled his companion's sleeve and whispered, "See here, now, just put it as if it was your notion, won't you? Don't let her think I'm too anxious about it." And in reply Papa Czernovic put his finger to one side of his nose, shut his eyes tight, and smiled.

Enone proved to be less obdurate than had been expected. "I don't want to drive out," she said, languidly. "Why are you so bent on it?"

"Because dere is de chance of de coach for noting, Nona! Ven our goot friend Flagge tell me dat dat woman provide him a coach, I say vy not make Nona hef a ride?"

"I dunno what to do with the trap. Lady Lowry would send it. She ain't using it just now. And—you know what she is, Nony—it'd pretty well kill her to think the livery stableman should get any advantage by having a holiday. I was a-going to send it

off right away, but Papa Czernovic thought you and his wife might like a turn in the Regent's Park for an hour. Funny enough, you remember I was saying to you on'y the other day as I thought a drive would be good for you, Nony."

All this elaborate attempt to deceive Eñone as to the real state of the case was superfluous. She did not even examine Flagge's words suspiciously. What did it matter? She was going away; and she would not fight against the wishes of the people around her during these last weeks and days. Accordingly the next morning she and Mamma Czernovic entered the brougham sent by Lady Lowry, and were driven round the Regent's Park. Madame Czernovic had consented to the arrangement, as she would have consented to any arrangement proposed by her husband and Nona; but it must be owned that she found it a dull business, and that she presented a rather forlorn spectacle staring out of her outlandish fur wraps, with her soft blue eyes full of wonder and resignation. Eñone indulged in a reverie. Now that it was quite certain that she had made that plunge into social depths far removed from the sphere where Vincent Maude lived,—now that she

looked forward to leaving England for ever, she might surely allow herself the consolation of thinking of him! She might be allowed to remember, at least, without wronging any one. But at seventeen years of age the imagination is more apt to busy itself with the future than with the past. And C  none transferred the figure of her hero into all sorts of wild and romantic scenes far away from the hard poverty and prose of her London life. She knew that these were day-dreams of the most unsubstantial sort. But they were sweet, and she could not turn away from their sweetness. If she should meet him some day in her own glorious Greece! He had spoken of his desire to travel in that classic land. If he should see her there, amidst all the beauty and the grandeur and the pathos of Grecian ruins and Grecian landscape—and if she should present him to her father as one who had been her friend in the forlornness of her wandering childhood—and if her father, welcoming him with the stately grace of his country, should win his respect and admiration, and he should see her no longer surrounded by common and coarse associations, but in her rightful place as the daughter of a lofty race, might it not be——?



These day-dreams had perhaps no more definite outlines than have the dazzling sunset visions of the cloudy west in autumn ; but they were sweet, and Enone fed her imagination with them, whilst her frail little body was being carried round and round the Regent's Park on a nipping January morning.

"Nona," said Papa Czernovic, receiving her at the door of Mr. Quickit's house on her return, "here is some one for to see you !"

"To see me ?" The foolish young heart began to beat, and the great sad eyes to sparkle. Could it be Maude ? "Who is it ?"

"An old friend. I did promise not to say noting, but I would not hef you fright or surprise too moch. Are you better of de ride in de coach ?"

"Better ! I don't know that I am better or worse, but I am tired. Let me go upstairs. Where is—— the person who is come to see me ?" answered Enone almost pettishly, being at once impatient, and proudly anxious to conceal her impatience. Papa Czernovic let her pass him to mount the stairs. His wife followed more slowly, waddling under the weight of a great mangy fur cloak which

had seen better days and shared many of the family vicissitudes. Old Czernovic hung back, and said a few words to her in Russian, in a low voice very quickly. She stopped and clapped her hands together, with an exclamation of surprise. Czernovic gently laid his finger on her lips. He was evidently in a state of pleasurable excitement, and as he toiled upstairs with his wife's arm in his, he poured a long speech into her ears, whilst she stopped at every third stair or so to clap her hands and utter interjections of surprise in her soft-sounding barbarous dialect.

Meanwhile Enone made what speed she could to the sitting-room. The speed was not great, for she was very weak. And as she went she had time to prepare herself for a disappointment. No ; it could not be Maude who was awaiting her upstairs. He would have indulged in no such jests as bidding Papa Czernovic keep his coming secret. He was always grave with her of late ; kind, and serious, and unfamiliar. No ;—and she sighed wearily—it could not be Maude. She had been a fool to think of such a thing for an instant. It might be Mr. Demayne, perhaps, or Captain Peppiat, or Lewis Griffiths. But it mattered little which of them it was.

The interest was gone, the spark had died out of Ænone's eyes.

She turned the handle of the door and went into the sitting-room. There was a man seated at the table with his back to her. He was smoking a cigar in front of the fire, and his legs were stretched out on a chair before him. Ænone saw that the feet on the chair were small, well-shaped, and covered with smart, shiny boots. At the slight noise she made in opening the door, he turned round, and seeing her, rose and flung away his cigar. He was a rather short, rather stout, rather bald man of some two or three and forty years of age. The fringe of hair round his head was black and wavy, his eyes were dark and bright, his hands fat, dimpled, and covered with rings. His whole air bespoke wealth, vulgarity, and self-confidence, tempered by good nature.

"Are you Ænone?" he said, speaking in English, but with a foreign accent. And at the words Ænone's heart stood still, and then gave a sickening bound. Her always pale face grew ghastly. She tried to speak but could not.

"You don't know me," said the man.  
"But that is not surprising! I don't think

I should have known you, if I had seen you by chance ;—although now I look again, there is something like your mother about the shape of your face. You don't guess who I am, eh?"

Ænone was supporting herself by leaning on the table, and was trembling violently from head to foot.

"I am your papa, Ænone. Don't look so terrified! Won't you come and give me a kiss?"

Then Ænone, still without speaking, went close up to him, and when he took her in his arms she burst out into a hysterical fit of sobbing.

For a little while he soothed and caressed her as if she had been an infant. But presently he seemed to get tired of her tears, and almost angry that she said no word of welcome to him. "I suppose you are glad—or at least not sorry—to see me, Ænone. But you haven't the most cheerful way of showing it!"

"Yes; I—am—glad," sobbed Ænone, forming the words with a painful effort. "But—I was—so—startled and surprised. And I—am not—very—strong."

"Poor little pigeon! No, you don't look strong! Well, we must put some flesh on

your bones, and—and dress you properly,” he added, glancing at her poor attire. “And then you’ll look very different. And so you would not have known me at all, eh?”

She shook her head. This was not the father she had pictured to herself. And she knew now that what she had taken for memory had been merely imagination. Still there were the fine dark eyes, and as he spoke one or two tones of his voice seemed to strike a familiar chord in her heart.

“Did you come because of my letter, papa?” she asked, giving him that title half shyly, half tenderly, and all tearfully.

“Your letter? No. I have had no letter from you for—oh, for years. Where did you write?”

“To—I think it was to Constantinople that Papa Czernovic sent the letter; to some bankers there.”

“Oh! ay! To Constantinople? Well, I have not been in Constantinople for a long time. And what did you write about?”

“I wrote—I wrote to ask if I might come and live with you, and go to the places you go to. I should not be afraid. And I should not be troublesome. May I, papa? Don’t let me be away from you again!”

"Of course, my white pigeon! That is just what I want," replied Balassopoulo, stroking his daughter's hair kindly. He seemed pleased and flattered by her desire to stay with him.

"Oh, thanks, papa! I will be so good, and so little troublesome! I am used to a rough life, you know; and to travelling."

"As to travelling, I've had enough of it. But if you like—we'll see about it, CEnone."

"And when shall we go? I am so tired—ah, you don't know how tired—of being here!"

"Go, where?"

"To the East; or to wherever it is that your business takes you. I will go with you to the desert, or anywhere," said CEnone, looking up into his face with tearful eyes and a sort of childish solemnity.

Balassopoulo burst out laughing, displaying as he did so two rows of white strong teeth under his well-waxed black moustaches. "I wonder what sort of idea you have of the desert!" he exclaimed with an air of great amusement. "No, my daughter, we won't go to the desert just yet. I should prefer Eaton Place. What do you think, CEnone—I have come to settle in London altogether!"

"Here!"

"Yes; here. It's the best place to live in in the world, if one can afford it."

"But I thought—— Papa, would you not rather live in Greece?"

"In Greece! No, thank you, Enone." And again he laughed, and, patting her cheek, bade her not look so tragical and astonished.

"But we are Greeks! We do not belong to this place, and this people!"

"We couldn't belong to a better people. No, no, Enone; we'll drop the Greek business. When I went to Malta three years ago I got myself naturalized as a British subject, and found it answer in every respect. I've no love for my own countrymen; nor you wouldn't have if you knew them as I do. They're a confounded set of thieves, and there's no dealing with them."

Enone sat looking at him, white and speechless as a figure cut in stone.

## CHAPTER VI.

SIGNOR SPIRIDION BALASSOPOULO—or, as he now called himself, Mr. Balasso—was not altogether delighted with his daughter. “She is mere skin and bone,” he said to old Czer-novic, “and, except for a good pair of eyes, is almost plain. I don’t see why she shouldn’t have some share of good looks. Her mother was a handsome woman :—*you* remember her! And I have not been considered a monster of ugliness myself. Clever? Oh, I dare say she’s no fool, but she has her head full of queer unpractical notions. She don’t seem to understand the value of money at all.”

By which latter phrase Mr. Balasso meant to express that his daughter had not shown herself duly alive to the great good fortune of finding a rich father instead of a poor one. “What did CEnone expect, I wonder? I might have gone on working for twenty years and not have realized as much as I have got within



the last three, by—well, partly by luck, and partly by having *nous* enough to take advantage of my luck when it came. But she takes it all as coolly——! I wonder what she would have said if I had turned up without a shilling!”

Papa Czernovic, who had his own convictions and perceptions as to the impression made on CEnone by her father, took refuge in his favourite observation that Nona had the artist temperament; adding that she cared very little about being rich.

Spiridion Balasso received this with an impatient shrug. He did not believe in the existence of people who cared very little about being rich. That simply meant, he considered, that they gave themselves airs, and refused to be grateful for the good things when they got them, although when they had them not they thought themselves hardly used. He was willing to load his daughter with jewels and fine clothes as far as his means permitted, but in return he expected her to appreciate and enjoy them ungrudgingly. He expected her, too, to gauge her enjoyment pretty accurately by the money value of the article enjoyed:—although of this he was perhaps not wholly conscious himself. Balasso would invite you

to dinner, and delight in setting before you food and drink of the best; but he would expatiate on the prices of his choice viands and rare wines whilst you were eating and drinking them, and would be apt to conceive a poor opinion of any man who should prefer a vintage at seven-and-sixpence a bottle to a vintage that cost a guinea.

It was true that he had not troubled himself about his daughter for a good many years; but he thought that she had not the least right to resent that, seeing that although he had stayed away from her whilst his fortunes were precarious, he had come to seek her out when he grew rich. He said to himself that he might have remained at Malta comfortably enough without the trouble of a grown-up daughter on his hands, and have contented himself with sending a yearly allowance for her support. He had had a long talk with Czernovic, and learned from him a great many particulars of Cenone's life, before the latter returned from her drive; so that by the time he met his daughter, he had made up his mind as to his course of conduct respecting several personages. He listened to old Czernovic's judgment of Cenone, and advice as to the best method of treating her; but without much

consideration for the one, or intention of following the other. It was very well for Czernovic to give him the *carte du pays*: that saved trouble. But he was fully minded to determine his own line of march. He should manage Enone very well. He did not require much demonstrative affection from her. He was called a kind-hearted man, and liked to see smiling faces round him, but he wanted no depth of sentiment. Indeed, deep sentiment would have worried and disconcerted him. "I think Miss Enone will consider herself a lucky young woman," said he with his little laugh of self-confidence. "I shall take rooms for the present at the Tyburnia; and next season we'll look out for a house—a nice box in a good neighbourhood. She'll be a little better off than in Howard Buildings, *per Dio!*"

The Tyburnia was a most delightful hotel; quite new, very expensive, and enormously big. Hydraulic machinery was employed to carry you up to your bed-chamber, and a telegraphic apparatus, with miles of wire, to summon the waiter. You were fed at a table which receded into a dim perspective like the pictures of Belshazzar's Feast, and your eyes were soothed by the glitter of gilding on

everything that could be gilt; from the chandeliers in the roof, to the knobs of the poker and tongs in the drawing-room. Papa Czernovic knew something about the Tyburnia, and he nodded with a rather faint assent to this speech. "Yes," said he, wrinkling up the corners of his cunning old grey eyes, "ach Gott, it is one very fine house! For dem what ondershtands de comfortable, dinner is grand ting—very grand fine ting! But Nona is a fine-strung little instrument. She is like some strange bloom—some strange flower what cannot live except in one climate. No good, de hothouse. Your bloom takes in his head, he dies in de hothouse—and what you can do? Gar nix! I hef seen Alpenblumen, flowers of de high Alp, what looks so frail as if noting but de hothouse will shoot dem. Vell, no! No at all de hothouse! But oderways, de great Gletscher, all ice and snow. A oak die dere, ja! But your small Alpenblume he smile like de summer sky where you shiver. For me I like de comfortable; and for me dinner is one grand fine ting. But Nona——? H'm, h'm, dat is not quite same, lieber Herr Balasso."

"Ta, ta, ta, my dear sir!" returned Balasso, jauntily flicking off the ash of his costly cigar;

“it’s all very fine to talk of Alpine flowers, but women understand which side their bread is buttered. The climate that best suited all the women I have ever known—young or old, pretty or ugly, black, white, or brown—is the climate of Tom Tiddler’s ground, where they can pick up gold and silver. *Basta!*”

The other members of the Czernovic family by no means shared Papa Czernovic’s doubts and misgivings—if doubts and misgivings he had—as to the happiness of Enone’s future. One and all congratulated her effusively—effusively for them, that is to say; for there was a touch of the *nil admirari* of the savage about these good people. And besides, they had survived a great many turns of the wheel. But there was one person to whom the unexpected appearance of Enone’s father, rich, sleek, and flourishing, came as an overwhelming blow. Dr. Obadiah Flagge shut himself into his own sitting-room, and sat down to think with his head on his hand, and a leaden weight at his heart. He had borne a brave front to Czernovic, who told him the news; and to Quickit, who would fain have discussed it, and stood at the door of his back parlour with his head on one side, rubbing his hands over and over each other, and prepared for a

chat. Flagge had declined the chat on the plea of business to attend to and letters to write. But he had so borne himself that Quickit, not having the clue which might have guided him to such a conjecture, did not at all suspect that the arrival of Mr. Spiridion Balasso was a matter which awakened anything more than the transient interest of curiosity in his lodger the medium. But when Flagge had shut the door of his own sitting-room, and sat down by himself, he felt that the coming of that plump, vulgar, smiling, bejewelled man had changed the world for him.

He had not thought himself a prosperous suitor yesterday:—but between yesterday and to-day, what a wide difference there was! As he thought, sitting there with his head in his hands, it seemed to him as if he had not sufficiently appreciated the happiness of yesterday: and now it was gone. Enone had condoned that one passionate outburst when he had first declared that he loved her, and offended her sensitive pride of maidenhood by alluding to her love for some one else. He had thought at the time that she never could forgive it. But she had forgiven—perhaps forgotten it. If she had not forgotten it, so

much the more hopeful was his case; for it was clear that she had laid aside all resentment. She accepted his flowers. She had driven in the carriage of his providing. She might have come to depend on him more and more for such things as his money could provide for her, and she had no means of procuring for herself. And then he told himself that CEnone could not be ungrateful. She was incapable of enjoying the gift and scorning the giver. If she took even such a trifle as a flower from his hand, it was a pledge that she felt trustfully, perhaps kindly, towards him. She must perceive how utterly for her own sake his offerings were made. And the perception could not fail to move a generous spirit. And now—she was no longer poor, lonely, forlorn, and forsaken by the world. What were his poor white blossoms and his borrowed carriage—borrowed at the cost of scheming and lying which she despised—to the daughter of the rich Mr. Spiridion Balasso?

All at once Flagge lifted up his head and tossed back his thin elf locks, arranged for the captivation of his fashionable patrons, who liked their poets, mediums, artists, actors, and other ministers of excitement and amuse-

ment to look as different from themselves as possible. He tossed back his long locks, took out a cigar, and as he lit it exclaimed aloud with a bitter smile, "Well, I guess I am *the* damnedest fool out, and there's no two ways about it."

Then he stretched out his legs on the hearth-rug, and settled himself in the easy chair, and began to smoke; and after a few minutes he repeated aloud the epithet he had applied to himself, and added to it several still stronger expletives, and smiled contemptuously and sarcastically between the puffs of smoke that issued from his lips. But presently the bitter smile died away, and he grew sad and thoughtful once more. And his thoughts shaped themselves somewhat thus:—

"Well, foolish or not foolish, the pain's real enough. And as to foolish—I dunno but it might seem foolish to beings as never felt 'em to have a cancer or a toothache. Maybe one kind of ailment ain't much foolisher than another. Men are kinder 'shamed of pain; but I dunno as 'taint as nat'ral to cry as to laugh. And as to love being foolish—p'raps it is—and so are a good many other sentiments, I reckon. But that don't stop 'em taking right hold of you, and wringing



your heart-strings pretty sharp. Why in nature that little white-faced, proud, foreign-bred girl upstairs should have come to be pretty much all I care for in this big round earth—I dunno! But she is; and what's the good of denying it, like a cussed, stuck-up, beef-eating John Bull? There's on'y one thing John Bull ain't ashamed of losing his head over—far's I can see—and that's a race-horse. Why, that poor frail little bit of female natur can make me thrill in every fibre of my body by just looking at me! And when she has that piteous strange look in the wonderful eyes of her—as if she was asking all creation why *she* should be and suffer, I feel like putting my right hand into the fire to make her happy. Poor little Nona! Guess there's a power as jest sticks us on pins like cockchafers, and has a good time when it sees us spinning. One man's pin may be politics, another's dollars, another's a woman's love; but we've got to be spiked somehow, and we've got to spin. Poor little Nona! She don't care the millionth part of a straw about me, p'raps, but yet——; if I'd been let to work out my own chance—if that fat smirky brute hadn't come in between us—I might—I *might* have made her feel a bit kindly to me, or at least pitiful. And now

she'll be taken off, and God knows if I shall be let to see her even! And she won't be happy, neither. It wouldn't be so bad if she was going to be happy. But that coarse fellow won't understand her. I can see it in the fat perky face of him. And she'll fret and pine, and she's so weak now she can hardly hold up her pretty head. Poor little Nona! My darling—my poor little delicate lily—it's—a—damned shame!" And Flagge dropped his face in his hands and cried—cried hot bitter tears, with a throbbing, aching heart, and an abandonment of himself to emotion, which would have affected the Honourable Mrs. Wigmore and other similar fair clients of his, could they have witnessed it, with a bewildering amazement surpassing all they had felt at his "spiritual" performances.

## CHAPTER VII.

ONE dull cloudy forenoon a day or two after Balasso's unexpected appearance in Howard Buildings, Rosamond Lowry was pacing up and down her accustomed walk in Hyde Park as usual. Moore was in attendance, very glum and ill-tempered. She did not consider it any part of her legitimate duties to walk out with Miss Rosamond, whom Moore pronounced to be the most uninteresting girl she had ever come across. She had no taste for gossip, was utterly indifferent to anecdotes of the fine ladies whose toilets Miss Moore had superintended in her time, and would bluntly check the recital of Miss Moore's experiences and observations, whenever they showed a tendency to become scandalous. Moore considered that Rosamond's mental and moral development had been completely ruined and perverted by her low connections in Bloomsbury. She was a thoroughly common-minded girl, Miss Moore

declared—and Miss Moore thought this was a very terrible accusation. So she trotted sulkily along over the damp gravel path beside Rosamond, mincing her steps with languid elegance, in contrast to Rosamond's firm, free, elastic gait, and endeavouring, by all the affected airs she was able to assume, to convey the impression that she herself was delicate and unaccustomed to pedestrian exercise, although the rosy young person by her side might be as strong as a pony. To be strong, Miss Moore thought, was another very terrible accusation when applied to a young lady.

All at once Rosamond startled her out of her elegant languor by uttering a loud exclamation and suddenly quickening her pace.

"Laws, Miss Rosamond, what is it? Is there a cow coming?"

Moore's chronic terror out of doors was a vision of an infuriated cow charging down upon her.

"A cow—here? No, you goose!"

"Excuse me, Miss Rosamond, for differing with you, but they do drive them heverywheres; so I am not such a goose as you are pleased to suppose."

"No, no; there are no cows. Come along! make haste!" And, suiting the action to the

word, Rosamond began to run, and after having run for half a minute or so, began to call aloud breathlessly, "Uncle Pep! Uncle Pep! Stop! Don't you see me, Uncle Pep?"

Two gentlemen who were walking on at some distance ahead, stopped at the call, turned, and, recognizing the flying figure, came back to meet her. She ran up to them, flushed and smiling, holding out her hands, with a gleeful repetition of "Uncle Pep!"

"Why, my Rosy, is it yourself?"

"Of course it is! And you were going to cut me! Oh, ain't I glad I just caught you! How do you do, Major Maude? I hope you won't think me quite crazy," panted Rosamond, laughing and still breathless.

"Oh, Rosy, Rosy," said her uncle, holding both her hands, and looking at her with a beaming face, "it's my belief that the refinements of polished society are entirely thrown away upon some people. Look at that genteel young lady whose destiny condemns her to go about in company with an impulsive sort of wild girl of the woods—just see how disgusted she looks! There's a world of fine moral indignation in her eye.

'She never complains, but her silence implies  
The composure of settled distress!'

And indeed Miss Moore just then came up to the group with an elaborate assumption of being reduced almost to the last gasp.

"Oh, Miss Rosamond," she faltered, holding her hand to her side, "what a turn you gave me! I could not imagine what was the matter."

"If I had stopped to explain I shouldn't have caught my uncle. There's a bench by that tree. Sit down and rest yourself if you're so awfully done up. Just wait for me there," returned Rosamond, unceremoniously motioning Moore to a seat. Then she drew her uncle's arm within her own, and moved away with him, saying, "Oh, you dear old Uncle Pep, what a delicious bit of good luck to come upon you just now! I had begun to think I should never have any good luck any more!"

Maude offered to walk on and leave the uncle and niece together, but Peppiat detained him. "No, no, Maude," said he. "Just stay with us. We're not going to talk secrets, are we, Rosy?"

"No; I've got something to tell you, but it's no secret. What do you think, Uncle Pep? We are all going down to Elcaster early next week!"

"To Elcaster!" repeated the two men together.

"To stay with your Aunt Mary?" said Peppiat.

"No—at least Lady Lowry says not at present. I don't understand it at all. I'm afraid they are worrying Aunt Mary amongst them."

"What does she say? Have you heard from her? Is she well?" asked Maude, anxiously.

"She only writes me little letters now and then; and she never complains to me, of course. But I fancy—I have a feeling that she is unhappy, and worried. I'm sorry if you are a special friend of Lady Lowry's, Major Maude, but I cannot help saying to Uncle Pep that I think Lady Lowry behaves like a *pig* to Aunt Mary!"

"Rosy!" cried her uncle, with affected solemnity.

"Well, I'm very sorry, Uncle Pep, but I do think so, and I can't help it."

"Let us understand each other, Rosy. Whilst protesting against the very forcible—nay, violent nature of your expressions as applied to a lady—to say nothing of their being calumnious towards a harmless and useful creature friendly to man, for whom as an Irishman I have always entertained affectionate sentiments!—I beg leave to assure you that I fully sympathize with your

feeling on behalf of your Aunt Mary ; and to say that—that you're my own warm-hearted little Rosy," added Pep, bringing his speech to a sudden climax.

"And I should like to say, Miss Rosamond," said Maude, looking at her with an expression of more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand, "that I cannot lay claim to the honour of being 'a special friend of Lady Lowry.'"

"Are you not? Well, I am glad to hear it. She says you are. But then, to be sure, she says—all sorts of things! But I shouldn't care for anything if she didn't attack Aunt Mary, and try to set papa against her, and—oh, I wish I was a man, to take her part!" And Rosamond clenched her hands and looked as fierce as she could.

"But what is it all about, Rosy?" asked Peppiat.

Rosamond was unable to give a very clear account of what it was all about. But she knew that there was some dispute and trouble about her grandfather's will ; that Dr. Flagge and the spirits were mixed up with it in some way ; and that Lady Lowry dared to accuse Mary of unfair conduct in the matter. "She only said a word of the kind once before me,"



said Rosamond. "And I don't think she'll do so again. I told her I would not remain in the house to hear such things said. I told her I would complain to papa, and if papa did not check it I would run away!"

"Rosy, you are a terrific young woman! Upon my word, I'm quite afraid of such an Amazon."

"Oh, it's all very well to laugh, Uncle Pep, but how would you feel if you heard such things? So she has said no more before me. But I cannot help being conscious of some disagreeable underhand work going on. It seems to be in the air. And now we are to make this sudden journey to Elceaster, and not to stay in grandpapa's house! It is all so queer and uncomfortable. However, I shall see my own darling Aunt Mary. That's one blessing! And now I've had a glimpse of you before going. That's another blessing. And now I shall have to say 'Good-bye,' for it's getting late;—and that's not a blessing at all!"

The girl clung to her uncle's arm and looked up in his face smiling, but there was some moisture in her bright young eyes as she smiled.

"Good-bye, my pet," said her uncle. "I'll

escort you back to the custody of that very superfine young lady yonder. Mind you behave yourself, and don't shock her susceptibilities too much. I can see you're a trial to her, Rosy."

"Oh, she is so stupid! She talks such nonsense sometimes, you wouldn't believe!"

"H'm! I don't think I can accuse myself of incredulity in that direction," returned Peppiat, glancing across at Miss Moore's simpering countenance, now arranged into an expression of elaborate unconsciousness that she was being looked at.

"No, but if you heard her talk about Papa Czernovic——! You know he came to our house and took away Nona, and——"

"Oh, Rosy, Rosy, to think of my having forgotten to tell you the great piece of news! But talking of Mary Lowry put it all out of my head. Nona's papa has come back ever so rich, with diamond rings on all his fingers—and toes, too, I dare say—and Nona will be the grandest young lady that ever was known. Hasn't she written to you? Well, I've no doubt she will. She spoke of you with great affection the last time I saw her. Good-bye, my darling. Yes, yes, I'll give all your messages to Aunt Nora. Try and get leave

to come and see her before you go. I'll write and ask Cosmo myself. I don't believe he'll refuse me. Good-bye! God bless you!"

When Peppiat rejoined Major Maude, the latter burst out, "Is it not monstrous—incredible—that that woman should behave as she does to Miss Lowry?" And then the two men talked of nothing else all the way across the Park. Maude had heard the case discussed by all sorts of people, by strangers who were not personally acquainted with one member of the Lowry family, as well as the Percy Wigmores and one or two others who had known my lady and Sir Cosmo. But he had never heard a word uttered against Mary Lowry; indeed, the chief interest of the affair to the gossips whom Maude had heard on the subject seemed to be centred in Dr. Flagge and the spirits. Nevertheless, it was true that ugly rumours imputing the disappearance of Sir Rupert's will to dishonest action were flying about. They were vague, truly, and took the form of questions, as "Wasn't there something said about undue influence?" or, "I'm told the old fellow was entirely under his daughter's thumb at the last. Did you hear anything about a lawyer down at what-d'ye-call-it? Some one declared that between

the lawyer and the daughter old Sir Rupert dared not call his soul his own. But the rumours were not the less mischievous for their vagueness. Only Maude had not happened to hear them, probably for much the same reason as had warned every one present at the memorable first *séance* in Green Street, that it would be well to speak respectfully of Miss Lowry in the presence of Vincent Maude. In the inscrutable fashion in which such matters do become known, it had come to be understood that Major Maude was in love with Miss Lowry of Lowry, and had been in love with her for years. Some said she had refused him. Others declared that her brother opposed the match. Others, again, said that Sir Rupert had left a codicil disinheriting his daughter absolutely if she should marry Major Vincent Maude. But there was a unanimous reticence in talking about Miss Lowry before the big, soft-spoken Major, which testified to the penetration and prudence of his acquaintances.

“Lady Lowry more than insinuated to me that Cœnone Balasso was responsible for her suspicions of Miss Lowry,” said Maude to Captain Pep, as they marched along side by side, talking eagerly. “But I went and spoke

to Nona myself. The child is the soul of truth, and I am sure she was never guilty of such black ingratitude."

"Oh, the poor little *leprechann* of a creature was regularly in the hands of my lady and that man Flagge."

"*He's* a scoundrel, if ever there was one," exclaimed Maude, stopping and facing full round, to give emphasis to his words.

"H'm! D'ye think so? I'm not so sure of it. Oh, he's not a man of honour, if you mean that——"

"Honour? No! Nor common honesty!"

"Ah, well, perhaps so. As to 'common honesty,' I've always considered it a beautiful testimony to the innate optimism of human nature, that the two things in this world which in my unfortunate experience have proved to be extremely rare, should be universally expected, taken for granted, and called 'common' sense, and 'common' honesty. However, I'll grant ye that Flagge wouldn't stick at a lie,—nor, perhaps, at any number of lies. And yet I've a sort of impression that there's some good in the fellow."

"That's a testimony to your optimism, Pep, at any rate! I wonder what they are rushing down to Elcaster for now."

“ ‘Sorra one of me knows,’ as they say where I came from. But you may safely bet it’s to do something disagreeable, if my lady has a finger in the pie.”

“Rosamond said that they were worrying her aunt.”

“Ah, divil doubt them !”

“She said she seemed unhappy, didn’t she ? Didn’t she, Pep ?” in an impatient tone ; for Pep’s attention was wandering.

“Oh, unhappy ? Yes ; oh yes, she did. Miss Lowry is a peerless lady, and I wish for her sake, and the least taste in life for my own—that I was a young paladin, handsome and bold, and well-mounted ; with Durindana in one hand and a bundle of ten thousand pound Bank of England notes in the other, and I’d go and carry her off from all the botherations in a ‘blaze of splendour.’ But I’m only poor Jack Peppiat, with a lieutenant’s half-pay. And then there’s Nora, God bless her. No ; I can’t do anything. It would be of small use even to smother Lady Lowry, or kick Cosmo. By the Lord Harry, I’d like to do that, though,” added Pep, rambling on after his happy-go-lucky fashion.

When they had gone some time along Piccadilly the two men parted. “Good-bye,

Peppiat," said Maude. "Give my best regards to your wife."

"The missis complains that we don't see much of you now. Look us up some of these evenings, old fellow."

"I will, I will."

"There's generally the old set—Lewis Griffiths, and Bob, and Demayne. Only Demayne has come to be such a swell lately there's no knowing whether he'll be able to spare us an hour or not. Do come; the missis would be so pleased to see you."

"She's as good as gold; and I'm not ungrateful to her."

"Look in to-night then, eh?"

"Not to-night, Pep; I can't manage it."

"Are you getting to be a swell, too?"

"Not that I know of. I don't think I shall ever rival Demayne in that line."

"Perhaps you might go in for the back slums of Europe now he's giving them up. If so, try Bloomsbury. If we are not the rose—and so forth—we are near the back slums anyway! So you won't come to-night?"

"I can't, Pep. I—I'm not up to it. Give my love to the missis, and tell her that I shall come some afternoon next week, and ask her for a cup of tea and a quiet talk with her."

There's nothing like a dear, kind, motherly woman such as your wife for doing a fellow good when he's down in the mouth. Good-bye."

"Of course," said Mrs. Peppiat, when her husband reported what Maude had said, and how Maude had looked, and what a dull, pre-occupied mood Maude had seemed to be in, "of course he doesn't feel inclined for all those men and your whisky punch, Northam. He wants to come and be listened to whilst he talks about Mary Lowry. I know that well enough."

"Do you think he is so very hard hit?"

"No one harder."

"I wonder if Mary would have him!"

"H'm!"

"He's a first-rate fellow, is Vincent Maude."

"Indeed he is! He couldn't think a mean thought to save his life."

"I wonder whether he ever asked Mary to have him!"

"H'm!"

"Nora, you're coming out in the part of the Sphinx; positively your first appearance in that arduous character!"

"Why?"

"You say nothing but 'h'm!'"

"I'll tell you what, Northam; it's my belief



that if Miss Lowry was turned out of house and home to-morrow without a shilling in the world, Maude would make up to her with all the energy imaginable. But there's been so much talk about her being an heiress, and that old woman from Elcaster—the lawyer's wife—set it about that she was going to make a grand match—Cassius Demayne heard it from Mrs. Hautecombe—and Cosmo Lowry gave Maude the cold shoulder so completely, and—and—altogether I think he's been holding off and creeping into his shell—waiting for some encouragement. And how is a woman like Mary to give him any encouragement? Men are such fools!”

“Very true, my dear.”

“But there's a sort of foolishness that one loves a man all the better for.”

“Well, I hope my foolishness is of that sort; 'twould be some consolation,” said Pep, very meekly.

Meanwhile Maude had gone home to his own rooms, and had packed a few clothes in a small valise. That having been accomplished in a violent hurry, he suddenly seemed to have an unlimited amount of time on his hands, and dawdled about the sitting-room in a purposeless way very unusual with him.

Then all at once he picked up his hat and went out, and walked about the streets in a brown study, looking neither to the right nor the left. Then, after half an hour or so, he pulled out his watch, looked at it, and began to hurry back to his rooms as if his life had depended on his haste. Then he despatched his servant for a hansom cab, and got himself and his valise driven to the Great Northern Railway Station. Arrived there, he took his ticket, and at once ensconced himself in a corner of a smoking carriage, muffled himself in his great coat, lit a cigar, and was soon gliding away from under the huge glass roof, away from the houses and the lights of London blinking through the wintry dusk, towards Elcaster.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE avenue at Lowry Place was white and smooth, and the trees in Clevenal Woods were muffled, bough and branch, in a soft, fleecy mantle pure as swansdown. The house, the gardens, the offices, with the outlines of snow-laden eaves, and roofs, and shrubs, relieved against an ash-coloured sky, looked like pictures drawn on a slate. It was not piercingly cold, and the air had that peculiar sweetness which comes with snow. All was so still that the slightest sound—even the cracking of a twig beneath its weight of snow—acquired an unusual importance. The clang of the lodge bell came through the quiet air across the gardens to the house, and set old Connaught barking. His deep note, just uttered once or twice with a certain dignity and deliberation, incited the stable dogs to join, and there was heard a sharp yapping of

terriers as a footstep crushed the crisp snow in front of the hall door.

Mary Lowry was sitting in the library where we first saw her. The old-fashioned lattice windows were fast shut now, and a log fire blazed upon the hearth. In other respects the room was little changed. Its main features, the heavy dark book-cases, the worn Turkey rug in the centre of the polished oak floor, the tall carved mantelpiece above the wide, open hearth, and the hearth itself, with its great "dogs" or andirons, had an air of antique comfort which was better than anything promised by the exterior of the house. Lowry Place was not above a hundred and fifty years old (it was built not upon, but close by, the site of the more ancient home of the family), and was neither splendid nor picturesque. But the library was an interesting room, with a physiognomy of its own, and there was a good deal of the Lowry family history to be read in it by a seeing eye. Some new hieroglyphs had been recently added. Great bunches of laurel and holly full of red berries had been stuck about the walls here and there, not very tastefully. It was an old Christmas custom at Lowry Place, which Sir Rupert had never discouraged, albeit in

his latter years he had looked with a very unfavourable eye on anything that savoured of festivity. But the evergreens cost him nothing, and bound him to the distribution of no largesse; so old James and the gardener continued to put them up Christmas after Christmas, and they had done so this year as soon as it was known that Miss Lowry was to return home so soon. But besides the wonted bunches of greenery, there was a delicate and tasteful framework of ivy leaves arranged round two portraits which hung on either side of the mantelpiece—the portraits of Mary Lowry's father and mother, painted about the period of their marriage. There was Sir Rupert, a handsome, stern man, half-way between forty and fifty, looking masterfully out from under the traditional black brows of his race; and Mary Hovenden, his gentle young wife, with a sensitive mouth, and broad, clear forehead. These two Mary had decorated with her own hands, but she had left the clumsy holly bushes undisturbed, although they certainly did not gratify her taste, in the ordinary sense of the word. But there is a higher "taste" which they did gratify. Mary loved the beauty which the eye can report to us; but she loved better

that higher beauty which can transfigure things ugly to the eye, and make them lovely. The fond fidelity of the old servants, and her own tenderness for the dead, made those inartistically placed evergreens too sacred to be changed. The new decoration of the portraits she did herself, and did daintily. And all this was written up on the walls of the library for the instruction of those who had eyes to see it.

And the mistress of Lowry Place; is she changed since we first saw her? Changed only in being more herself, if the phrase may pass,—the traits, that is to say, which were latent in her countenance, have become more marked. The tendency to melancholy has developed into a look of settled sadness, and the resolute lines of the mouth and chin seem firmer and more resolute. The upper part of the face is still softer, and the lower part still stronger, than of yore; as if courage had increased with sorrows, and gentleness with courage. There was just now, too, a little anxious puckering of the brows as she turned over and sorted a mass of papers on the table before her. But this was evidently transient. The finely-shaped hands which were busied with unfolding, and selecting, and setting

aside paper after paper were a great deal thinner than they had been in the summer, and her plain black dress hung somewhat loosely about her bust and shoulders.

Connaught's deep sudden bark startled her, and she first looked up from her occupation, and then down at the old setter who lay by her feet—his constant post, from whence nothing short of main force or his mistress's peremptory command could dislodge him.

"Why, Con," she said, "what's the matter?"

Con barked once again, in a deliberate, though more muffled tone, as who should say, "I am sorry to have startled you, and apologize if I have been too loud, but nevertheless I meant what I said, and feel bound to repeat it."

"Is there," said Mary, gently touching the dog's handsome head with her finger tips, "some one coming? Well, he won't hurt us, I dare say, Con, whoever it may be."

Con thumped his tail on the floor in acknowledgment of his mistress's caress, and sat up on his haunches with his head eagerly addressed to the door.

"A friend, eh, Con? Is that what you mean? Well, then, it must be Mr. Flint; for" (with the faintest little fleeting sigh, and

the faintest little fleeting smile) "I don't think there is any one else outside the household whom you acknowledge in that character. You're a difficult dog, sir, and don't love easily—nor unlove easily, poor faithful old boy! I suppose some of the Lowry qualities, good and bad, have gone into you in all these years."

"Would you see a gentleman, ma'am?" asked a servant, entering. It was not James, but a young man recently engaged to act as his subaltern, and a stranger to the place.

"Who is the gentleman? Did he not give his name?"

"No, ma'am. He said he should like to speak to you for a moment."

"It is not Lord Elcaster, is it?"

"N—no, ma'am. I think it can't be Lord Elcaster, because the gentleman said he'd only just come down from London, and was going back to-night by the mail, if you'd see him."

Mary instantly thought that some news had been brought about her father's will. Possibly the stranger might be Cosmo himself! With a quick impulse, and without taking any time to reflect, she gave orders that the gentleman should be admitted. The door closed behind the servant. Con sat up, eagerly



watching the door, and wagging his tail with an emphatic thump, thump, thump on the floor. In a minute he gave a low bark—not an angry, but an excited bark. The door opened again, and a tall figure strode quickly into the room. Connaught stood up on his feet, sniffed at the new comer, walked slowly round him, sniffed again, and then, after leaning his fine head against his mistress's knee, and turning his intelligent eyes up to hers, he quietly lay down again at her feet with his nose between his paws, and observed the interview tranquilly.

Meanwhile Miss Lowry was sitting speechless in her chair, looking up at the man who had entered with a white, startled face, and one hand pressed against her heart. "Is anything the matter in London? Do you bring bad news?" she added at length, very quietly.

"No; no bad news. I fear I have alarmed you?"

"Only an instant's shock. We are so quiet and remote here that the apparition of a stranger seems as wonderful and portentous as that of a comet. Doesn't it, Con?"

There was a pause.

Miss Lowry looked up in surprise. "Will

you not sit down, Major Maude?" she said, recovering the gracious dignity of her wonted manner, although the colour was fluttering on her cheek like the fine flickering of light through foliage moved by a breeze. Still no answer. Maude was standing opposite to her near the centre table at which she was seated with the heap of papers before her. He was resting his hand on the table and looking down in a strange dreamy way, as if he neither heard nor saw what was before him. Miss Lowry spoke again: "I understood from the servant that you had just arrived from London and wished to speak with me at once, because you purposed returning to town to-night. Is that the case?"

At this appeal he lifted his eyes, and they met hers. In an instant his face changed from the dreamy, far-away look it had worn: it was the difference between sleep and waking—between a landscape glimmering in the twilight of dawn, and the same scene when the sun has flamed up from behind a hill and all at once it is full day. He grew bright with a clear and rapid resolve. "Mary," he said, "on the way down here I was in a cloud. I was deceiving myself;—even up to the last moment—to *this* moment, I did

not know positively, I was not sure—that is to say, I had not honestly answered to my conscience why I was coming here. I thought that there were various motives pulling at me, or at least I told myself so. Now I know that there was but one motive; and that is strong enough to have taken me across the Atlantic or the Himalayas, just as easily as to Elcaster. I came here because I love you, Mary, with all the strength of my heart.”

Such a flood of emotion rushed over her, as she could scarcely bear. There was a sweetness in it so intense as to be almost painful, like the sting that lurks in the taste of purest honey. And then the sudden reaction from the braced-up, rigid renunciation of love—a renunciation which seemed to turn life’s music into a thin, hard monotone—to the full richness of a deep content, made every nerve vibrate. Mary Lowry had not squandered away her heart in frivolous flirtations. She had been as far aloof from those paltry pretences of passion, which are only vanity in masquerade, as the topmost snows of the Silverhorn from the beaten mud of the highways. Her soul was as pure as her lips, and wore equally the freshness of unsullied maidenhood. To such a woman, with

a heart full of the rose-fragrance of innocence, and a mind ripened by maturity, love came with all the charm that poets sing, and a pathetic intensity which perhaps no poet can express.

She did not answer her lover in words; but her face was eloquent, and so was her outstretched hand, offered to him with a gesture of adorable simplicity.

Maude took her hand reverently, and stood for a moment looking down upon her upturned face.

"It seems like a dream," murmured Mary.

"To me it seems as if everything else—all the rest of my life during these years of separation—had been a dream, and that this is the only reality," he answered. "All the rest might pass away, but my love for you—Oh, Mary, you are my first and only true love! The one woman in the world for me! And can you really care for me?"

"Do you think you would be holding my hand now if I did not love you dearly?"

"My own treasure!"

He stooped and pressed her to his heart in a long embrace, and when he released her, her face shone with a happiness too deep for smiles. There is more solemnity in intense

light than in the blackest midnight ; and there are rare moments in life when the soul rises to regions of pure sunshine, whose awful serenity quenches the gay glitter of festive lamps.

“ See, Vincent,” said Mary after a while, “ you have gained Con’s good opinion already. He is usually so jealous of any one approaching me ; but look how quietly he lets you sit here ! ”

Con had indeed endured this unprecedented phenomenon with calmness. But when Maude put down his hand to pat him, saying, “ Let us be friends, old fellow ! ” the dog merely tolerated the caress without any answering demonstration of kindness.

“ He knew you were a friend. He told me so as soon as he heard your footstep, and long before I heard it ; didn’t you, Con ? ”

Con responded now, effusively enough ; he licked his mistress’s hand, and waved his brown feather of a tail, and looked up at her with fond, watery eyes.

“ He is not used to make new friends, and he really cares for no one but me since my father died,” said Mary, half apologetically. “ But you will love Vincent for my sake, won’t you, Con ? ”

"No, he won't;—at least not all at once. And I respect him for it. If you were to tell me that you loved some one else better than me, I might consent not to murder him—as Con refrains from biting me—but I don't fancy I should be very fond of him!"

"Is it real—can it be real, that you and I are here together in the old library where we parted so long ago? and that——"

"And that we are to be together till death us do part? Yes; thank God, Mary dearest! And, as I say, it seems to me the only thing that *is* real!"

"But, Vincent—after all these years, and all these changes—is it not strange?"

"What is more strange is that I should have been such a dull fool as not to say to you the very instant I saw you, 'Mary Lowry, I did love, do love, and shall love you as long as I live. Can you take pity on me?'"

"Perhaps you were not sure that you meant it then. I must be changed."

"Not sure that I meant it! Good heavens, why, if I had never seen or heard of you before, I should have fallen in love with you the moment I set eyes on you in that house in London!"

"In that case,—and I am bound to believe

so probable a statement,—it *is* a little strange that you did not say a word to that effect,” returned Mary. And she laughed a little silvery laugh that had all the freshness, and more than all the tenderness, of sixteen.

“I seemed to be under a spell of dumbness and diffidence. Things look so different from different points of view. Yesterday seems clear and simple enough; but to-morrow is perplexing and vague to the wisest of us. I see now that I ought not to have been dumb. But as to my diffidence,—I had good reason for that, you’ll admit.”

“I shall admit nothing of the kind, sir!”

“Ah, yes, Mary! Think! I was a weather-beaten soldier, without high birth, or much money, and not even young. You were—you!”

“I never knew that I liked flattery before! But your flattery is sweet. Perhaps it is wrong to say so. Is it?”

“Whatever you say is right and good and dear, and that is no flattery, Mary. Every one knows it but yourself.”

“Ah, Vincent, I shall convict you now! If you thought so well of me, why did you doubt that I had been as true as you had been? I told you when you asked me years ago that

I had given you my heart. That was once for all, you know ! But still—you doubted.”

“ Mary,—in the first place, when you said that——”

“ You remember where it was ? ”

“ Remember ! Ah, if you know how often it all came back to me in the night-watches,—how I treasured up every look, every tone, every curl of your hair in my memory ! ”

“ It was not a very poetical spot where you first spoke to me of love, though ! It was on the gravel drive outside the stables. You had been looking at papa’s hunters, and we were walking back to the house in the summer twilight, and you told me you must go away next day, and then—— ”

“ It has been a poetical spot to me ever since, Mary ! But when that all happened you were little more than a child. I was a grown man. I knew what I was doing. But you were very young, and singularly inexperienced even for your years. That was an excuse, in itself, for fearing that you might have changed by the time I returned. And then—— I have never been able to understand it, though I have tried often, painfully, God knows ! How could you send my poor letter back without one word of pity or kindness, and with those



cruel lines from Sir Rupert, 'Miss Lowry returns Mr. Vincent Maude's unwarrantable letter, and begs him to understand that the direction on this packet is the last writing she can ever address to him.' I know the words by heart. I would not believe at first that the cover was directed in your handwriting, but I took it to your brother, I remember, and he said it was your hand."

"Vincent! And you never received my letter?"

"What letter? No; I received none!"

"I wrote to you! I showed my father the letter. I told him that I would obey him, but I stipulated for the right to say farewell to you in my own fashion. He put my letter into the cover with yours, and I directed it."

"The packet contained no such letter, Mary, when it reached me."

There was a silence. Mary covered her face with her hands. Bitter thoughts passed through her mind. Her father had deceived her, had struck a cruel blow at the man she loved, and had ruthlessly risked making all her life sad and solitary, solely to gratify his overweening family pride! She had been dutiful,—she had consented to sacrifice her love,—but not to deny it. And yet her father

had cheated her, and misrepresented her, at the moment when she was obeying his commands at the cost of years of sorrow! The thoughts that passed through her mind as she sat there hiding her face in her hands were very bitter.

Presently the old dog, with an uneasy sense that his mistress was troubled, thrust his nose on to her lap. Mary dropped one hand on his head, keeping her eyes covered with the other. The touch of the poor faithful creature recalled the scene of her father's death, when Con had lain still and watchful for hours beside his master's bed, and then, when all was over, and he was driven from the room, had come and stretched himself at her feet, and whined piteously when they tried to remove him. It recalled, too, her own sensations when she saw that last look of recognition and piteous striving to express some thought with which his mind was labouring in her father's dying eyes; and when she stood later gazing on his dead face, like a marble mask, in the coffin. She raised her head, and her eyes were full of tears as she said softly, "Vincent, let us forgive him! He was very unhappy."

Maude took her hand and raised it to his

lips. "My dearest," he said, "I will remember nothing except that God has given me the great blessing of your love. How can there be room in my heart for anger at this moment?"

The afternoon waned. The early twilight began to make the white branches outside the window glimmer ghostly, and the wood fire cast red gleams on the dark wainscot. Major Maude and Mary Lowry knew nothing of how the hours were passing. Time and Death, that rule all other things, are subject to the great god of Love: he illuminates the darkness of the grave, and spurs or checks the course of time for the lover, as a rider his steed. The two so long parted by the fates, talked on in the delicious confidence of love; recalling past hours—words, looks—trifles to others; serious realities to them! And recalling, too, past grief, which served to enhance the deep sense of present happiness.

"Lady Elcaster desires her kind regards, ma'am, and has sent to know if you would take a cup of tea this afternoon."

Miss Lowry looked up at old James standing in the doorway, as if he were a strange phenomenon that she had never seen before. But in a moment she recovered herself, and

answered, "My compliments and thanks to Lady Elcaster, but I shall not be able to go to her to-day."

"Yes, ma'am. Do you choose to have the lamp?"

"The lamp! Why, what o'clock is it?"

"Nearly five, ma'am."

"Yes, James, bring the lamp. Here is an old friend come to see me, James. Do you remember Mr. Vincent Maude?"

"Laws, ma'am, to be sure I do! And is this Mr. Maude?"

"Major Maude now, James."

"I'm glad, sir, to have the honour of seeing you again in the old place. I remember you right well, sir."

"James is an old and faithful friend, you know, Major Maude. Lowry Place couldn't get on without him."

"'Tis your goodness to say so, ma'am. And as to being faithful—why, sir, how could any one help but be faithful to Miss Mary?"

With which speech James discreetly made his exit.

"The old dog and the old servant both like you, you see, Vincent!" said Miss Lowry when the door was closed.

"They both have the instinct to know what *you* like, at all events!" laughed Maude.

"And now you must go!" said Mary, rising from her chair.

"Must I? Well—if I *must*!"

"And must you return to London to-night?"

"To London? No!"

"Did you not mean to do so?"

"Oh—but that was before——! That was several centuries ago, Mary mine!"

"And I have never learned why you came down so suddenly, nor what it all meant! I seem to have had no time to ask you anything. When James spoke of bringing the lamp I could not believe my ears. I had not even noticed that it had grown dusk!"

"It hasn't grown dusk!"

"Oh yes! And you must go."

"And to-morrow when may I come? Think of going to sleep with the certainty that I shall see you to-morrow! It is so exquisite, so wonderful that it would almost seem less of a wonder if Lowry Place had vanished into the air before to-morrow morning!"

"I think I can undertake that it will not vanish. And you must not come too soon."

"There can be no such time as 'too soon' to see you again, Mary."

"You know I am alone here, surrounded by chattering people who make it their business to gossip about all that happens in Lowry Place. You must let me have my way this once."

"Yes, I know I must! And at all other times too."

"I shall send and ask Mrs. Flint to spend the day with me, and——"

"Mrs. Flint!"

"Yes; there's no need for that tone of horror! Mrs. Flint is a very dear friend of mine."

"But I thought I was a dear friend of yours! I don't want to spend the day with Mrs. Flint, Mary."

"No Mrs. Flint, no Mary Lowry!"

"But I have a thousand things to say to you!"

"You shall say them, never fear. If you would but condescend to listen to me instead of wildly rushing at conclusions! Mrs. Flint will come to lunch here, and so will you. But—you may come here an hour earlier,—at one o'clock, and then we can talk. Will that please you?"

"I must do as you say."

"But not grudgingly! Indeed, Vincent, I am trying to do for the best."

“I know you are, my best darling, and you are right and wise as always, and I will greet Mrs. Flint as effusively as she will permit. She has never shown me any signal favour hitherto.”

“Oh, she is sure to like you now.”

“As Con and James like me,—and for the same reason!”

Then James appeared with the lamp, and Maude went away, and the world was all changed to him as he retraced his footsteps along the snow-carpeted avenue.

## CHAPTER IX.

THAT same evening, after Major Maude had set out to walk back to Elcaster, Miss Lowry despatched a note to Mrs. Flint, which mightily excited and interested that lady. The messenger from Lowry Place arrived at Mr. Flint's house about half-past six o'clock, and found the lawyer and his wife seated over their dessert, as we saw them when we first made their acquaintance; only that now blinds and shutters were closed, and the master and mistress of the house were seated on each side of a cheerful fire, whose glow brought out the ruby tints of the old port wine very pleasantly.

"What can it mean, Samuel?" asked Mrs. Flint, after she had sent back her answer. "She asks me to go to lunch, and spend the day with her to-morrow, and begs me particularly not to fail!"



"I should say it means pretty much what it says, my dear: luncheon, and perhaps dinner to follow, and possibly tea also."

"No, but, Samuel, this is something more than common. She asks if you will join us at dinner."

"That, I am happy to say, is not so very uncommon as to startle me, Bertha."

"No, of course not; but see here what she says: 'I have some news to give you, so pray do not disappoint me, dear friend.' What does that mean?"

Mr. Flint sipped his wine and shook his head, as much as to say that he did not know what it meant, and was not inclined to suppose there was any very important meaning to be discovered in the matter.

"Do you know what I think, Samuel?" resumed Mrs. Flint, after a pause of reflection; "I think she's going to marry Lord Elcaster."

"God forbid!"

"Now, Samuel! Why should you say that? If Lord Elcaster has not been all he should be hitherto, with such a wife as Miss Lowry he is sure to reform. And you had better accustom yourself to the idea of our sweet Mary Lowry being Countess of Elcaster,

for I feel a presentiment that the marriage will come off."

"Why should you fancy that the news she speaks of has anything to do with marrying at all?"

"There is a different style about her note, —something unusual. I can hardly explain it. It seems so much more vivacious and bright than she has been lately."

"She has been out of spirits ever since she came back from London," said Mr. Flint thoughtfully. "But that is easily accounted for."

"Of course! Out of spirits? I should think a rhinoceros would be out of spirits after passing three months with Lady Lowry! However, there's nothing low-spirited about this note. As I say, I can't describe it, but I feel it, just as one knows what people mean by the tone of their voice, no matter what they say."

Mr. Flint said no more; but he comforted himself with the reflection that it would be impossible for a woman like Mary Lowry to be cheerful and vivacious if she had bound herself to marry Lord Elcaster.

The good lady was very punctual in starting for Lowry Place the next day. The frost still

continued, and the leafless twigs of the avenue sparkled like crystal. The snow had been swept away from the centre of the drive, and the roadway sounded like metal under the hoofs of Mrs. Flint's sober gray horse, and the wheels of her sober green brougham. She was well wrapped up, for she did not love the cold, and she declined to divest herself of her fur-lined cloak until she arrived in the warm climate of the library. Miss Lowry was not there to receive her: which circumstance Mrs. Flint noted as being unusual. "I'm sure there's something going on," said the sagacious matron to herself. "Things are not just in their everyday groove here."

She had not waited above five or six minutes in the comfortable easy chair beside the hearth, when the door was opened quickly, and Mary Lowry entered the library, followed by a gentleman whose stature towered above hers, although she was of no mean height for a woman, and whom Mrs. Flint recognized with a start.

"They have only this instant let me know you had come. The man had to look for me. We were in the stables!" said Mary.

"We were in the stables." Mrs. Flint saw it all in a moment. There was something in

the sound of that "we," as Mary Lowry uttered it, which was a full and complete revelation. As Mrs. Flint had remarked to her husband, "one knows what people mean by the tone of their voice, no matter what they say." There needed not the bright sparkle of Mary's eyes, nor the exquisite flush on her cheeks, nor the sunny sweetness of her smile, to tell the story. Never had Mrs. Flint seen her favourite look so beautiful. She was, in the full sense of that hackneyed phrase, radiant with happiness. The contrast between the pallor, sadness, and languor of last week, and the roses of smiles of to-day, touched her old friend's heart, for it gave her, as it were, the measure of Mary's silent sorrow. The grief must have been heavy which could have bowed down so serene and sunny a spirit as shone out of those soft brown eyes. To the true instincts of Mrs. Flint's womanly heart, Mary's happy face appealed so irresistibly that she entirely forgot for the moment the very existence of that wealthy nobleman, my Lord Elcaster, and holding out her arms impulsively, she exclaimed, "Oh, my dear, is this your news? I am so glad," and hugged Mary, and cried over her with the most genuine sympathy and affection.

"Dear kind friend! I hoped you would be pleased. But how could you guess? Vincent and I meant to tell you, of course, but we had been planning all sorts of cunning approaches before we astonished you with our great news. We little thought you would pounce upon it so wonderfully."

"My dear," said Mrs. Flint, wiping her eyes, and indulging in a poetical figure of speech for the first time on record, "when the sun is shining in the heavens, it isn't necessary to send round a messenger to inform the little birds that it's day! Directly I saw you I knew all about it."

"Oh, I hope everybody will not be so keen," cried Mary, laughing a little, and blushing. "For we wish to keep it secret for the present."

"Then I should advise you not to let people see you together—that's all!"

Then Major Maude advanced to claim Mrs. Flint's acquaintance, and she greeted him very graciously. Her feelings were still too deeply stirred for her to be able to remember what a "poor match" was Major Maude for Miss Lowry of Lowry; or even to recall the singular conversation which she had chanced to overhear a part of between this very Major

Maude and "the queer little foreign girl." She was profoundly gratified, too, by being admitted to the knowledge of a secret so nearly concerning Mary Lowry before it was revealed to the rest of the world. And Major Maude so won upon her good opinion by his devotion to Mary, that before an hour had passed she had given up Lord Elcaster to his fate—consigned him, indeed, to the waters of oblivion, so far as she was concerned, and gone over utterly to the enemy.

When Mr. Flint arrived, which he did some few minutes before dinner time, he was shown at once to Miss Lowry's boudoir, where she was awaiting him alone, and where in a few words she told him that she had engaged herself to marry Major Vincent Maude.

"There is only one drawback, Mr. Flint," said Mary. "Vincent is terribly disappointed that I have more money than he thought I ever should have when he first knew me."

"These are troubles which people learn to endure with fortitude, my dear Miss Lowry."

"I believe he prays in his heart that a new will may be found which shall leave me homeless and penniless."

"Ah! Then I venture to predict that he will be disappointed. But if I may have the

making of your marriage settlements I will ease Major Maude's mind by tying your money up tight enough, never fear."

"He brings me unexpected news from London."

"Indeed?"

"Yes! it seems that my brother and his wife propose coming to Elcaster almost immediately."

"Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry! That is unexpected! And you had no idea—they had not mentioned their intention to you at all?"

"Not at all. Perhaps they may purpose doing so still."

"There must be some new discovery, or fancied discovery—some mare's-nest—or other that they've found amongst them, if you will excuse me for saying so. Has not Major Maude any particulars to give us?"

"I don't know. He has only just told me—not ten minutes before you arrived—that my brother means to come to Elcaster. We have been occupied with other things," said Mary, with a bright soft blush and a tender smile.

"All the better! You know I have been preaching to you not to allow yourself to be

tormented by that accurs—ahem! absurd, business.”

“I could not help being tormented. The thing weighed on me like a nightmare. Not that the idea of losing my property was terrible to me, as I think you know; but——”

“I know!”

“I could not divest myself of a hideous idea that I was—was suspected in some way. I scarcely know of what. But I could not but feel that Cosmo did not trust me. That was hard, you must own!”

Mr. Flint blew his nose violently and fidgeted on his seat, and muttered some indistinct words on the subject of Sir Cosmo’s conduct, which, perhaps, it was well were inaudible.

“Well, you need not scold me now, Mr. Flint, for, to own the truth, since yesterday I have not once thought about the will until now!” said Miss Lowry, smiling at the old lawyer, with an exquisite candour and sweetness.

“That’s the very best news I have heard for many and many a day, my dearest Miss Lowry.”

“And now will you take me to dinner? I must beg Mrs. Flint’s pardon, for I fear I have kept her waiting.”



Mr. Flint was highly satisfied with the news of Mary's engagement. He had so exalted, some persons might have called it so romantic, an admiration for Miss Lowry, that it would have pained him had she made a mere commonplace worldly match. If Miss Lowry had married a king on any other grounds than being heartily in love with him, she would have stepped down from her high place in Mr. Flint's imagination. But now she was surrounded with an extra halo. She had been true to the love of her youth. There was nothing sordid, or fashionable, or of the earth earthy, in the whole affair, and Mr. Flint was in a full glow of content. Not one of Mr. Flint's numerous and respectable clients—perhaps not even the wife of Mr. Flint's bosom—would have suspected him of being contented with any marriage on grounds so unsubstantial, and so entirely unconnected with landed property.

But great as was Mr. Flint's content it was—not chilled, perhaps, but—just touched by a certain apprehension he had that Bertha would be disappointed and mortified. Nay, he was not without some misgiving lest Bertha might imprudently reveal her disappointment, or make an unlucky allusion to

Lord Elcaster, who had been her favourite candidate all along. Although his satisfaction outweighed his misgivings, Mr. Flint was not altogether at his ease when he led Miss Lowry into the library, where they were all assembled to await the summons to dinner. There was Major Maude, tall and stalwart and bearded, standing on the hearth, which sent up a warm glow on to his bronzed forehead, and kind, honest, hazel eyes. There was Miss Lowry, graceful, beautiful, in her black dress, which served to make her golden-tinted curls, and her fair, serene face seem still more golden and more fair. She was so radiant, so exquisite, so entirely lovable in her simple, noble goodness, that Mr. Flint almost wondered to see Major Maude composed and quiet, and behaving as he might have behaved if the world had not been all turned into fairyland for him since yesterday. Mr. Flint forgot that deep happiness is a sedative; and that even he himself, though merely an affectionate old friend, and not an accepted lover, was less brusque, talkative, and demonstrative than on ordinary occasions. He had taken all the above particulars into his mind, and had come to the conclusion that Mary Lowry and her affianced husband would be the handsomest

couple in the county, whilst he was shaking hands with Major Maude, and congratulating him with a mixture of old-fashioned courtesy, and that little tremor of kindly emotion which is of an older fashion still. With the corner of his eye he had glanced at his wife sitting majestic in her black satin gown by the fire-side. He now turned to her a little nervously, and had said, "Well, my dear!" as being a safe phrase to begin with, when she interrupted him in a most unexpected manner.

"Well, Samuel!" she exclaimed, in a kind of arch triumph, and her voice was very deep, and her chin very double. "Well, who was right, eh?"

For one moment he absolutely thought that she had not understood the situation, and hurried across the room to bend down over her chair, and prevent her from committing herself by an unguarded mention of Lord Elcaster. But she would have none of his private hints and whispers.

"Who was right, sir?" she repeated in her richest contralto. "What do you think, Miss Lowry!—now, I'm going to betray you, Samuel!—I actually prophesied that the news you had to give me was news about your engagement, and Mr. Flint pooh-poohed me!

It's a positive fact, I said, when I got your note, that I was certain we should hear you were engaged. Didn't I, Samuel? Confess!"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Flint, looking at his wife in a rather bewildered manner.

"Yes, I was convinced of it!"

Mr. Flint mentally observed with a sort of admiring astonishment that Bertha seemed to have wiped Lord Elcaster clean off the tablets of her memory.

"Do you know, Mrs. Flint," said Maude, "I begin to be afraid that you're 'no canny,' as the Scotch say! How did you come to have so much insight? What was there so particular in Mary's note? I wonder if I might see that note!"

"Oh, there was nothing particular in the note,—at least nothing that I can define. But I can assure you, Major Maude, that in some matters women have a kind of sixth sense. Haven't they, Samuel?"

"I should say, my dear, that they had a sixth, seventh, eighth,—in short, an indefinite number of senses, far outrunning all the conceptions of the duller male creature——"

"Of course they have!"

"And independent of even the trammels of fact," added Mr. Flint, drily. "They say that

Jove himself has not power over the past ; but the feminine intellect seems to acknowledge no such limitation."

Nevertheless on the present occasion this peculiarity of the feminine intellect was not without its advantages, as Mr. Flint acknowledged. "It's all the better that Bertha takes to this engagement so kindly," said he to himself as he led Miss Lowry to dinner.

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Major Maude and the lawyer remained alone over their wine, the latter spoke very openly of the tone of Sir Cosmo's conduct to his sister, and confessed that the whole affair of the missing will had puzzled and annoyed him (Mr. Flint) more than he had been willing to acknowledge to Miss Lowry.

"You see there can be no doubt that Sir Rupert did make a will up in London unknown to us all," said he.

"You think that's true?"

"I think there can be no reasonable doubt of it. I spoke to the witness Quickit, and I came away with the persuasion that he was honest in the matter, and that Sir Rupert did make a will. Of course, so long as that will is not forthcoming we are not legally bound to trouble ourselves about the matter. But, as a matter of feeling, and under all the circum-

stances, it is trying to Miss Lowry, naturally. I know it has been troubling her very deeply."

Major Maude remarked that, when he arrived on the previous evening, he had found Mary seated in the library with a heap of papers before her, and that she had acknowledged to him that she had been searching for some clue as to what her father had done with that mysterious London will.

"Oh yes," said Flint, shaking his head, "I was certain that she did that sort of thing. And it is all in vain. We have searched together minutely through all the papers and memoranda which Sir Rupert left; and he was a methodical, orderly man, not a man likely to shove important papers away into holes and corners. It's a strange business altogether. There was that letter which Sir Rupert wrote to me the night before he died. I almost wonder that it did not make much impression on me at the time; but now I must say that, in the light of recent discoveries, it acquires a certain importance."

"That letter is Lady Lowry's *cheval de bataille*. I have heard her mention it with mysterious nods and hints, over and over again."

"The mysterious nods and hints were in

deference to you, Major Maude, I suspect. In other people's presence I have good reason to know that her ladyship spoke more plainly."

"How 'in deference to me'?"

"Well, she probably had some suspicion of the state of your feelings towards Miss Lowry."

"Then do you mean to say that she spoke ill of Mary to others?"

"My dear Major Maude, I am an old and faithful friend of the Lowrys. I know them well, and I have their interest—especially Miss Mary's interest—at heart; as you are to be our dear friend's husband, I wish to speak to you quite confidentially, as to one of the family."

"I entreat that you will do so."

Major Maude's face had assumed a very stern look. He would have been pronounced "dangerous" in his present aspect by any judicious observer.

"Well, to begin with, Sir Cosmo Lowry's present wife is an ignorant, coarse-minded, unfeeling woman—I told you I should speak plainly! By such a person Miss Lowry can as little be appreciated as—In short, there is a proverb the Germans have, which expresses my meaning: 'If you give an ass even rosemary,



he takes it all for hay.' Lady Lowry takes it all for hay. She imputes herself, and the sort of people she is most familiar with, to superior natures."

"I entirely agree with you."

"Well, that being so, you will easily understand what jealousies and suspicions such a mind might harbour."

"Suspensions?"

"Consider how the case presents itself to Lady Lowry's coarse apprehension: Sir Rupert dies, and leaves a will very favourable in its provisions to his daughter;—I am not saying that *I* think those provisions in any degree too favourable, under all the circumstances, but I am putting myself into Lady Lowry's attitude. The day before his death he writes a letter to his lawyer, the purport of which is that he has some new arrangements to announce which the lawyer will not approve, but which it is too late to alter. He dies before the letter can reach its destination, thus more than justifying his own presentiment that there was no time to lose. No new testamentary dispositions have been made so far as is known. The will deposited in my office is duly proved and acted upon, and matters take their regular course. But within

a few months the discovery is made—how brought about, by what charlatanism and humbug, and with what unworthy motives, it is useless to inquire—that Sir Rupert Lowry actually did make, and cause to be witnessed, a will subsequent to the one proved, and that he kept that will secret. What has become of it? He probably destroyed it himself, as he had made it, in a fit of caprice :—or possibly in repentance for a fit of caprice. *Probably*, I say, he so destroyed it. But if he did not? If it still exists? Or—*suppose some one else destroyed it?* Whose interest was it that that latter will should disappear? Its contents are unknown; but I have not the least doubt that Lady Lowry has got the notion obstinately fixed in her mind that they were more favourable to Cosmo than the will which shuts him out of Lowry Place. Her greed and her ignorance, and the cunning of those who have played upon both, combine to confirm her in this idea. Well, then, what is manifestly the next step to such a mind as hers? Why, she would without scruple suspect Mary Lowry of——”

Maude rose up from his chair, and held out his hand to check the completion of the sentence. “Don’t utter the atrocity, for

God's sake!" he said. "I can't stand it." Then he walked once or twice up and down the room, and came back to where Flint was sitting, and gripped his hand. "I have not the least doubt you are accurately right, Mr. Flint," he said. "Lady Lowry is a detestable woman."

"For my part, Major Maude, I cannot help feeling more indignation against Sir Cosmo than against his wife. Ignorance is to some extent an excuse for her. But that Cosmo, who has known Mary all his life, who can recall her goodness to his first wife, the noble, constant way in which she has stood his friend, the generosity with which she received this present wife, the perfect honour and truthfulness of her character, that Cosmo should think an ill thought of his sister seems to me unspeakably base. It is a relief to me, I assure you, to express my feelings on the subject; for my wife rather sticks to him from old habit and associations, and to Miss Lowry herself I cannot, of course, say that I think her brother a heartless cur."

"You know that these people mean to come down to Elcaster?"

"Miss Lowry mentioned that you had said so. Do you suppose there is anything new

that has made them take this sudden resolution ? ”

“ I have no idea. My advice to Mary would be to decline to see Lady Lowry ; to break with her altogether.”

“ Oh ! Really ? Oh, I think not ! No, no ; I shall not advise that, Major Maude.”

“ How can she allow the woman to come into her house after uttering such vile slanders as you hinted at ? ”

“ You must remember that Miss Lowry is ignorant of those slanders. She has an uneasy conviction, indeed, that her brother and his wife mistrust her. But to what extent that mistrust has gone, she has really no idea. The attitude she has taken from the simple rectitude of her nature is, I think, the attitude which the most politic consideration would recommend. She has nothing to conceal, nothing to fear. No one is more anxious than she herself that the truth should come to light. She said to me only the other day that she wished her brother would come and search through his father’s papers himself, if that would satisfy his mind. You may depend, Major Maude, that thorough openness and simplicity are the weapons to fight this sort of thing with.”

"Perhaps you are right. And, after all, the main thing is not to distress Mary."

"Quite so!" assented Mr. Flint with a quaint little bow and smile.

"The main thing for me, of course I mean," said Maude, smiling in his turn; "but as to thorough openness and simplicity,—I assure you, Mr. Flint, that if I were to act as I feel, I should kick him out of Lowry Place the first time he ventured to put his foot into it."

"That would be a proceeding characterized by openness and simplicity, certainly! Ah, well, I can talk of all this business to-day with a much lighter heart and cooler head than I could yesterday. It won't embitter Miss Lowry's life now, come what may."

"It shall not, if I can help it."

"I think you will succeed in helping it. Already Miss Lowry has almost ceased to distress herself about it. As for me, it's a great comfort to have a man to talk to on the subject. I'm not afraid of over-burthening *your* shoulders with botherations, you see."

"Pray don't scruple to lay any botherations upon them which you think may lighten Miss Lowrys. My back is broad enough."

And indeed so it was, in the literal sense of the word. Nevertheless Major Maude, for all

his stalwart stature, was as sensitive as a woman in some respects. And he took the idea that Mary had been breathed on by the breath of calumny very painfully to heart.

Not that it stung him any more that evening as he sat beside her in the library, proud, and glad, and delightfully in love. If, as Dante says, there be no greater grief than to remember happy times in the midst of misery, it is certainly true, on the other hand, that rough weather past, is pleasant to look back on when we ride safe on smooth waters. To Mary Lowry it seemed as if every sad and solitary day she had spent served only to enhance the tranquil sweetness of the present hour. Instead of regrets, hope; instead of mistrust, confidence; instead of loneliness, sympathy! When Maude whispered to her some word of regret for the lost years during which they had been parted, she softly answered him, "Do you know, dear Vincent, if it were not for all that weary time I think I should scarcely understand how happy I am now."

But even being in love did not prevent Mary Lowry from attending to the duties of hospitality, and doing the honours of her house with all consideration and courtesy.

Mr. and Mrs. Flint would have been quite content to efface themselves on this occasion, and quietly enjoy the spectacle of the lovers' happiness. ("They will make a *grand* couple," said Mrs. Flint afterwards to her husband; adding naïvely, "Major Maude is a great deal better looking than I thought him when I saw him in town!") But Mary quietly drew them into the conversation, and Vincent seconded her with a very creditably good grace.

For various reasons none of them wished to speak of Sir Cosmo and my lady. The gossip of Clevelen and Elcaster would not have been very intelligible to Maude, nor very interesting to Mary. The future of the affianced pair—where they would live, and what plans of life they thought of—might under other circumstances have formed a natural topic for the talk of the four persons assembled in the library at Lowry Place; but too many considerations touching Sir Cosmo were connected with it to make it altogether safe ground. So Mrs. Flint fell to discussing the various places of amusement she had visited during her stay in London. "Of course it was out of the season," said Mrs. Flint deprecatingly, for those few syllables "in" or "out of the season" were words of power with the

good lady; and she felt it in a measure necessary to apologize for having been amused at a period unsanctioned by the priests and priestesses of that great goddess Mrs. Grundy. "But still I confess I enjoyed two or three evenings very much. I think there is almost always some good music to be heard in London. I don't set up for being a connoisseur——"

"Considering that you know nothing about music that is rather singular, Bertha, and does credit to your self-command," said Mr. Flint, whom Miss Lowry presently rebuked for his impertinence with a raised forefinger.

"Oh, it's only the usual arrogance of the domestic tyrant called a husband, my dear!" said Mrs. Flint good-humouredly. "And he's wrong too."

"Which is also usual, is it not, Mrs. Flint?" said Maude.

"Quite usual. The fact is, I used to play Hummel's and Clementi's sonatas with great success—never mind how long ago. But, to go back to what I was saying, I had two or three pleasant musical evenings in town. I went to hear some Wallachian or Moldavian singers. I don't really know where they come from, but that doesn't matter; they



sang delightfully. It was at St. Cecilia's Hall."

"Oh," exclaimed Maude, "my old acquaintances, the Czernovics!"

"Vincent," said Miss Lowry, "that reminds me to ask you a question which has been in my mind once or twice: How is poor little CEnone? And where is she? I heard from Rosamond that she had left my brother's house."

Mr. Flint glanced quickly at his wife, but Mrs. Flint was gazing at the fire very placidly and demurely. She had been strong on the subject of Major Maude's position with regard to the "little foreign girl," and had not spared words of indignation and almost disgust at the perverted taste which could find anything to admire in that sallow outlandish-looking little creature, whom she had even—in moments of conjugal confidence—compared to a melancholy black-eyed monkey on an organ. But now she was apparently quite unmoved on the subject. "I suppose she has obliterated Miss CEnone from her memory as well as Lord Elcaster!" thought Mr. Flint to himself.

Maude narrated the change in CEnone's fortunes which had been brought about by her father's unexpected return.

"Quite a romance!" said Mrs. Flint complacently. Enone had her full leave to be as romantic as she pleased, now that it was clear she had not stolen Miss Lowry's lover away from her.

"Enone is one of those poetic-looking creatures who seem born for romantic adventures," said Mary.

"Yes;—with those wonderful eyes!" assented Mrs. Flint.

Mr. Flint thought of the melancholy monkey on the organ, but prudently held his tongue.

"Poor little Nona!" said Maude, thoughtfully.

"Not 'poor' little Nona any longer, I hope!" said Mary. "Is she not happy at her father's return?"

"Y—yes;—I don't know. I'm afraid he has been a disappointment to her on the whole."

"Is he not kind to her?" asked Mary.

"Oh, yes; he seems to me to wish to be very kind to her."

"And you say he is rich?" observed Mrs. Flint.

"Rich in comparison to anything which Nona has been accustomed to. I don't suppose he is a millionaire, but he can afford to

give her a carriage and plenty of smart dresses."

"What is his business?" asked Mr. Flint.

"He appears to have retired from commerce. He was a merchant dealing in miscellaneous goods, and wandering about in the Levant, and even in Africa, for some years. Latterly he settled himself at Malta, where I fancy his business consisted chiefly in lending money at usury. I dare say he does something in that way quietly now. But whatever his trade may have been, it seems to have prospered with him. He has got himself naturalized as a British subject."

"That sounds sensible," said Mr. Flint, nodding approvingly. Elcaster was not at all cosmopolitan; and those of its natives who were too enlightened to hate and despise foreigners, pitied them very much indeed.

"I suppose it answered Mr. Balasso's purpose," rejoined Maude. "But it has been a great blow to poor Nona."

"Ah, I can easily understand that," said Mary.

"Can you, Miss Lowry? Well, I confess I can *not*," exclaimed Mr. Flint, emphatically. "A 'blow' to her? Why, it was the very best thing her father could do, both for her

and himself. I begin to think this Mr. Balasso must be a very sensible person. Instead of a kind of nomade vagabond, half European, half Oriental, he becomes a member of the British nation. Our consuls and ambassadors abroad are bound to protect him. He can travel about the world without a passport. He is not subject to the slavery of a military conscription——”

“He can pay income-tax, serve on a jury, or even become a churchwarden!” added Maude.

“Come, Major Maude, I suppose you’ll allow that it is a promotion for a Levant Greek to be turned into an Englishman;—or even into a humble imitation of one!”

“My opinion on the subject is unfortunately not of so much consequence as his daughter’s. The girl has lived upon romantic conceptions of her glorious birthright as a Greek. And this has mortified her to the quick.”

“Oh, pooh! I shouldn’t have any sympathy with that sort of stuff.”

“Yes, Mr. Flint, you would have a great deal of sympathy—you would be all sympathy if you knew poor Cœnone as we know her,” said Mary persuasively. “She has talked to me freely sometimes of her child-

hood. She would not always be confidential, but when the mood took her she would sit at my feet in the twilight, and tell of the strange wandering life she had led until she came to London. You cannot fancy anything so curious as the mind of this lonely little creature, as ignorant of the world that you and I live in as if she were in another planet, and yet having read and learned much that is usually beyond the ken of children of her age. She was devoured by her imagination; and it had all the stronger hold on her because she kept her day-dreams to herself. The people she lived with were her intellectual inferiors, and she disdained them, and treated them with a lofty sort of condescension, although she was dependent upon their kindness for bread."

Mr. Flint shook his head. "I can't sympathize with that, Miss Lowry," he said.

"Because it presents itself to your mind as it might do if I had acted so, or if any one of your acquaintance had acted so. But you must remember that Enone Balasso was scarcely more to blame than the helpless infant who accepts all its nurse's services with sublime indifference, and strikes at her with its tiny soft fist if it be vexed. One smiles at

the fearlessness of the weak mite; but it has its pathetic side. So the self-esteem of the little lonely, helpless Nona Balasso always seems to me infinitely pathetic when I think of it."

"And who were these people she lived with?" asked Mrs. Flint.

"None other than the Muscovite minstrels, whose singing pleased you so much in London," said Major Maude.

"What, those Moldavians?"

"The very same. And they are good-hearted creatures; faithful and kind to each other; honest after their fashion; and devoted to Enone. I must say I agree with Mr. Flint as to Nona's behaviour to the Czernovics. Her cool indifference, I might almost say ingratitude, to them, is the worst trait I know in the girl's nature."

"And yet she can be grateful," said Mary. "Her gratitude to you, Vincent, is boundless."

"Oh, really?" said Mrs. Flint.

"Then I suppose her gratitude is in an inverse ratio to the benefits conferred, for she owes me much less than she owes the Czernovics."

"Oh, she considers that you belong to a

very different order of beings. I believe she almost thinks you worthy to be a Greek. Poor little CEnone ! And now her father has made himself into a British subject ! Do you know, Mr. Flint, she told my brother one evening when he said something which hurt her pride—she is curiously proud and sensitive—that her forefathers had been great and glorious when his were rude barbarians ! ”

“ And how did she come by that notion, pray ? By having been educated by an English lady, and living in the midst of English culture ! Don’t tell me ! We English taught her all she knows of Grecian glory—about the gloriousness of which glory there might be a word to be said which should not be all hip, hip, hurrah ! and I think it is a good thing for the young lady that her father displays some common sense.”

“ Now I have injured CEnone’s cause when I meant to plead it, and deepened what Mr. Flint must forgive me for calling a prejudice,” said Mary.

“ No, no ; I have no prejudice against the child ! None in the world. And I’m very glad indeed, since you and Maude are interested in her, to hear that she is likely to be respectably provided for. I dare say her

Hellenic magnanimity will accommodate itself very comfortably to such barbarian vulgarities as a well-furnished house, decent servants to wait on her, coal fires, and plenty of well-cooked food."

"Oh, Mr. Flint, and you maintain that you have no prejudice! I assure you that unlimited beef-steaks would not console CEnone for the shattering of her cloud-castles. She is fanciful, high-flown, ignorant of the world, foolish, if you like, but thoroughly genuine. There is not a trace of pretence or acting about CEnone. Don't you think I am right, Vincent!"

"I think that you plead for her like an angel!"

"I suppose that means that you do think I am right?"

"Yes, it means that, and a great deal more," said Maude, whose mind had recurred to the fact that the first unlucky utterances about Sir Rupert's will had been said to be given by CEnone, and who thought too of the painful light which had broken in on his mind at his last interview with the girl as to her jealousy of Mary.

"Well, at all events it will be good for the poor thing to be properly fed," said Mrs.



Flint. The mention of beef-steaks had conjured up in the good lady's mind sundry frightful ideas as to the sort of living which CEnone had been accustomed to. "As to cooking," she added, with an almost plaintive tone, "I suppose those Moravians, or whatever they are, haven't a glimmering of it. I shouldn't wonder if all that has something to do with the girl's starved look. Who knows what trash they fed her on when she was a child? Foreigners, we know, will eat *anything!*"

Decidedly the natives of Elcaster had not learned to be cosmopolitan.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Flint went away Miss Lowry took the former aside, and said, "I shall write to-morrow morning to my brother, announcing my engagement. And Vincent will write to him too; I have asked him to do so. It is due to Cosmo, as the head of the house."

Mr. Flint swallowed down a temptation to say what treatment *he* considered due to Sir Cosmo Lowry from Sir Cosmo Lowry's sister, and merely replied, "It seems possible that your letter may cross him on the road, since he is coming to Elcaster so shortly."

"Well, it is possible. But I must write.

I cannot rest until I have written to Cosmo. There are only he and I left now, Mr. Flint. It is hard if, after clinging to each other during many troubled years of separation, we are to be estranged now when all seems prosperous and peaceful. And Vincent was a true friend to Cosmo in old days. His errand in coming here first, years ago, was to announce the birth of poor Bell's little boy, and to intercede with my father for them. I think Cosmo will remember that."

She looked into Mr. Flint's face as she spoke, so wistfully, that he had not the heart to say anything harsher than that he thought her brother would be the most insensible of men if he did not respond to her faithful affection. And then he and his wife and Maude said "good-night," and left the mistress of Lowry Place to repose.

## CHAPTER XI.

DURING the first days after his arrival in London, matters went pretty smoothly between Mr. Spiridion Balasso and his daughter. He showed himself disposed to be generous towards all who had been kind to her. Besides liberally remunerating the Czernovics for their care of Œnone, he advanced to them half the sum necessary to buy the musical instrument business which they had been looking after, and thus enabled Papa and Mamma Czernovic to retire from their public character of Muscovite Minstrels as soon as they pleased. He took Œnone—in a smart brougham drawn by a showy horse—to call on Miss Cribb the schoolmistress, at Kensington, and presented that accomplished lady with a big brooch adorned with amethysts and topazes.

This was all very well. Miss Cribb had been kind and sensible, and Œnone felt that

Miss Cribb's conduct deserved some recognition; she was pleased, too, that her father, with all his ostentation of money, did not shrink from acknowledging her former poor and dependent condition. But by-and-by he made a proposition to her which was the cause of the first serious disagreement between them; he proposed to her to go and call on Lady Lowry.

"On Lady Lowry? No, papa; I cannot do that."

"You 'cannot do that'!" exclaimed Balasso, mimicking what he called CEnone's tragedy tone. "What for? Haven't you got a gown good enough to go to her ladyship? Anything you want you may have, you know."

"If I chose to go, it would be indifferent to me what gown I wore. But I cannot go to see that woman. She is distasteful to me in every way."

Balasso's brow grew rather gloomy, but he was not yet absolutely angry. He foresaw a little trouble,—a little botheration, as he said; for he prided himself on speaking the most familiar and idiomatic vernacular, and fondly imagined that it was difficult to discover from his speech that he was not an Englishman born. But although he foresaw a little

trouble, he should, of course, have his own way :—good-naturedly, if that were possible, but if not, by stern self-assertion. C  none must be made to understand once for all that his daughter had duties to perform as well as privileges to enjoy. Hitherto he had given way on several trifling points of difference between them. For example, in the matter of dress C  none was a little intractable. Being liberally supplied with cash, and taken to the most fashionable milliners and dress-makers, she nevertheless refused to allow herself to be clothed in the manner her father would most have approved. His method of procedure was to look over some of those remarkable pictures of gowns and mantles and bonnets, and piles of false hair with a pink and white face above or below them, according to the requirements of the case, which represent *Les Modes de Paris* in all colours of the rainbow ; and when he came upon some particularly striking combination,—as of a rose-coloured train with scarlet tunic, or a purple robe trimmed with amber ribbons, or a hat adorned with six humming-birds and a flamingo,—to order *that* for Miss Balasso, to be made of the very best materials procurable for money. And then, as the fashionable

artificer would naturally be on the side of *Les Modes de Paris* and her rich new customer, C  none would have some hard battles to fight. But on the whole Mr. Balasso did not insist on carrying out the suggestions of his own taste. C  none, to be sure, let him spend what he would, was never dressed altogether "like other people" (Bal  sso's formula for expressing a becoming style of apparel), but then neither did C  none look, move, or speak altogether like other people. And perhaps, on the whole, she understood best what suited her. Besides, he believed that a certain sort of eccentricity was considered rather "the thing" in a girl with plenty of money. "If she were very handsome," he said to himself, "she wouldn't want anything else. A face and a fortune will do pretty well everything for a girl. But being as she is, her odd ways give her a certain distinction, and single her out from the crowd." But in the present case he implicitly trusted his own judgment, and was resolved that C  none should act in accordance with it. So when C  none declared Lady Lowry to be distasteful to her in every way, he said quietly, "You stayed in her house for weeks, I am told."

"Yes; but I do not think I owe her any

gratitude. I worked for her whilst I was there."

"Oh, as to that, I dare say you did. And her daughter is your friend, who loved you and was good to you?"

"Not her daughter! Rosamond is altogether different from Lady Lowry. Lady Lowry is only the second wife of her father."

"Ah! Well, this Lady Lowry is the kind of person whose acquaintance will be useful to you now."

"Useful to *me*!"

"Yes; never mind the tragedy now, Ænone, and let us talk prose, please. I'm a plain jog-trot party, myself. You want some woman to take you by the hand, and get you into society. You have no mother, and I am a stranger. Well, this Lady Lowry will just suit us. I consider it a great piece of good fortune that you happened to get acquainted with her. She has a title, and that goes a long way amongst the English. We must make a beginning, and here is the occasion ready to our hand."

Ænone again laid herself open to the reproach of looking tragic. She clasped her hands together despairingly. If she could but make her father understand!

"You do not know her," she said, earnestly. "Lady Lowry is arrogant. She has a vulgar mind."

"Oh, she'll come round. We'll coax her a little. Besides, I don't ask nothing for nothing. She'll get her *quid pro quo* in one way or another."

"But, papa——! You would have to abase yourself! You do not know of what phlegmatic insolence she is capable."

"Leave me alone to manage her, C  none. Besides, if she was a little stuck-up, and so on—*nous avons chang   tout cela*! She'll be civil enough to you now, I dare say."

"And why? Because she will think I am a rich man's daughter instead of a poor orphan?"

"Thinking people rich is not a bad reason for being civil to them."

"I hold it to be a very bad reason—a base reason."

"Tut! Well, whether or no, 'tis the way of the world, and we must accept it."

"I will never accept it—even if I must endure it."

Balasso made a strong effort to curb his anger. C  none was quite unconscious how strong the effort was, and incapable of guess-



ing the sort of irritation which her words caused.

"Come, little foolish pigeon," said the father at last, "be reasonable. You have been living in a dream. It is time to wake up. I am kind to you, am I not?"

"Yes;—you—I am not ungrateful, papa."

"No, no; to be sure not! So far so good. You know nothing of the world. I know a great deal. You must take my opinion on points you know nothing about. And where you can't agree—you can always obey! And what is it I am asking, after all? I should have thought a girl of spirit would have liked to go and drive up to my Lady Lowry's door in a smart carriage and fashionably rigged out, before the flunkeys and all, where she had been in former days so shabby and poor;—a little nobody. You're not a little nobody now, Ceneone. Wait a bit. You have no idea as yet of the value of money; but it can do wonderful things, little simpleton. You shall see what you shall see."

And this was the father about whom Ceneone had dreamed such dreams! A feverish flush of mortification came over her as she recalled the proud ideal she had made for herself of her Greek father, and contrasted it with the reality.

Balasso did not continue the controversy. Indeed, so far as he was concerned it was at an end. He patted CEnone's drooping head as she sat listlessly in an arm-chair beside the window,—not looking from it; staring abstractedly on the ground, and seeing only with her mind's eye,—bade her, with a smile, not be sulky, and went out promising to return in the afternoon and take her for a drive. First of all he betook himself to the City, and had a brief conference with a broker there. Then he returned westward in a leisurely manner, along Fleet Street, looking in at the shops, particularly the jewellers' and goldsmiths', with almost infantine pleasure. He was as fond of finery as a Turkish lady is of sweetmeats. His waistcoat was gorgeous with a thick gold chain of elaborate pattern; he wore an emerald pin in his cravat, and various rings—amongst them a diamond of considerable size—on his fat olive-coloured fingers. But not content with these adornments he went into a shop whose plate-glass window offered irresistible temptations, and bought a set of studs—black enamel and rubies and a spark or two of brilliants; things that could be descried a good way off, and glittered profusely. He did think of taking a

locket nearly the size of an ice-plate to Enone. But he refrained. She would probably decline to wear it. Enone's asceticism was a matter of real vexation to Spiridion Balasso. He 'would have delighted in a showy, dashing, gaudily-dressed daughter, able to display his fortune to advantage, and thoroughly to enjoy it. He was able to perceive that Enone had the air of a lady, and that she was by no means contemptible intellectually. He himself, although vulgar and uneducated, was not a fool; and he quickly became aware that if it were possible for him to attain to a much loftier rung of the social ladder than he was ever likely to reach, he need never be ashamed of his daughter's manners. But not being ashamed was very tame comfort. He would have liked to be able to brag of her, as he did of his wine and his jewels. "Dash it all, I wish she had a little more bounce!" said Mr. Balasso to himself, as he walked towards the Strand with his new studs in his pocket.

Finding himself so near it, he turned down into Howard Buildings with the intention of trying to see old Czernovic, but on the threshold of Mr. Quickit's house he met Flagge, who was just coming out. The two men

shook hands. They had met once or twice, and Balasso had been good-natured and pleasant with the medium. Balasso was habitually good-natured and pleasant; and if there did lurk a claw in the velvet sheath it must be owned that it was scarcely ever put out except in self-defence. Flagge, for his part, almost hated Balasso; but he eagerly accepted any friendly advances from him. Balasso was the way that led to Cenone; and it must have been a hard road Flagge would not have traversed to reach her.

"Can you happen to tell me if Papa Czer-novic is in the house?" asked Balasso.

"Why, no; he ain't in. I've just seen Sacha, and he told me the Papa was gone down to the music-store. I guess you'd find him there if you want him."

"Oh, no, I don't want him particularly."

"Miss Nony pretty well?"

"Cenone is well enough, but a little cross-grained this morning. Girls are not easy cattle to drive, Dr. Flagge."

"I'm glad she's well enough," returned Flagge, drily. "'Tain't allus so. Latterly she seemed to me to be very frail and weak;—kinder fading, like a sick flower."

"Oh,—I don't know. She's a mi

creature, you know, and looks punier than ever amongst all these blooming English girls. I dare say she's stronger than she looks. These skinny, wiry people often are."

"Well, she might be a sight stronger than she looks, and yet not much to brag of that way. But what's wrong with her, that you say she's cross-grained?"

"By-the-bye," said Balasso, abruptly, "you know Lady Lowry, don't you?"

"Lady Lowry? Well, I reckon I am acquainted with her ladyship; yes, sir."

"You used to go there when my daughter was staying there on a visit? To be sure! I—— Are you walking?"

"Well, I had concluded to go to a luncheon-bar in Fleet Street, and have a snack."

"Will you lunch with me? Do! I'm going to an Italian place that I know of, where you get a very fair feed. Come along, I shall be delighted."

Flagge making no difficulty, Balasso hailed a cab, which soon deposited them at their destination. Balasso ordered a copious repast, taking care to impress on Flagge that he was ordering the most expensive viands which the house afforded. "Have you got any champagne fit to drink?" he said to the waiter,

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speaking in Italian. "Bring us the best you have." Then he translated the command for Flagge's benefit, adding jocosely, "I don't go in for the cheap and nasty. Never did. I can do without things as well as another. But what I do have, I like to be of the best."

"Well, sir, I expect that's a sentiment pretty universally implanted in human natur'. I lived out West at one time among the untrammelled denizens of the rolling prairies, and I observed the Appanawchees 'ud do without whatever they couldn't get, and take the best when they could."

"Ha! it does your friends the Appanawchees credit, whoever they may be," returned Balasso, good-humouredly, as he fixed his napkin to his button-hole.

"Well, it's a kind of a providential adjustment of things, I opine. The only trouble is the 'doing without' part of it. Taking the best when you can get it don't come so hard."

"I wanted to ask you, Dr. Flagge," said Balasso, after they had eaten and drunk, and were arrived at the tobacco stage of the banquet, "what sort of a person this Lady Lowry really is—in confidence, you know." Then, seeing at once a look of hesitation and mistrust come over the man's face, he

added, "I'll tell you first why I want to know, and you will understand the position at once."

Flagge did not give Balasso credit for as much keenness of perception as he really possessed. The American had a certain dry contempt for the intelligence of this fat, boastful, vulgar, chuckling, Levant trader. But Balasso's sleek, rotund person, and jovial manners, were misleading if taken to symbolise the quality of his mind. In a few words he explained to Flagge what he wanted, and that he thought Lady Lowry might be useful to him. He spoke with perfect frankness, seeing no sort of advantage which was likely to accrue to him from doing otherwise. He had no hypocrisy as to his aims, nor as to his idea of the best method of reaching them. "I've got money," said he, "but not enough to do without a little patronage. If I had as many millions as I have thousands I shouldn't want anybody's help. But in London it takes a sight more cash than I have, to astonish the natives. Now you are a 'cute fellow, and you're a good deal behind the scenes: don't you think this Lady Lowry would be a useful acquaintance? Enone has a prejudice against her, but I don't suppose that counts for much."

"Lady Lowry is—well, she ain't exactly a seraph, Mr. Balasso."

"Not a seraph? Well no, I suppose not! A seraph would hardly answer my purpose of getting into Society, I should think." And Balasso chuckled, and stroked his black moustache, and showed his white square teeth.

"Well, I don't know but what a seraph *might* feel pretty badly in what's called Society. A seraph might sniff the brimstone too strong under the Bond Street perfumery. Sometimes I get a whif of it myself, so everlasting powerful that I'm a'most dumb-founded. But—not being a seraph—it don't asphyxiate *me*."

"Ha, ha, ha! No fear, I should say! Nor it wouldn't asphyxiate *Ænone*."

"Why, the cases are different, though, Mr. Balasso. Brimstone ain't her nat'ral element, anyway."

"It there a special flavour of brimstone about Lady Lowry? Is that what you mean?"

"Well, sir, I ain't prepared to make that statement categorically; no, sir. The whole atmosphere of the house ain't heavenly. I don't mind saying that much."

"My chief reason for wanting to get a few introductions is to make *Ænone* a place in



the world. For myself, as you may easily understand, I can find amusement enough outside of Mayfair."

"And Miss Nony ain't grateful?"

"She don't understand. She's as ignorant in some things as a Red Indian. However, of course, she'll have to do what I tell her."

"Is she so *very* unwilling to go to Lady Lowry?" asked Flagge, anxiously. The idea of CEnone's being coerced into doing what she did not like, affected him a great deal more painfully than a far worse misfortune, happening to any one else, could have done.

"Oh, I dare say it's only one of her fads. She'll get over it. That little daughter of mine has her head full of all kinds of high-flown notions. What, now, should you say would be the best way of getting round Lady Lowry? Every one has his likes and dislikes, and I'm willing to humour her if she can and will do what I want."

Flagge rapidly turned the subject over in his mind. On the one hand, he was most unwilling to assist any proceeding which was distasteful to CEnone, but to this consideration he had to oppose the following ones: it was probable, nay, almost certain, that let

him say what he would, Balasso would call on Lady Lowry at least once. If my lady were rude and ungracious, well, the thing would die a natural death. But if, as Flagge thought more likely, my lady should think it worth while to be civil in the hope of profiting by CEnone's clairvoyant powers, which she firmly believed in, then it would clearly be best that he should not have offended Balasso; and aroused Lady Lowry's suspicions, by endeavouring to keep them apart. If CEnone were to be forced into contact with the Lowrys, he (Flagge) would at least be at hand to use his influence on her behalf, and to spare her annoyance as far as possible. Balasso, placidly finishing his cigar, had not watched Flagge's downcast eyelids, and hollow temples fringed with long straggling locks, above half a minute, when the latter looked up again, and said, "Well now, I guess I can fix it for you," and proceeded to say that he would take an early opportunity of mentioning Mr. Balasso to her ladyship, and of speaking of him in such terms as would dispose her to receive the father and daughter with all civility. "I know what 'll persuade her and what won't," said Flagge, "and I've pretty considerable of an influence over her."

"Spirits, and all that, eh?" said Balasso with a wink and a chuckle.

Flagge replied with perfect gravity. "Ain't a-going to discuss spiritism with you, Mr. Balasso, but I may as well say that if you suppose it to be all a humbug——"

"Oh, I didn't say 'humbug,' you know."

"No, you did not, sir. That's a fact. But I say it 'cos you meant it. And I'm a deal too well used to that to be riled. But you and a good many other 'cute people are wrong about spiritism. We're a dreadful smart generation, but I dunno as we've quite pricked right through creation, like a child with a gas ball, and found what's inside of it yet!"

"The child finds nothing inside but emptiness, Dr. Flagge!" returned Balasso, with a shrug of superiority.

"Well, I reckon that's because he's too ignorant to understand as a vapour that he can't feel between his finger and thumb *isn't* emptiness. However, as I was saying, I understand Lady Lowry. And although I may not be a titled member of the British aristocracy, you'll find that my good word ain't without its value in certain fashionable quarters. No, sir."

"Lord bless you! I can believe that fast enough! A man hasn't lived such a life as mine without finding out what queer strings the very smartest puppets are pulled by. You'll excuse the comparison, Dr. Flagge, ha, ha, ha! But you know the world, and so do I."

"Why, I don't see as there's anything to excuse, sir. I'd sooner be a queer string than a smart puppet, if there *is* to be pulling of wires."

"Right you are, Dr. Flagge!" exclaimed Balasso, with unfeigned sympathy.

"There's an Honourable lady friend of mine too,—Honourable Alexandrina Wigmore;—she belongs to very high connections. I should think she might help Miss Nony. She's not A 1, you understand, owing to her and her husband not having a dollar to bless themselves with, more 'n what just feeds and clothes them, and keeps 'em afloat on the top of a big sea of debt. But she might be useful. I'll see what I can do."

Balasso thanked him, and they shook hands and parted, Flagge starting at once to go to Green Street, as he said, and Balasso returning to his hotel.

“This way I shall keep some hold of Balasso, anyhow, and Nony won’t slip out of my sight altogether,” reflected Flagge as he walked along towards Green Street.

## CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT the same time that Dr. Flagge and Mr. Spiridion Balasso were lunching together, Lady Lowry was having an interview with Percy Wigmore. The interview took place in the library, instead of in my lady's boudoir. The latter cosy apartment had no fire in it, and all the furniture was muffled up in brown holland, and it looked thoroughly chilly and unattractive. The members of the Lowry household seemed to be stirred from the state of lethargic quietude which had recently pervaded them. The servants were more alert than usual; there was a sound of movement and running up and down stairs in the house; and as the door was opened to admit Wigmore, he caught a glimpse of a figure in shirt sleeves flitting across the hall, which figure was no other than the ducal Lobley himself.

Wigmore was aware that this unusual bustle portended the speedy departure of the family for Elcaster. In his quality of con-

fidential friend he had been permitted to discuss the projected journey with my lady, and had even in some measure contributed to its being finally decided on, in the following manner. He chanced to mention one day that his wife had received a letter from Lady Elcaster. Upon this Sarah, at once proceeding to catechise him with her accustomed persistency and directness, elicited from him several interesting facts.

First, it appeared that Lady Elcaster was not only an acquaintance, but a connection of Mrs. Wigmore, the Marchioness of Dull-drum being aunt to the latter lady, and cousin to the former. ("Dear me," said Sarah parenthetically, "I wonder how I came to miss that in the Peerage!") Secondly, Sarah learned for the first time that the Elcasters, mother and son, were now staying at their residence near Clevenal, a spot seldom honoured by my lord's presence for long together, and scarcely ever by his mother's, who was understood to dislike it, as being dull. ("That would not be the case," observed Sarah in another parenthesis, "if Lowry Place was inhabited by a family of distinction who understood how to keep up their position, instead of by a single woman.

Of course a single woman—though certainly she is not very young, as far as *that* goes—cannot have the same weight in society, nor entertain company like a married lady.”) Thirdly, it came out that Lady Elcaster had hinted at her intention of inviting the Wigmores to spend a week at Elcaster House, but that he (Percy) “didn’t quite see it.” “You wouldn’t catch Lady Elcaster invitin’ me and Alexandrina if she could get anybody else,” said the ingenuous Percy.

“La! Why?” demanded my lady in a rather sudden and peremptory fashion. The disagreeable question presented itself to her mind whether, since the Wigmores were not considered desirable guests by Lady Elcaster, they might not be ineligible acquaintances for herself.

“Oh, well, you see the fact is there was no end of a row amongst ’em all some little time ago—reg’lar shindy.”

“Amongst who?”

“Oh, Lady Elcaster and old Lady Dulldrum and Alexandrina. They were all at it hammer and tongs.”

“What about?”

“Oh, well—it wasn’t about anything in particular. There was a lot of gossip and



chatter carried backwards and forwards, and they're none of 'em very sweet-tempered, and they got worked up into tantrums, and gave it each other so hot that—it made a coolness, don't you know? Fact is, I believe," added Wigmore, beginning again with a jerk; for he perceived that Lady Lowry still held him with her glittering eye, and that she would not be appeased without further particulars; fact is, old Lady Dulldrum, who is really a—a reg'lar old cat, I give you my word she is—told Lady Elcaster about Alexandrina's wanting to borrow a little money of her—the dowager's as rich as the Bank of England, and Alexandrina's her own neice, you know, so it wasn't very surprisin'—and the Elcaster said something nasty; so then Alexandrina thought two could play at that game, and she said something nasty. I should back Alexandrina myself if it came to a scrimmage of that sort; and I believe she had the best of it. So there it was, don't you know?"

"What was it Mrs. Wigmore said to get the best of it?" demanded my lady, doggedly. She found it difficult to understand how a person who wanted to borrow money could have achieved any triumph over a person who did not want to borrow money.

"Oh, dash it, I can't remember it all," said Wigmore desperately. "I believe Alexandrina told her aunt to tell the Elcaster that if her husband's father had been a brewer instead of a peer of the realm, she shouldn't have been obliged to trouble her, or something like that."

"Whose husband? And who wouldn't have troubled who?"

Percy gave a muffled groan. But there must have been some extremely strong and subtle charm in the butterfly gallantry which the airy and youthful-hearted little gentleman indulged in with my lady, for not even under the *peine forte et dure* of her cross-examination did it occur to him that he might have passed a less disagreeable half-hour by going to drive with his wife, as she had that morning suggested he should do. It was a new illustration of the homely saying that "Vanity suffers no pain;" for, save to gratify that master passion, stout, middle-aged Percival Wigmore would neither have subjected himself to the stolid selfishness of Lady Lowry, nor endured the pressure of his newest and tightest suit of clothes. However, he made a valiant struggle to explain his meaning—always one of the most difficult tasks to our

buoyant friend—and at length managed to get it conveyed into Lady Lowry's brain that the father of the first Earl of Elcaster had been a brewer of enormous wealth, and that the haughty Countess was well known to have jilted a poor man of her own rank in order to marry the brewer's son. This much having been made clear to her, my lady went on again :

“ Why can't Lady Elcaster get anybody else to go and stay with her ? ”

“ Oh, well, I s'pose she could get *somebody*, you know, only—their place is awfully dull, and there's no shootin' to speak of, and Elcaster don't get on with people somehow;—at least, not with the sort of people his mother could have to stay in the house, don't you know? And almost everybody's engaged just now, and Elcaster ain't on comfortable terms with the Countess's family, and she won't hear of his side of the house, and now he's got nothing to amuse him, and a lot of doctors potterin' about, dockin' him of his brandy and that, he must be awfully disagreeable, as sulky as a bear with a sore head—and so Lady Elcaster has asked me and Alexandrina down, don't you know ? ”

“ And shan't you go ? ”

"Well, I don't care particularly about goin'. Elcaster ain't the sort of fellah I like. Oh, I get on with him pretty well. I can get on with anybody, almost. But he and the old lady fight like cat and dog sometimes, and I hate that sort of thing. If you can't make things go smooth with people, you'd better cut it short at once, you know. At least that's my feelin'."

Lady Lowry was paying very little attention to Percy's statement of his feeling. On the contrary, she was reflecting that it would suit her extremely well that the Wigmores should be at Clevenal during her own visit to those parts. And she presently said, "Oh, I think you had better go. Doesn't Mrs. Wigmore like it?"

"Alexandrina's inclined to accept," admitted Percy, rather reluctantly. "She says it's so stoopid goin' on quarrellin' with people when they want to come round."

"So it is! At least with people like the Elcasters. You never know when they may be useful."

"La bless you! Elcaster wouldn't lend me fifty pounds to save me from starvin'! Oh, he's a reg'lar screw in some things, although he can make his money spin fast enough for anything he likes himself."

But it was not precisely the sort of usefulness that consists in lending fifty pounds of which my lady was thinking. So she observed once more, "Oh I think you'd better go. It would be very nice for you and Mrs. Wigmore to be there whilst we're at Elcaster."

"Well, your bein' so near would make it jollier, certainly; much jollier. Have you made up your mind to go down to Elcaster?"

"Quite," replied my lady. And, indeed, she had made it up within the last five minutes.

All this had taken place about a week before the interview between Wigmore and my lady mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. And during the interval everything had been satisfactorily arranged between Mrs. Wigmore and Lady Lowry, who had decided to take their respective lords and masters to Elcaster, with the most undoubting confidence in their power to have their own way in the matter.

In explaining the reasons which might be supposed to have induced Lady Elcaster to invite his wife and himself to visit her, Percy had omitted to mention one very principal one. It was true that my lord her son *was* very cross, ill-tempered, and unmanageable; and that it was difficult for various reasons for the Countess to secure guests who might be trusted

not to set his smouldering irritability in a flame, and who should be at the same time such persons as she could see at her own table without loss of dignity. But other waifs and strays might have been found for the seeking—"unattached" members of society, willing to make themselves agreeable for a consideration, and no questions asked. But Lady Elcaster had heard from the Dowager of Dulldrum a wonderful version of Alexandrina's wonderful stories of Dr. Flagge and the spirits, and the Lowrys and the missing will; and Lady Elcaster was dying of curiosity to know more. Since the notion had entered her head of having Miss Lowry for her daughter-in-law, she naturally took more interest in all that concerned Lowry Place than she ever had done before. This affair of the will might make a difference in her ladyship's views. To be sure she knew Alexandrina to have a very unscrupulous tongue on occasions. And besides, all the world knew that an ill-natured story would lose none of its ill-nature if Lady Dulldrum had the telling of it. The best plan would be to hear Alexandrina's account *viva voce*. And as to the impertinent speeches Alexandrina was reported to have made, some little time ago, why Lady Elcaster

wanted Mrs. Wigmore, and was not going to allow any small tittle-tattle about so insignificant a personage as Alexandrina to stand in the way of a gratification desired by so great a lady as herself. So she had written, inviting the Wigmores to Elcaster House, and allowing her reason for doing so to be very plainly seen. Lady Elcaster prided herself on never being afraid to say what she meant to every one; which, inasmuch as nine times out of ten she meant something bitter and insolent, had the effect of making her ladyship's society not so entirely charming as might have been wished.

However, the fair Alexandrina was very well able to take care of herself. "I shall go," she said to Percy. "Of course I understand all about it, and she knows that I do. But it's quite proper that we should be seen at Elcaster House now and then, amongst our own connections, and I know it'll spite Aunt Jane frightfully."

Aunt Jane was the Marchioness Dowager of Dulldrum.

"Well," said the Honourable Percival, when he had paid his first salutations to the fair lady of the mansion, in Green Street, "so you're all in the midst of preparations to start, I see. Your boudoir has its hair

done up in curl-papers, eh? It always makes me think of curl-papers when I see a room done up in those kind of pinafore things. Well, this ain't a bad box of Lowry's, though. I never was here before. Doosid snug place he has here, all to himself!"

"Sir Cosmo requires a room where he can be quite undisturbed, for his studies. He reads an immense deal. Latterly, he has scarcely done anything else, I think."

"Smokes, too, a little, don't he?" rejoined Wigmore, sniffing the pronounced odour of tobacco which hung about the apartment.

"Sir Cosmo is not looking well," said my lady, with much gravity.

"Ain't he? I haven't noticed—I mean I don't see him very often. The Junior Georgie is such a stoopid club. Stoopidest club in London, as I often say."

"No; Sir Cosmo is looking very far from well. I should have thought it could scarcely have escaped any one's observation, Mr. Wigmore."

"Oh, la! so bad as that, eh? Oh! well—when you never set eyes on a man from one week's end to the other, you—you can't notice how he looks, don't you know? What is it? Liver?"



“Liver, Mr. Wigmore!”

“Well, some men do have it, you know, specially men that have been in the army. A great-uncle of my own by my mother’s side was forty years in India—general officer—awfully peppery old card—and with him it was nothing in the world but liver, nothing else in the world!”

“*What* was nothing but liver, Mr. Wigmore?” asked my lady with considerable asperity. “I really don’t know what you are talking of, but I do know that Sir Cosmo’s health is far from satisfactory, and I can assure you that this wretched business, and the very strange and unfeeling behaviour of his sister, is preying on his mind very seriously.”

“No!” said Wigmore, pursing up his mouth into an expression of as much sympathy as he could muster. But the little man had no turn for hypocrisy—even of the proper and social sort, and he did not do it well. “But what’s Miss Lowry to do if the will can’t be found, you know? I think that’s the way for Lowry to look at it.”

“You think that’s the way for Sir Cosmo to look at it?” re-echoed Sarah, now thoroughly angry, with her cheeks aflame, and her round

eyes very bright and blue, "Well, then, I must say that you do not show that sympathy and friendship which I expected from you, Mr. Wigmore."

This was a point on which she and Percy had differed before. Not even his gallant devotion to my lady's attractions could avail to make Wigmore join for a moment in her attacks on Miss Lowry, whether overt or covert. "They're carryin' the thing too far, you know," he had said to his wife. "The spirits are all very well in moderation. But when it comes to makin' hints, and even right-down accusations, against a most excellent and virtuous young lady on the authority of a fellah like Flagge—no, hang it all, Alexandrina! I can't stand that!"

So on the present occasion he staunchly refused to blame Miss Lowry, although, as he had thoroughly learned by this time, to do so would have been the most acceptable demonstration of "friendship and sympathy" he could have made to her sister-in-law. This obstinacy on the part of Percy might have led to an unpleasant scene but for the opportune arrival of Dr. Flagge, who was ushered into the library without any preliminary announcement.

"Oh! please to sit down, Dr. Flagge," said

my lady, as soon as she saw him. Then she called back the servant who had let Flagge in, and told him to admit no visitors whatever. "I am extremely occupied at this moment," said my lady.

"Well, p'raps you'd rather have me come some other time," said Flagge, coolly. "It don't matter to me. What I've got to say can wait, far's I'm concerned."

"No; I should prefer you not to go away, Dr. Flagge."

"Well, I'll say good mornin', Lady Lowry," said Wigmore, getting up from his chair.

"Good morning."

"Look here, don't you want me to tell that fellah that sends the flowers something or other?"

"Oh, yes; I've written it down here. But it would be better to see him. No more after Saturday. Make him understand." My lady's fit of indignation by no means prevented her from making use of the object of it.

"All right." Then bending down to take my lady's plump, be-ringed fingers in his, the gallant Percy murmured, "I say, don't be hard on a fellah!"

My lady breathed hard once or twice through her nostrils, but said nothing.

"And take care of yourself. You seem to have to think of everthing and everybody."

"I have, indeed," returned my lady, somewhat mollified. "But I understand the duties of my position. And I shall perform them, whether I am appreciated or not."

"Oh, but you are appreciated! There's one person who appreciates you, Lady Lowry. Do tell me if there's anything else I can do for you. It'll be a real pleasure, don't you know?"

"N—no; I don't think I want you to do anything for me just now, except seeing the flower-man. If I did think of anything I wanted, I should tell you." This was indubitably true.

"What a jolly rose-bud that is!" said Wigmore, lingering, hat in hand, and looking at a small vase of flowers near Sarah's elbow. "May I have it?"

"If you like," returned my lady, stolidly.

"I can't get it out without upsetting all the others. Won't you manage it for me?"

"How ridiculous you are!" said my lady with her little guttural laugh. "There! I think you might have got it for yourself, though. Dr. Flagge will think you a dreadful goose."

And then Percy marched off in triumphant

good humour with the rose-bud in his button-hole. For all this quarrelling, and making up again, and general philandering,—which was all in truth very innocent, and never caused that sagacious matron his wife one moment's uneasiness,—gave Percy the delicious sensation of fancying himself young again, and was a true Fountain of Jouvence to his spirit.

As soon as Wigmore was gone, Dr. Flagge commenced his negotiation thus :

“Listen to me, fairest lady. Here's Nony Balasso come to be a big heiress. Ah, you may well look startled ! But just let me tell you, now. Her father's come back from the East, from trading with the ancient races of the mysterious Orient—from whence, by-the-bye, a vast amount of spirit lore has come to us young and ardent, but inexperienced nations of the mighty West—and has realized a heap of dollars. Now, at fust sight, and to the eye of the material-minded sceptic or the scoffer, this combination might appear as if 'twas likely Miss Nony wouldn't be amenable to the magnetic influences any more ;—at least, not in the manner most calc'lated to assist the researches we have in view. But under the guidance of a controlling spirit who was with me for several hours last evening,

one or two suggestions were written out in a bold and peculiar hand—(I dunno but it might be that Athenian ancestor of Miss Nony's, who used to come early in the winter, for there was something of a Greek character about his *e's*)—and it seems to me, if you follow up those suggestions, you may be able to retain some kind of a hold on Miss Balasso. It may require you to exert some feminine tact, because of the manner in which you parted from Nony—or she parted from you. However, to a lady of your refined elegance and aristocratic culture, I should opine that there would be no difficulty in fixing it.”

This long harangue had given my lady time to get firmly hold of the notion that Enone's worldly circumstances were so far improved as to render her independent of any favours from the Lowry family. If her assistance were needed now by Lady Lowry, she must be treated with some civility. “Well,” said Sarah, “but what's the good of saying all that? If Miss Balasso doesn't want me, she is not very likely to take any more notice of me. I'm sure she never showed any gratitude before, so we can't expect she should show it now!”

“Her father talked of coming to call on you,

lady. And if he should do so, you will receive him and Nony in a suitable manner?"

"Coming to call? Oh, but I am going to Elcaster on Monday. I have made up my mind to be *on the spot*, according to your suggestion."

"Well," said Flagge, after an instant's pause, "I don't see as that makes much difference. You'll not spend the rest of your life there, and when you come back will be time enough to begin that interchange of formalities and the ceremonial of social etiquette which is strange to a mind untutored in conventionalism, and accustomed to the freedom of an Appanawchee, but which, nevertheless, has its uses in an ancient and artificial community like this."

The truth was that the sight of Wigmore had revived a half-formed idea in Flagge's mind that the Honourable Alexandrina might be as useful to the Balassos as Lady Lowry, and that with proper management she might be induced to "take them up," in the cant phrase she affected. Therefore he let the subject of Enone and her father drop very coolly, and proceeded to discuss matters more nearly affecting his personal interests. And before he took his leave he had received from

my lady a cheque signed by Sir Cosmo, which she had that morning wrung from him with much difficulty, and at the cost of enduring an outburst of savage bitterness.



## CHAPTER XIII.

THE arrival of Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry at the principal inn of Elcaster was, as a matter of course, known all over the little town within a few hours after it took place. Their movements, and all that could be learned of their sayings and doings, were watched and reported as keenly as if they had been royal personages. Such a thing was unprecedented as that a Lowry of Lowry should be living at the George Hotel, Elcaster, instead of in his own ancestral home. Sir Cosmo and his wife and Rosamond, attended by a maid and the faithful Lobley, had reached Elcaster on a certain Monday evening. My lady had declined to travel without Lobley, despite her husband's frowns and sneers. It was impossible to say, she observed, what sort of accommodation they might find in a third-rate little place like Elcaster. The George Hotel was not accustomed to receive personages of their

quality; and a thousand arrangements might be necessary for my lady's comfort, which it was out of the question she should see to for herself, in her present delicate state. In vain had Sir Cosmo pointed out that her own maid, Moore, could do all that was needful, and demanded, if she could not, what the hussy was good for? My lady replied to all objections by stolidly repeating, "I shall not go to a place where your family have been the principal people for generations without a manservant, Cosmo. Just think how it would look!"

And as this last sentence contained the quintessence of her creed on all subjects, moral, social, and religious, further argument was thrown away.

On the Tuesday morning a closed carriage was ordered to convey Sir Cosmo and my lady to Lowry Place. "I wonder what Mary will say when she sees us!" said my lady, as they were being driven along towards Clevenal. Sir Cosmo sniffed, and drew down the corners of his mouth, but made no answer in words.

"It will be a great surprise for her!"

"A most agreeable surprise!" said Cosmo, with an indescribable sneer.

"It ought not to be a *disagreeable* surprise,

Cosmo, but I'm afraid it will be. I wish I could think otherwise. It would be more creditable to Mary. I say nothing of what is due to me, but you are her own brother, Cosmo. That cannot be denied by the most partial of her friends!"

"I don't know why she should not hate the sight of us, myself," replied the baronet. "Green Street could scarcely have been a pleasant sojourn for a woman of Mary's breeding and education, even if we had done all we could to make ourselves pleasant to her. But the fact is we did—something like the reverse. And now we are pretty plainly insinuating that she used undue influence about my father's will. Upon my word if Miss Lowry of Lowry refused to receive us, I don't know that we should have much right to complain!"

"Oh, Cosmo, I do think it so unkind of you to talk like that! I know what you mean——"

"Well, yes; I should think my meaning was obvious to the meanest capacity," muttered her husband.

"Yes, Cosmo; I know what you mean when you talk about Mary's breeding and education. I cannot help my birth—although perhaps it is not so very mean as all that

comes to—and as to education—after three years with Mrs. Bolitho, I think I may venture to hold up my head on *that* score!”

“Tchah! You’re a fool!”

My lady put her handkerchief to her eyes, but she did not keep it there long. Her tears had lost a good deal of their effect on her husband. The more completely Cosmo permitted the reins of government to slip into Sarah’s hands, and the more he allowed himself to follow her lead in the matter which had brought them to Elcaster, the more he asserted his superiority and masterhood with his tongue. He was sneering, bitter, cruel, contemptuous in words. But every important action of their joint lives was bent and shaped by the plodding, persistent force of her stubborn will.

“That is not the opinion every one has of me, Cosmo,” said my lady, removing her handkerchief from her eyes, and returning it to the interior of her muff. “Some persons consider me to possess rather remarkable abilities.”

“If you mean Wigmore, he’s a fool too.”

Now, my lady had meant Wigmore. But she immediately answered with offended majesty, “No, Cosmo, I do not mean Mr.

Wigmore. He does think highly of me, but that may be because he is a friend. There are other people who don't consider me a fool. Mr. Quickit does not think me so, for one. He knows very well that it was owing to my judgment that he was called upon to bear witness to poor dear Sir Rupert's will. And there are others besides Mr. Quickit."

These words, stinging Sir Cosmo as they did with the recollection of his wife's victory and supremacy throughout the whole business of the missing will, threw him into so savage an ill-temper that Sarah deemed it prudent to refrain from exasperating him farther, and to bear his harsh sneers with what philosophy she could, reflecting that it would be better to arrive at Lowry Place with some semblance of harmony, and of acting together; and having a cunning notion that the sight of the house and property of which he had been defrauded might avail to turn his wrath against his sister better than any arguments of hers.

The door was opened to them by old James, who stared at them rather glumly, but without manifesting any special surprise. Neither did he use his privilege of long service to utter a word of greeting to Sir Cosmo, as he had done on the first return of the latter to Lowry Place.

James ushered the baronet and his wife into the drawing-room just as he might have done if they had been strangers come to pay a formal visit, and withdrew to announce their arrival to his mistress.

James's demeanour did not help to soothe Sir Cosmo's temper. Although it is probable that any manifestation of cordiality on the part of the old servant would have been snubbed and sneered at by Sir Cosmo as "the usual humbug of those people who expect to get something out of you if you are soft enough to be bamboozled," yet nevertheless this chill respect annoyed him; and he muttered something about James being a surly old fool who had been spoiled by over-indulgence.

"What can we expect, Cosmo?" asked Sarah, leaning back in an arm-chair beside the fire, and vigilantly casting her eyes all over the room to see if anything had been moved or changed in it since she was last there. "It's something new having a fire in the drawing-room at this hour of the day," she proceeded. "And what a lot of flowers! The greenhouse must have been finely stripped, I should think. I wonder why James did not show us into the library. Humph! Mary

has altered those hangings, I see ; and she's taken a lot of that old china out of the store-closet and stuck it up there. I know that blue and white sort is quite fashionable now, because I priced some in Hanway Street. But it was all kept under lock and key in the china closet when I first came here. I remember seeing it quite well when Mary showed me over the house."

Indeed, my lady could have made a pretty accurate inventory from memory of all the articles of value in Lowry Place. Whilst she made these observations her husband was pacing up and down the room, with his head sunk on his breast and his hands behind him. Sarah had certainly not exaggerated when she spoke of his looking ill. He was thin even to emaciation. His chest looked hollow ; his hair, which six months ago had been slightly grizzled, was now quite grey ; and his skin was the colour of old parchment. Any one seeing him now for the first time would have taken him to be at least fifty years old. To him, as he turned, having reached one end of the long drawing-room in his regular march, appeared Mary at the open window in the other end of the room, and the brother and sister stood for a moment

face to face, and divided by the whole length of the room. The change which had taken place in both since their meeting in that house last summer, and the contrast they presented to each other, was sufficiently marked and startling to impress itself on my lady, watching the two from her chair, with very unpleasant vividness. And, alas! it must be confessed that that which sent the keener pang of mortified surprise to Sarah's heart was not the jaded look on her husband's face, but the bright, soft, transfiguring light of happiness upon Mary's. Sarah was not indifferent to her husband's well-being; and, although neither her temperament nor his temper admitted of anything that could be called tenderness between them, yet she felt herself attached to Cosmo by a hundred ties, which made her pride, her interest, and her comfort depend very mainly on his. But pride and interest combined to exaggerate the dislike and distrust she had long ago conceived towards Mary; and now to see her with that serene sweetness on her face, and that light of inward happiness in her eyes, struck Sarah like a personal injury, and it alarmed her. Mary looked like a woman who had nothing to fear from their presence.



Now, judging with Sarah's judgment, this serenity augured ill for her hopes.

Mary advanced, and so did Cosmo, and they met half-way, and shook hands. Mary then crossed the room to where Sarah was still seated, and was about to bend down to kiss her cheek, but she saw something in her sister-in-law's face which checked the impulse, and she merely offered her hand, which Sarah took with an attempt at languid dignity, not wholly successful.

"Did you get my letter, Cosmo?" were Mary's first words.

"No; I have had no letter from you lately."

"Ah! I feared it might cross you on the road. But I could not bear not to write."

"Why, did you know we were coming, then?" asked my lady, opening her eyes very wide.

"Yes; I knew it," returned Mary with a smile of amusement; for my lady's surprise and disappointment were so genuine that they caused her to drop the great lady air she had been trying to assume, with some suddenness.

"Dear me! I didn't know you were kept so well-informed of our movements, I'm sure. I suppose Miss Rosamond took care to let you know?"

"No ; not Rosamond. Cosmo, will you let me say a word to you in the study? Sarah will excuse us for a few minutes."

"Well, upon my word, I do *not* think that very polite!" burst out Sarah, with a red, angry face. "I should have thought you could have had no secrets to tell Cosmo that I might not hear. I don't think it polite, nor well-bred, I assure you."

"I am sorry for that," answered Mary, quietly. "Still, I must beg Cosmo to allow me to speak with him alone for a few moments."

Mary had entered the room prepared to speak to her brother and his wife with full and friendly confidence. But an instant had sufficed to show her the spirit they had come in, and she did not choose to risk Sarah's comments on the news of her engagement, in Sarah's present mood. It was rather an instinct than a train of reasoning which made her perceive that she would meet with no sympathy from either of the two ; but at least with her brother she thought she should be safe from coarseness or offence.

Cosmo stood looking neither at his wife nor at his sister, but straight before him into the fire. Presently he said, with a sniff at

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the end of each sentence, "I hope there are no mysteries. There's nothing more worrying than a mystery. Nor stupider. Everybody knows all about 'em. Or, if they don't know the particulars, they invent 'em. Better speak out, I should think."

The truth was that Cosmo was afraid to be alone with his sister. He shrank with the cowardice of a guilty conscience from meeting her clear eye, and replying to her clear speech, unsupported by Sarah's presence. He had not in his inmost heart ever thought evil of his sister, but he had heard evil attributed to her without defending her, he had acted and spoken as though he distrusted her, and even whilst he secretly resented and hated his wife's suspicions, he had allowed himself to appear to share them so far that it was impossible to draw back now, and profess his full confidence in Mary's goodness and honour. But, on the other hand, although he doubted not that she had come by it honestly, he grudged her the property left her by Sir Rupert, and would fain have possessed it himself. He had even come to deem it a cruel injury that he did not possess it. Altogether he was ill at ease in his sister's presence, and if he was obliged to confront

her, felt himself better able to do so when his wife was there too than under any other circumstances. Nor were these the only occasions in which Sarah had served at once as an excuse and a shield for him. When she made some speech peculiarly offensive to good taste, or good feeling, people said, "How that woman must make her husband wince! With all his faults, he *was* bred up a gentleman after all." But although it might be true that Sarah's speeches sometimes made him wince, yet he did not disdain to profit by them. He would fain have profited by them now, but my lady, having had time to recover from the first movement of temper, reflected that it would not do so to quarrel with Mary as to shut themselves out from Lowry Place before they had accomplished the object for which they had come—namely, a thorough, personal search through Sir Rupert's papers for the missing will. So she said, with an air of virtuous superiority, "I'm sure, Cosmo, I don't wish to be a cause of dissension between you and your sister. If you hesitate out of any feeling for me, you need not do so. I may have been hurt for the moment, but, of course, I don't really mean to say that Mary has not a right

to speak to you privately if she likes. I know my own position and my own duties, and I bear no malice to any one."

After this Cosmo felt he must follow Mary to the study, and hear what she had to say. Very briefly and directly she told him that she had promised to marry Major Maude.

Cosmo remained silent, with downcast eyes, for a little while. He had not seated himself, but was leaning with his shoulder against the mantelpiece, and his hands thrust into his pockets, in an attitude which was customary with him. After a few seconds he raised his eyes—they looked very haggard and sunken under the black bushy eyebrows—and said, "Well, is that all you have to say? This is not to be kept secret, is it?"

"No, Cosmo; my motive in asking to tell it you alone was to make it clearly understood, without offence to your wife, that I can receive no one in my house who does not choose to treat Vincent with respect and civility. I say this because I observed, before leaving London, that Sarah had taken a disagreeable tone in speaking of him. Why, I cannot tell,—nor, possibly, can she. All my wish was, and is, to be on terms of peace and good-will with you and your wife. Once

I hoped for something more,—for affection and confidence; but I have failed to win those from you, Cosmo.”

The words and the tone touched him with a sharp pang of remorse; but he answered with a frown and a shrug, “I can’t talk sentiment.”

A flush dyed Mary’s cheek for a moment; but she went on quietly, “Vincent is here now. He is ready to meet you in a friendly spirit, if you will let him.”

“He’s extremely kind.”

“Had there been time, I should have asked you and Sarah to accept the hospitality of Lowry Place; but I was only told of your intention of coming to Elcaster the day before yesterday. However, it may still not be too late. If you will come and occupy your old quarters—I mean the rooms which you and Sarah had last August—you shall be welcome.”

This offer was a tempting one; but Cosmo felt ashamed to accept it. On the one hand was the discomfort of living at the Elcaster inn, with the vision of a long bill at the end of the vista; but, on the other, there was something in the idea of accepting Mary’s hospitality when they were cherishing such feelings and projects as had brought them

to that part of the world, which even Cosmo felt to be humiliating in its meanness. "Oh, I don't know," he muttered; "we didn't intend. You must speak to Sarah about it."

"Very well. And now, Cosmo, if you think you can undertake for your wife that there shall be no semblance of discourtesy shown to him, I will ask Vincent to meet you both."

"I don't quite understand what it is you're afraid of," said Cosmo with a sneer.

"Rudeness," answered Mary curtly.

"Oh, well, Sarah is not a Grandison in petticoats; but I don't suppose she wants to be specially rude to Major Maude."

Mary accepted this as a promise that Sarah would not attack Maude, and, bowing her head, was about to leave the room, when, having just reached the door, she turned, and with a warm impulse went back to her brother and placed her hands on his shoulders. "Cosmo," she said, "if there has been any estrangement between us, it has not been my doing. I do so want to love you, if you will let me! Won't you say one kind word about Vincent? He was a staunch friend to you in the old times. And—and I am so happy now, Cosmo! Do you know, I have loved him all these years!"

Cosmo shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and drew his brows together, and twitched his nostrils. Then he said, "I don't know what I can say, Mary. You are your own mistress, of course. I don't know that there is any personal objection to Maude; but of course, if you ask my opinion, I must say that he is scarcely the kind of match for Miss Lowry of Lowry. I doubt whether he could tell you who his grandfather was."

And with that Sir Cosmo Lowry shuffled out of the room, and went to carry the news to my lady.



## CHAPTER XIV.

“OF course we shall stay here, Cosmo,” said my lady when her husband told her of Mary’s invitation. “I’m afraid it may be too late to do any good;—it *may*, but at least we will not throw away a chance. Besides, it looks much better for us to be staying at Lowry.”

On the subject of Mary’s engagement, my lady did not waste many words. She was vexed, of course; for, if Mary did not give up to her brother the property she had inherited, the next best thing she could do would be to live and die an old maid, and provide for her brother’s children. However, there was still the hope, if the spirits spoke truly, that Mary’s marriage might turn out to be a very insignificant matter after all—at all events, to Lady Lowry!

“Mary has got it into her head that you are likely to bully Maude. If you mean to

stay here, you'd better not try that," said Sir Cosmo.

"I trust, Cosmo, that I know how to conduct myself as becomes my station. If poor Mary has any little feeling of soreness or jealousy about Major Maude's former very marked admiration for me, her mind will soon be set at rest when she sees us together."

"Yes; there's small doubt of that, I should say. *You!* Lord bless you, you foolish woman, he won't be conscious of your existence when Mary's by!" Then with sudden fierceness, "Devil take the snob! what does she see in him? A fellow of no birth at all! I don't know where he first found the cursed impudence to lift his eyes to Miss Lowry of Lowry! My father wouldn't stand it;—kicked him out as soon as he found what he was after. And there I go with my father. We agreed on that point, at all events."

Then the husband and wife went down to the library; where they had been told that Miss Lowry would await them.

Mary was there, and Major Maude was there, and Mrs. Flint was there, comfortably established with her wool-work—"Lolling back in an easy chair as if she lived there!" as my lady indignantly put it. Maude came

forward, and offered his hand, and said a few words very quietly, to which Sir Cosmo made a response half surly, half embarrassed, and my lady one wholly condescending, and marked by a certain cow-like dignity all her own.

Maude bore his new honours meekly enough, but to the massive simplicity of his ordinary manner there was added now a protecting attitude towards Mary, which was at once proud and tender. He had taken his place by her side with manful frankness, and very clearly meant to keep it against all comers. There was no trace in his demeanour of a consciousness that Mary was an heiress with a heavy purse and a long pedigree; nor the smallest symptom of an intention to be apologetic towards her family for any shortcomings in those respects on his own part. His extreme gentleness was so evidently the result of strength and kindliness, that none but a fool would have been tempted to presume upon it. Sir Cosmo was not a fool; and on the whole he found that it was much easier to indulge in scornful sarcasms behind Major Maude's back, than to treat Major Maude disrespectfully to his face.

Between Mrs. Flint and my lady there ensued a greeting which might, perhaps, be

characterized as "offensive and defensive." But to Sir Cosmo, Mrs. Flint held out her hand, and spoke with some eagerness. "Good gracious, and is this really, really, Cosmo Lowry?" she said. "You know I didn't see you when I was in town. I haven't set eyes on you since—oh, ages ago! Not since your coming of age, I believe."

"Ah! And I'm so wonderfully improved since then, that you wouldn't have known me, I dare say," answered Cosmo drily.

"Oh yes, I should. Time changes us all, of course. But I should have known the Lowry brows and eyes anywhere."

Mrs. Flint, seeing no reason why she should be otherwise than familiar and unconstrained with her old acquaintance, Cosmo, began to chat with him about all sorts of incidents and people belonging to old times, and thus put Sir Cosmo more at his ease than he had yet been since he entered the house. He had neither memories of the past, nor intentions for the future, to make him shy or sullen with Mrs. Flint. She had no unfulfilled claim on his gratitude to trouble his conscience, and she had as exalted an estimate of the grandeur of his genealogy as could be desired even by a Lowry of Lowry who had married a farmer's

daughter. In a word, Mrs. Flint's presence and conversation had so happy an effect on Sir Cosmo that he was seen to smile without drawing down the corners of his mouth, and began to crack one or two dry, satiric jokes at the expense of sundry dead and gone Clevenal worthies who had flourished in his boyhood.

It thus devolved on Mary and Major Maude to entertain my lady. But the task was by no means an easy one. "You little expected to see me here, Major Maude," said Sarah, after a brief space.

"Well, to say the truth, I did expect to see you here, Lady Lowry," answered Maude, smiling a little, "having happened to learn that you were coming to Elcaster from Rosamond, and the fact is I believe your statement ought to be reversed; for you certainly did not expect to see me here."

"Oh, I am not so blind as all that, Major Maude, I assure you!" answered Sarah, with a little toss of her head, intended to be arch. "I saw what was going on long ago."

Neither Mary nor Vincent feeling inclined to discuss the question of my lady's acuteness and perspicacity, there followed another interval of silence. It seemed to oppress my

lady much less than it did the other two, for she was evidently revolving something in her mind, and giving all her attention to it without regard to the rest of the company. At length she said, "Cosmo has mentioned that you wish us to stay here for the few days we shall remain in these parts. Well, I frankly tell you that I shall much prefer being here to staying at that hotel in Elcaster. I make no secret of it, Mary."

"Why should you?"

"No; of course, it is only natural. I am not at all easy about your brother's health. Oh, well, if you ask me what distinct disease he has, I can't tell you. But people may be ailing without a disease that you can give a name to. Don't you notice how bad Cosmo looks?"

"He is very thin, and looks worn and tired," answered Mary; "but he does not complain of feeling ill, does he?"

"No; oh no; he does not complain. But as to thinness, he's a skeleton! I know what it is—harass, all harass. Harass tells on him, and he shows it. Now with me, although I feel things on my nerves to a degree no words can express, I don't betray it in my face. Dr. Possetter says he never did see such a com-

plexion as mine. Some people with one quarter of my anxieties would be lead-coloured by this time!"

"What is it that so harasses Cosmo?" asked Mary, innocently.

My lady pursed up her mouth, and shook her head. "I should have had a great many things to say to you if I had found you alone—or at least only with Major Maude," she added, mindful of her husband's hint. "I suppose we must look upon him as one of the family now. But, of course, before strangers, who are neither kith nor kin, nor even connections by marriage, one can't talk." And as she said this, my lady directed a look of elaborate significance at Mrs. Flint, who was chatting away with Sir Cosmo very unconcernedly.

"There will not be the least difficulty in your saying anything you may wish to say to me," replied Mary gravely.

There appeared to be no difficulty, in truth; for Sarah, drawing near to her sister-in-law, proceeded then and there to pour forth a statement of how the revelation of the missing will had preyed on Cosmo's mind ever since he had heard it; how Mr. Quickit's positive testimony that the document was still in exist-

ence when Sir Rupert left his house for the last time had taken hold of Cosmo and haunted him by night and by day; how this was all very natural, and even laudable, inasmuch as Sir Rupert, let what would have happened to estrange them, was yet Cosmo's own father, and the last will and testament of a parent had peculiarly sacred claims on the observance of his children; how, although no doubt there had been search amongst Sir Rupert's papers, still in a big house like Lowry Place things did get poked away in holes and corners, and wills were known (according to my lady) to have a mysterious and inexplicable affinity for holes and corners above all other species of written documents; and finally how, in the anxious condition of Cosmo's mind, and the unsatisfactory state of his bodily health, she (Sarah) had deemed it her duty to bring him to Lowry Place, and amicably arrange with his sister to have a thorough search made throughout the house under his own eyes. "And having made up my mind what my duty was," said my lady in conclusion, "I at once proceeded to do it. I have always made it a rule through life to do my duty, and I trust I shall never shrink from it."

"That is why you have come to Elcaster,



then?" said Mary. "I told my brother, and wrote to him, that I should be willing to let him look over all the papers in the house if he thought it worth while. But it will be in vain. Mr. Flint is convinced that my father left no other will than the one in his office."

"Oh, Mr. Flint——" my lady checked herself, and rising from her seat asked her husband if it were not time for them to be returning to Elcaster. They were to go back to the inn and make arrangements for coming to Lowry Place that same evening to dine and sleep. Mary begged that Rosamond might be allowed to come to her immediately. "I am longing to see the dear child," she said, "and she will be of no assistance to you, I suppose, during these few hours?" My lady declared that Rosamond's assistance was certainly not needed, inasmuch as there was more, not to mention that invaluable creature, Lobley, ready to do her ladyship's behests. So Major Maude undertook to drive the ponies into Elcaster and bring back Rosamond at once. And as this arrangement suited Sarah very well, for she was well pleased to get rid of her step-daughter whilst she discussed matters privately with Cosmo,

she gave a gracious consent to it, and Maude went off at once to the stables to give orders for the getting ready of the basket-phaeton and the ponies.

“Good-bye, for the present,” said Mrs. Flint to the baronet. And when they were in the carriage on their way back to Elcaster, the first thing Sarah said was, “What did that Mrs. Flint mean by saying ‘Good-bye for the present?’” Is *she* to be there this evening?”

“Yes; and her husband, too.”

“To dinner?”

“Well, I suppose when they’re there, Mary will give them dinner. What do you mean?”

“I consider it *shameful*!”

“What’s the matter now? Haven’t you got your own way about getting into Lowry Place? Ain’t you contented? You won’t have to pay for the Flints’ dinner.”

“You know what I mean, Cosmo. Those Flints are evidently regularly hanging on to Mary, and poking themselves into the house as if they belonged to the family. I’ve no confidence in your Mr. Flint, I can tell you. He’s had pretty pickings already, no doubt, out of the property. Mary believes in him blindly—or it suits her to seem to! And

now they're flattering her up about Major Maude and her engagement, just to keep a hold on her. I dare say if she'd wanted to marry the baker or the butcher out of the village they'd have said it was all right."

Then Sir Cosmo made a very cruel rejoinder. "I don't quite think that, Sally," said he," for I believe Mrs. Flint considered it a terrible business, and mourned in sack-cloth and ashes when she heard of *my* marriage. And your father isn't a village butcher or baker, after all."

Major Maude and the ponies had made such good speed that he was ready to start with Rosamond on his way back to Clevelenaby the time the "George" fly and its sober-paced steeds drew up at the door of the inn. Rosamond was in a glow of delight and excitement as she sprang into the phaeton.

"Rosamond!" exclaimed my lady, "you have not even changed your dress! Are you going in that morning frock? Where is Moore? Pray do not be so wild!"

"Oh, Aunt Mary won't mind my frock, and I can't help being wild—wild with joy! Go along, little ponies!" And the phaeton clattered along up the High Street at a brisk pace, and was soon lost to view.

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My lady displayed so much haughty dissatisfaction with everything that had been done for her by the people at the "George Hotel," and Sir Cosmo snarled and scolded so mercilessly over every item of the bill presented to him by the head waiter, that that functionary, and the landlord, and the chambermaid (who had been aggrieved by Miss Moore's second-hand arrogance), and, in a word, all the household of the inn, saw the departure of their high and mighty guests not only without regret, but with decided satisfaction. "The new baronet's as big a skinflint as the old one, by what I can see," said the old head waiter to his master, as they stood together at the door watching the fly laden with luggage make its second departure that day for Clevelenel. The landlord shook his head contemptuously. "Sir Rupert was a close-fisted 'un, sure enough," said he, "but you knew where to have him. He didn't expect three penn'orth for twopence, and a low bow into the bargain. And if Sir Rupert warn't pleased, he'd rap out an oath, and let you know it straightforward. This 'un's all sneering and sniggering, and making fun of you in a crabby, cold-blooded kind of a way. What I call a bitter weed, *he is*."

Sir Cosmo was, of course, unconscious of

these comments ; but yet he had a sense on him, as he left the house, that he had not made a good figure there, and that the people were glad to be rid of him. He had always had a tendency to be fretful and suspicious as to what was said of him. And the fretfulness and suspicion had portentously increased of late. "Set of thieves, those fellows are!" he muttered. "Never saw such a bill! It would serve that man Packer right to publish it to the county."

"Now, Cosmo," said my lady, who kept all the vigour of her mind inflexibly bent on the one point, "here we are in the drive, and before we go into your sister's house I want to say a word. Believe or not believe what the spirits say, we've come down to Clevenal, and had all this trouble and expense in consequence of what they've told us, haven't we? Well, now we are here, don't let there be any shilly-shally. We've come to look for your father's will, and I mean to look thoroughly. It's a—*a religious duty*, Cosmo;—not to speak of the money we've advanced to Flagge! And I hope you intend to back me up in doing my duty, for do it I shall, in spite of fifty thousand Flints; and I know my own position, and despise people like them; and as to mourning

over your marrying me, that low-minded old woman in her black wig should have cause to mourn it, if I had my way, and so I tell you, Cosmo. There! ”

## CHAPTER XV.

THERE was no time before dinner for any conversation between my lady and the other members of the party assembled at Lowry Place. She went at once to her dressing-room on her arrival, and only descended from it a minute or so before James announced dinner. The meal passed off very well, despite the incongruous elements of which the company was composed. Neither my lady's stolidity nor Sir Cosmo's sneers could avail to eclipse the gaiety of the others. Mr. and Mrs. Flint were delighted with Rosamond, in whom the latter kept discovering innumerable traits of her grandmother, Mary Hovenden. Rosy, for her part, was as joyous as a warm-hearted young creature could be, who from an atmosphere of gloom, depression, and coldness found herself transported into the midst of cheerfulness, affection, and cordial, smiling faces. As for the two lovers, they were so obviously and unaffectedly happy as to excite

my lady's displeasure. "I never saw anything like those two!" she observed to her husband, later. "And I don't think it's becoming."

"What is it has that shocked your fine taste, Sally?"

"Oh, it's no good talking like that, Cosmo. No one could help noticing it. Why, every time they look at each other their faces regularly beam again. I *do* think it looks so silly!"

However, my lady's silent and majestic disapprobation did not, as has been said, cast any shadow over the "beams" which she so much objected to. Possibly, indeed, her disapprobation passed unobserved; for Sarah's countenance was not very flexible or changeful, and even had the rest of the party been watching it closely, it is possible they might have failed to perceive anything more than the usual expression of stolidity in the round blue eyes and pulpy red mouth.

In the course of the evening, Percy Wigmore made his appearance in the drawing-room of Lowry Place. He and his wife had only arrived at Elcaster House the previous morning, and already he had left a card on Miss Lowry, and one for Major Maude at the inn in Clevenal, where the latter was now



staying. Mary had mentioned this when the ladies were alone in the drawing-room after dinner, and my lady had observed, in reply, that the Wigmores had been chiefly induced to accept Lady Elcaster's very pressing and often-repeated invitation by the fact that she (Sarah) intended to visit the neighbourhood about that time.

"I find that he and Rosy have struck up a great friendship since I left London," said Mary, smilingly, to my lady.

"I don't know about a great friendship, but I trust and hope that Rosamond has learned to appreciate Mr. Wigmore better than she did."

"Yes, I have," put in Rosamond, who had heard what was being said,—as, indeed, my lady intended she should. "I believe Mr. Wigmore is really kind-hearted; and he isn't a bit of a hypocrite. He may not be very clever, but he is ever so much better and nicer than his wife."

"Rosamond!" exclaimed my lady, reprov-  
ingly. Then turning to Mary, she said, "You have no idea how good Mrs. Wigmore was to Rosamond;—taking her out to drive, and to the Botanical Gardens, and behaving altogether in the kindest way. But Rosamond, I am sorry to say, is *not* of a grateful disposi-

tion. For, as I told her, even although we know that Mrs. Wigmore only took notice of her for my sake, still she ought to feel some sense of obligation. But I believe she positively dislikes Mrs. Wigmore."

"She doesn't speak the truth," pleaded Rosamond. "And you cannot like people when you find them out in being false!"

It was as this juncture that Percival came in, and deprived the company of my lady's comments on this dictum of her step-daughter.

"Good evenin', Miss Lowry," said he, advancing jauntily, but with a distinctly perceptible shade of hesitation. He was a little in awe of Mary, and not at all certain what sort of a reception she would accord to him. However, she speedily set him at his ease, and he greeted Mrs. Flint and Rosamond, and, last not least, my lady, with all his own youthfulness and gaiety of demeanour.

"I don't know whether a cigar has any temptation for you, Mr. Wigmore," said Mary, "but I believe there is something of the sort going on in the dining-room, where my brother is."

"Oh no, thank ye, Miss Lowry. I don't care much about smokin'. I'd rather stay here, if I may."

"The gentlemen will be here directly, I think."

"Oh, never mind them, thank ye. I much prefer ladies' society."

"You are a man of taste, Mr. Wigmore," said Mrs. Flint.

"Oh yes; men are so stoopid, sometimes, don't you know? At least, some men. I don't mean your brother, you know, of course, Miss Lowry. But there's Elcaster, now. He is awfully stoopid, unless you get him on bettin' and things of that sort. Now I know nothing on earth about racehorses, and I get flounderin' about out of my depth directly."

"How *are* the Elcasters?" demanded my lady, with a peculiar air of shutting out the others from this topic, and as if "the Elcasters" constituted a private conversational preserve for herself and Wigmore, on which no poaching could be permitted by the unauthorized.

"Oh, they're all right. At least, the Countess is all right. Elcaster's rather seedy, and awfully cross."

"I wonder they consented to spare you this evening!" said Sarah, archly. "What did they say to your running away?"

"Oh, I can't help what they say, you know.

I don't feel myself bound to play politeness with Elcaster. And as to the old lady, she don't want *me*, and she only wants Alexandrina to get all the gossip and scandal she can out of her. She always snubs me, in point of fact, because I won't kotow to her. No, I told Alexandrina fairly before we came. I said, 'Now, look here, I'm goin' to please you, and you're goin' to please Lady Elcaster. But if I find it too disgustin' I shall slope, like a shot.' Why should I stand Elcaster's nonsense? That house is the deadly-liveliest den in the kingdom. What with the Countess's airs, and Elcaster growlin' at the servants, and the dinner, and the doctor, and everything, I really could not stand it. So I thought I'd just look in here, don't you know, for half an hour, if Miss Lowry won't turn me out."

Miss Lowry certainly was rather amused than offended by this ingenuous statement of the reasons which procured her the honour of Mr. Percival Wigmore's visit. Not so, my lady. She felt it to be very hard that such humiliating candour should have been heard by Mrs. Flint, whom she now looked on as her declared enemy. She had boasted about her dear aristocratic friends the Wigmores,

and of *their* dear aristocratic friends the Earl and Countess of Elcaster, and now came in that blundering Percy, and talked of them as if they had been the commonest of mortals. Nay, what was worse, he owned that Lady Elcaster was in the habit of snubbing him. It was altogether provoking and mortifying, and my lady turned sulky on the spot. In truth, her annoyance was superfluous, for Mrs. Flint had understood the whole situation perfectly well before Percy's indiscreet revelations, and had not the slightest idea of triumphing over Lady Lowry in consequence of them. But Sarah's mortifications were not yet at an end. To her surprise and disgust Mrs. Flint began conversing with Percy about "the Elcasters" in a most familiar strain; commenting on the old Countess's *hauteur*, and her son's character and pursuits, and on the disagreements between mother and son, and the mixture of meanness and extravagance in my lord's doings, as matters perfectly well known to her. It must be confessed that Mrs. Flint's judgment of Basil, Earl of Elcaster, had become much more clear-sighted since she had given up all idea of seeing Mary Lowry his Countess. Then presently it appeared that Lady Elcaster had been in the

habit of coming to see Mary frequently of late, and that she had spoken of her to Wigmore in the highest terms.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Flint to Maude, who had by this time come into the drawing-room with the other men, "it wasn't the Countess's fault if you were not sent about your business, sir!"

"What had I done to merit her ladyship's displeasure?" asked Maude, looking across with an amused smile at Mary. But Mary blushed and shook her head. "Nonsense, Vincent," she said, "Mrs. Flint is pleased to laugh at us."

Lady Lowry broke her sullen silence at this point, to inquire rather eagerly what it was that Lady Elcaster had said "against Major Maude."

"It would have done credit to her ladyship's powers of invention if she had said anything either for or against me," said Maude, "for I believe she was until yesterday quite unconscious of my existence."

"Oh, I don't mean that she hated you individually, Major Maude. But she had made up her mind that somebody would be a very nice daughter-in-law, and she didn't want you or any one else to carry off somebody from under her nose."

Lady Lowry was astounded, angry—and incredulous. Therefore, instead of letting the matter drop, as Mary evidently wished, she pressed question after question with so much coarseness and spite, that at length Mrs. Flint said plainly, “Now, it’s no use your shaking your head and looking so indignant, Mary. Your sister-in-law does not understand the matter at all, and will think Heaven knows what unless I undertake to speak to the point without hint or innuendo. What I meant by my little joke, Lady Lowry, was simply that the Countess of Elcaster showed an undisguised wish that her son should marry Miss Lowry——”

“Mrs. Flint!” exclaimed Mary.

“My dear, I don’t think there’s any harm in saying that! It is the fact! I believe Lady Elcaster wouldn’t deny it.”

“Oh no, upon my word, she wouldn’t,” said Wigmore, after his usual boyishly ingenuous fashion. “She almost said as much this evenin’ at dinner. She said Miss Lowry was—well, I won’t, then!” and Percy pulled himself up abruptly, in obedience to Mary’s grave protest, “Mr. Wigmore, I beg you will say no more.”

My lady sat dumb, with flaming cheeks.

Mary had refused to be a Countess, then? The thing was incredible. Cosmo, too, listened with feelings of almost equal bitterness, though from a different cause. Mary had had this chance—had had a coronet at her feet, and had kicked it away for the sake of a fellow like Vincent Maude. Mr. Flint, who read both their minds pretty keenly, changed the subject by a *coup de main*. “What’s the latest news from spirit-land, Mr. Wigmore?” said he. “I hear you are quite an adept, and the last time I spoke with Lady Elcaster she said something about wanting to investigate spiritism. Now, when people like Lady Elcaster talk about wanting to investigate, one has a pretty shrewd notion what that means. But,” looking round with a cool, clear eye, “I must be careful what I say in the present company. I understand your ladyship is a believer, eh?”

Her ladyship was still struggling with the idea so suddenly presented to her mind that Mary might have been a Countess, and wouldn’t; and as her ladyship’s intelligence, however solid, was certainly not mercurial, her ladyship stared helplessly at Mr. Flint, as if he had addressed her in an unknown tongue. Sir Cosmo was half inclined to resent Mr.



Flint's bold mention of the spirits as an impertinence under all the circumstances. But, inasmuch as he had openly pooh-pooh'd the spirit theory himself, he felt that there would be a certain absurdity in running a-muck on its behalf against Mr. Flint—not to mention that Mr. Flint was an enemy whom Sir Cosmo would rather attack in any imaginable manner than an open manner, upon any possible subject. So there was a pause, which would have become embarrassing but for the buoyant and unquenchable Percy, who rushed gallantly into the breach. "I shall end by adoring that smiling little wax doll of a man," said Mrs. Flint to herself.

"Oh, look here," said Percy, "I can give you the very latest intelligence. Jove, it's quite a curious coincidence your sayin' that now, Mr. Flint! Fact is, I'm givin' up spiritism myself. I don't like goin' in for these things to the extent of—of——"

"Really believing in them?" suggested Mr. Flint, with grave politeness.

"Well, I mean—makin' 'em a noosance, don't you know? It makes all the difference how you take things. Now with the Dableys and old Banbury St. Cross, and all that sort of thing, there was no chance of gettin' into

a scrape, don't you know? But, by Jove, some people go in for it to such a degree that you may have a bear loose in no time—'specially in families. Because, of course, if there is a row it's sure to be your own people that pitch into you the hottest, don't you know?"

And with this, Percy smiled round on the assembled company, apparently quite undismayed by his own somewhat depressing theory of the laws that govern domestic relations.

With the exception of Lady Lowry, every one present winced more or less perceptibly at this unlucky speech. But Sarah was equal to herself and to the occasion. Drawing herself up with dignity, and opening her eyes to their fullest extent, she began a sort of monologue with these solemn words: "*I think it's wicked to talk against the spirits.*"

There was nothing to be done but to listen in silence. Sir Cosmo, with a heavy frown on his face, and his shoulders hunched up to his ears, retreated behind a large book of engravings which lay on the centre table, and made as if he were absorbed in their contemplation. But to the others no such refuge was open, and they had to endure the cold douche of my lady's eloquence with what

fortitude they might. At length—apparently for no other reason than the general law which decrees that no sublunary thing shall go on for ever—Sarah's harangue came to an end. And then Mr. Flint, turning to Wigmore, said, "Well, and what is your latest intelligence?"

The latest intelligence was, it appeared, that Lady Elcaster, excited by Mrs. Wigmore's account of the wonders of spiritism, had sent to London for Dr. Flagge the medium, and that he was expected to arrive at Elcaster House shortly.

"Sent for him!" cried Mrs. Flint.

"Invited him to stay at Clevelen for a few days, don't you know? Of course, she'll pay him. And if she didn't, it would be worth Flagge's while to go to Lady Elcaster. She's quite bitten with the thing. I believe she fancied it might help to amuse Elcaster, but he don't seem to take to the notion. He says if the spirits will name the winner of the next Derby he'll believe in 'em. However, the old Countess is goin' to have Flagge. I shall keep out of it. I told Lady Elcaster so. I said, 'Look here, Lady Elcaster, I know something about the spirits, and I've seen a good deal of 'em, and they're all very well

up to a certain point; but when people go plungin' in over head and ears, and believin' all their gammon, don't you know, something disagreeable is safe to turn up—safe as the day,' and so it is."

Soon after this Percy took his leave, and Maude accompanied him. And then Mr. and Mrs. Flint went away, leaving the Lowry family together under their old roof-tree.

The next day my lady began her search in earnest, and on a methodical plan which she had already arranged in her own mind, and to which Mary made no objection. This plan was to take the house in horizontal sections, beginning at the garret, and working down to the basement story. To the remark that no documents of any consequence were ever deposited in the upper regions inhabited by the servants, and that all the papers and letters belonging to Sir Rupert would be certainly found distributed amongst three rooms: namely, his own bedchamber, the library, and the little study, on the ground floor, Lady Lowry replied that as to those latter places they had already been searched; that in order to do things thoroughly her plan was the best, and that if the search throughout the rest of the house proved unsuccessful,

they could but make one more, and final, attempt to find the missing will, by carefully sifting again all the papers which had already passed through Mary's and Mr. Flint's hands.

The mode of proceeding was as follows: my lady had a comfortable, well-cushioned easy chair, a footstool, and such warm wraps and shawls as she thought needful, carried into the room—attic, or store-room, or whatever it might be,—which she had decided to make the scene of the day's operations. There she installed herself as comfortably as circumstances would admit of, and set her aides-de-camp to work to bring her everything in the shape of a written paper which they could lay their hands on, and which she then examined for herself. The aides-de-camp varied occasionally with circumstances. Sometimes a lad would be told off from the stables or gardens to carry the basketful of dusty yellow old papers to my lady's armchair, and to mount on step-ladders to high shelves or presses, and overhaul their contents. Sometimes a housemaid was spared to lend a hand. But let these subalterns change as they might, Miss Moore was always present at her mistress's elbow; and although at first she found prying and searching through other

people's property an agreeable excitement enough, in the dulness of a quiet country house, yet she soon became tired, complained of the dust and the cold, and exhibited symptoms of sulkiness to her mistress, and of rebellion and contempt in the servants' hall.

Indeed, to persist in such a task as my lady had undertaken required considerable force of will, and energy of perseverance; for although Sarah underwent very little, if any, bodily fatigue, still neither for her was it in itself an agreeable manner of spending the morning to sit in the cold garret in the winter time, and turn over heaps of worm-eaten papers which sent forth clouds of dust at every touch, and a musty smell as of the dead and gone years which lay embalmed, mummy-like, within their yellow folds. And it was amazing to see what masses of papers were dragged forth from long-forgotten hiding-places. Why or how most of them had been preserved was a mystery. There were old copy-books, old account books, old diaries, and memoranda of all sorts; heaps of letters,—to look at the quantity one would have imagined that all the Lowrys for generations past had been in the habit of hoarding every scrap of writing that came into their hands!—bills, family receipts,

and inventories of the contents of china and linen closets. One long-disused attic, which served as a store-place for odds and ends of furniture laid up in ordinary, as it were, was a mine of these old and utterly valueless documents: valueless, that is to say, to my lady. Some quaint and picturesque chapters of family history, and obsolete manners and customs, might have been pieced together out of those yellow papers with their faded ink. But not on such trivial objects was our Sarah's forcible will bent.

It very soon became evident that the task she had set herself would be a long one, if she continued to pursue it with the same thoroughness to the end. But after three successive mornings of hard work her perseverance showed no signs of wearing out. Sir Cosmo had—at her urgent and even imperative request—come up to see her on the second morning, when she was about half-way through the contents of a great oaken press in the disused attic before mentioned. My lady's pink and white complexion was disfigured by smears of dust; dust was in her pretty brown hair, and her white plump fingers were certainly dirtier than they had ever been since the days of her infancy, when she had made mud pies

or grubbed holes in the rich clay soil of her father's farm.

"Good Lord, Sarah, what a state you're in!" exclaimed her husband, looking at her very much as if she really were a naughty child, who had dirtied its pinafore. "It can't be necessary for you to steep yourself in grime in this fashion."

"As to being necessary, Cosmo," returned my lady, "I don't know. Some people don't think it necessary to do their duty. I do. I consider it my duty to my husband and my husband's child—perhaps your son and heir, Cosmo—to look after their interests, however disagreeable it may be to myself."

Moore had been sent away to her luncheon, and the husband and wife were alone together.

"But it's all nonsense, you know, poking about here. It's totally out of the question that Sir Rupert should have left his last will and testament up here! I don't suppose he ever was in this room since he was a school-boy."

"Never mind, Cosmo. I shall go on as I've begun. And then nobody can say afterwards that I didn't have a thorough routing out."

"But, good heavens, you'll be weeks about it, at this rate!"



“Never mind, Cosmo. It can’t be helped if I am.”

“H’m! I suppose you would consider it superfluous to inquire what Mary says to that?”

“She won’t turn us out, I suppose.”

However, acting on her husband’s hint, my lady did say something in the course of the day to the effect that she feared she should not be able to complete her investigations as quickly as she had at first hoped, and the visit of herself and her family to Lowry Place threatened to be protracted to weeks instead of days. “But I dare say you agree with me, Mary,” she said, “that it’s better for the satisfaction of all parties to do the thing thoroughly whilst we are about it.”

And so, day after day, Sarah sat and turned over piles of papers, whilst Sir Cosmo went over his estate, worried Mr. Stokes, and made himself detested by the majority of the tenants, who were all of the opinion of the landlord of the “George Inn,” that the new baronet was “a bitter weed.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

SIR COSMO LOWRY and his wife had arrived at Lowry Place on the sixteenth of January ; it was now the middle of the first week in February, and they were still there, and nothing had come of Sarah's obstinate search. That is to say, at least, she had not found what she sought for ; but, in other directions, several things had come of her search. In the first place a great deal of gossip had come of it, and a wonderful number of false statements : from the simple misapprehension of the ignorant and inaccurate to the lie direct and malignant. There was not a dwelling in Clevelen where my lady's proceedings were not eagerly canvassed. They were an exhaustless topic of talk alike in the labourers' cottages and the drawing-rooms of Elcaster House.

Mrs. Flint declared seriously to her husband that she thought the woman was mad. " She

has a monomania on the subject of Sir Rupert's will, Samuel," said Mrs. Flint. "All that detestable spirit business has turned her brain. One has heard of such things happening before now. All I wonder at is that Miss Lowry should allow it to go on; to think of having one's house ransacked in that way—and by that woman!"

But Mr. Flint would not give in to the theory of monomania. And as to Miss Lowry, he thought she was behaving admirably.

"Well, but, Samuel, you don't suppose for one instant that Sir Rupert was likely to have hidden away his will amongst the disused rubbish in the garret?"

"No, I can't say I suppose that."

"Of course not! No one who knew Sir Rupert could entertain so preposterous an idea. No sane man or woman could believe it. Lady Lowry has been told by all sorts of people who did know him well that such a proceeding on his part was utterly incredible and out of the question, and yet she goes on day after day—it's a case of monomania. That dreadful man Dr. Flagge—and why doctor? Only with people like that, if you begin with one 'why' you must go on with a hundred more—twists her round his finger; makes her

believe what he likes. *How* Lady Elcaster can harbour such a wild-looking creature, with his hair all about his shoulders, and that jacket with silver buttons like a dancing dog——!" &c., &c., &c.

In truth, Dr. Flagge's presence at Elcaster House had caused a sensation little inferior to that made by the story of Sir Rupert Lowry's missing will. Had not the Lowrys been Clevelen folks from father to son for hundreds of years, it may be asserted that Dr. Flagge and the spirits would have carried away the palm. But nothing could be so interesting and important in Clevelen as the private affairs of Clevelen magnates. Dr. Flagge, after all, was an outlandish personage, who had appeared to "overcome them like a summer cloud," and would in all likelihood disappear again in the same manner. As to his occult and magical wonders, public opinion amongst the villagers was greatly divided: some opining that Flagge performed tricks with balls and little red boxes such as they had seen at Elcaster fair; others inclining to the belief that it was more like fortune-telling; while some said that he showed ghosts on a white sheet in the dark by means of a magic-lantern. It had got about that there was

some connection between my lady's search for the will and "Dr. Flagge's spirits" as the Cleveland phrase had it, attributing to the eminent medium a sort of proprietorship in the troupe of disembodied ladies and gentlemen who were supposed to contribute to the amusement of the great people at Elcaster House.

To Mary Lowry and to Vincent Maude the neighbourhood of Dr. Flagge was the most disagreeable result of the whole matter; far more so than the presence and the active researches of Sarah. Maude honestly thought Flagge not only an unscrupulous, but a malicious fellow, and Mary was shocked and hurt at the idea of her father's name being used in the deceptions of this charlatan. Some account of what went on during the *séances* at Elcaster House reached her by one channel or another, and everything she heard of Dr. Flagge's spirit revelations served but to deepen her disgust for them and him. Almost immediately after his arrival at Elcaster House Sarah intimated that she wished to see and speak with him; and upon this Miss Lowry had quietly but firmly declared that she would on no pretext receive Dr. Flagge. This was a great blow to my lady, but Mary was inflex-

ible, and quite unmoved by representations that Flagge was admitted to the houses of the "aristocracy," and that it would "look so funny" if Miss Lowry openly set herself against a person patronized by the Countess of Elcaster. "Besides, I particularly want to speak to Dr. Flagge," said my lady, as if she thought that argument irresistible.

"I have no pretension to prevent your speaking with any one you think proper to receive. If Dr. Flagge comes here by your directions to see you, I will give orders that he shall be admitted to the drawing-room, where there will be no other person."

"But when can he come? All the morning I am occupied in the search. And I can assure you it is a fatiguing business, Mary! After luncheon I require a little rest. No one seems to consider that my strength requires to be kept up, particularly under present circumstances. The most convenient plan would be to have him here to dinner; or at all events in the evening, and then I could talk to him comfortably."

"I am sorry to disoblige you, Sarah, but I must positively refuse to admit that person among my guests."

"Really, Mary, you are dreadfully pre-

judiced. Any one would think to hear you that you knew nothing of the world."

"It is true that I know very little of Dr. Flagge's world;—and the glimpse I have had of it does not tempt me to know more."

"Well, I declare I had no idea you could be so obstinate."

Mary shook her head laughingly. "There never was a Lowry yet, I believe, who had not a spice of obstinacy," said she.

My lady had to give up the attempt to get Dr. Flagge invited to Lowry Place.

But this check, by reminding her of Flagge's last interview with her in London, suggested to her mind another proposition, which she proceeded to make, undaunted by her failure about Flagge, and not permitting dignity or resentment to prevent her making an attempt in a different direction. She began at once, driving straight to her point.

"I think it would be kind of you, Mary, to ask that poor little CEnone Balasso down here for a few days to see Rosamond."

Mary was considerably surprised at this proposition. Her sister-in-law had never shown any particular kindness to CEnone. My lady went on: "I am told that Mr. Balasso is anxious to get the girl taken up by people of

good position. She has no mother, and it would be a charity to help her out of that dreadful set of people she was living amongst; and Mr. Balasso is very well off—extremely well off—almost what you may call a rich man, so that really it would not look at all queer to take notice of the girl. Indeed, I think it would be quite a proper thing to do. I should have invited her to Green Street, I assure you, if I had been going to stay in town.”

“I did invite CEnone to come here, thinking that change, and rest, and country air, even in the winter, might be good for her. But she refused to come. She seemed almost to shrink from coming in a strange way.”

“Oh well, she always was strange. You musn’t think anything of that. I dare say she’s more agreeable in her manners now that she has better clothes, and all that.”

Mary asked her niece, as soon as she found an opportunity of doing so, whether she had seen CEnone recently, and whether she should like her to be invited to Lowry Place. To the first question Rosamond replied by relating the story of CEnone’s sudden departure from Green Street, and Lady Lowry’s consequent wrath against her. To the second,



she answered that she loved Nona dearly, and should rejoice to see her again, although Nona had seemed to wish to divide herself utterly from all the family.

“Well, so it appeared to me, I confess,” said Mary, more puzzled than ever as to the motive of her sister-in-law’s sudden tenderness for Ænone Balasso. However, my lady returned to the charge gallantly, and made it a personal request that Ænone should be invited to Lowry Place.

“I am more than willing to have the poor child, if you think it would be of any help or comfort to her to come here, but—the truth is, that I scarcely know where to put her.”

“Surely there must be space enough in this big house !”

“There is space, undoubtedly; but many rooms have been disused and dismantled for years.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what could be done. Rosamond’s room is a very large one; just have another bed put into it, and the two girls will do beautifully together.”

Mary could scarcely help laughing at the singular persistence of her sister-in-law. However, she was unwilling to refuse to invite Ænone, and consented to send her a note

asking her to come to Lowry Place the following week. "I think you will find that Enone will refuse," said she, when she had finished her note, and enclosed within it a few lines from Rosamond.

"Oh, no! If she were such a fool, her father knows better. I am told Mr. Balasso is a person of very proper feeling, who wishes to get into a nice set. What a mercy for the girl that her father turns out to be such a sensible man! He might have been a creature like that dreadful old Russian. One might have expected anything, I'm sure, to hear Miss Balasso's queer talk."

When Vincent Maude was told of the invitation he was so manifestly dissatisfied that Mary could not help perceiving it. "Do you dislike my having Enone here?" she asked. "In truth, Vincent, it was chiefly the thought that you were interested in her, and would like me to be kind to her, which turned the scale."

"No, dearest!—dislike you to have poor Nona! Certainly not. And your sweet goodness to her would make me love you more than I do, if that were possible. But—What has put this into Lady Lowry's head? She used to treat Nona anything but affect-

ionately. There never was such a woman! Her single-mindedness in pursuing her own way, and her shamelessness in disregarding the feelings of every one else, are almost sublime."

My lady despatched a note to Mr. Balasso by the same post which carried Mary's invitation to his daughter. She was minded to have all the credit to be got by patronising poor CEnone; and at the same time she gave Mr. Balasso a hint that to neglect or decline this invitation would be equivalent to losing her countenance for his daughter next season. "Well," she said to Flagge, the next time she saw him, "I have invited Miss Balasso here. And I hope it will be of some use. I suppose there's no fear of her refusing to be mesmerised? I have no idea of her giving herself airs, even though she may be comfortably off. If she comes to a house like this, I shall expect her to show some gratitude. I wish that to be clearly understood."

Flagge looked at my lady almost with admiration. He had never conceived the idea that Miss Lowry might be induced to invite CEnone to visit her. Then a sudden misgiving crossed his mind. "Nony has the peculiarities of a highly sensitive organiza-

tion," said he. "I don't feel sure she'll accept."

"Sensitive fiddlesticks! Don't talk nonsense, Dr. Flagge. If she takes any of her rhodomontading whims—that's what you really mean by sensitive organization!—her father will exert his common sense, I should hope. I took care to write to him also."

"Lady, I admire your energy and grasp of mind!"

"Ah, I can assure you it's all needed. Day after day I go on looking and searching and rummaging about amongst masses of paper until I'm fit to faint. But up to the present time I haven't come upon one scrap referring to Sir Rupert's last will and testament. The spirits keep on telling you that it was not destroyed, do they?"

"They testify to that effect. Yes, madam. But—that ain't altogether same thing as saying it's in this house, you know, lady."

Sarah turned pale. "Why, good gracious, Dr. Flagge," she exclaimed, "you don't mean that after I've rummaged through this house as no one but a wife who was determined to do her duty by her husband's family could or would have rummaged, that I may have to begin the search all over again? And where?"

Oh, it's too awful to think of!" And she clasped her hands with a despairing gesture that was quite genuine and unaffected.

"Well—I guess that if the document was not discovered in the course of your researches throughout the family mansion in which the deceased breathed his last—why,—you'd just have to give up," returned Flagge slowly.

It was the first word of discouragement—the first word, indeed, other than wholly encouraging—which she had heard from him on the subject, and it came upon her almost like a blow. But in an instant she rallied, and standing up said, "As long as I've breath in my body I won't give up until that will's found. The spirits have promised me that I shall find it. And—and you're not the only medium in the world! I've heard of a woman who can do wonderful things; read a letter put at the back of her head, and see what's going on a hundred miles off. Give up? Why, I do believe it would kill Sir Cosmo! He hasn't said much about it,—that is not Sir Cosmo's way,—but I know he has had scarcely anything but this missing will in his mind for months and months. It isn't of the least use for you to talk to me about giving up, Dr. Flagge, and so I tell you."

If Mrs. Flint could have seen and heard my lady at that moment, she would have been confirmed in her theory that Sarah was the victim of a monomania on the subject of her father-in-law's will.

Flagge, as he walked down the avenue and through Clevelen village, took a mental review of the situation. "After all," said he to himself, as he shrugged his shoulders and tossed the long hair aside from his forehead, "*that* game's pretty near played out, far's I'm concerned. Miss Lowry despises me; won't receive me into her house. I know all that very well, and I don't care a cent. about it. Only—if they do get Nony to come down here, I don't want to be banished from the sight of her. My poor little white lily! There's not one of 'em all understands her as I do. And as to caring for her—why I don't believe there's a human being on the face of the earth except poor Obadiah Flagge as would have a half an hour's heartache if she was to die to-morrow:—not even her father. And yet all these others can see her and be with her, and talk with her as much as they care to, whilst I have to scheme for a glimpse of her. It's an infernal foolish world,—and I dunno but I'm as big a fool as there is in it!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

ŒNONE and her father came down to Elcaster at once, on the receipt of Miss Lowry's invitation. Balasso brought his daughter to Lowry Place himself, and made many acknowledgments to Miss Lowry for her kindness. He took care to make her understand that he did not intend to encroach on her hospitality, and that two days would be the limit of Œnone's visit, inasmuch as he was about to take her abroad for the rest of the winter and the spring. She was not strong, and a few months in the South of Europe would set her up for the fatigues of the ensuing London season. They had, in fact, intended to start from Dover on that very day, but he was unwilling to deprive his little girl of the pleasure of this visit, and had therefore put off their departure for a few days. "I go back to town by the mail train to-night, Miss Lowry, and shall return to fetch my little girl

on Friday morning, if you will permit me," said Balasso as he took his leave.

Lady Lowry afterwards expressed her surprise that Mr. Balasso should think it worth while to run backwards and forwards between London and Elcaster, just for a couple of days. "He might have put up at the George. I've no doubt he would have done very comfortably there," said my lady; thereby conveying her sense of the difference between the sort of accommodation required for herself and Sir Cosmo, and that which would be good enough for Mr. Spiridion Balasso.

But Mary understood that Balasso had gone away from Elcaster in order to avoid any appearance of wishing to thrust himself on the Lowry family. He knew that it was one thing to be invited to an evening party in London, and quite another to be admitted to the small and intimate circle now frequenting Lowry Place. "I think Mr. Balasso has acted very discreetly," said Mary. Whereupon my lady opened her eyes very wide, but said no more.

This took place whilst Cenone was accompanying her father back into the hall to say "good-bye." She had hardly said a word as yet to the others.



"You're a good girl, Nona," said her father, pausing at the door to kiss her forehead. "And you will see how right I was to urge you to come here. I know best about such matters, little one."

"I have kept my part of the bargain; keep yours, papa. Take me away after two days. Take me across the sea!"

Balasso nodded, and patted her cheek, half kindly, half impatiently. "Good-bye, little white pigeon!" he said, waving his hand as he stepped into the hired carriage which had brought him from the Elcaster railway station, and was waiting to convey him back hither.

Enone stood for a little while at the open door, looking, not after her father, but straight out before her. As she turned to go into the house she encountered Vincent Maude face to face.

If she had seen some fierce and terrible wild creature instead of the kindly English gentleman who smiled down on her and held out his hand, she could scarcely have shrunk back with a more scared and startled face. "Are you here?" she said in a low breathless voice. "I did not know! I would not have come!" Then suddenly she ran back to the door and called "Papa! Come back, papa!"

But the carriage was already out of sight, as she looked down the long empty wintry avenue.

Maude came close up to her. "Nona," said he, "what is the matter, my child?"

"I did not know you were here," she answered, with the same scared look, and faint, breathless voice.

"And my sudden appearance startled you? I see."

She let this explanation pass, but did not confirm it by a word or a gesture.

"Enone," said Maude, looking down with tender compassion on her drooping eyelids and wan, dejected young face, "are you warmly dressed enough to take a turn with me for a few minutes, here on the gravel walk?"

"Yes."

"Come, then; I have something to say to you. It is a secret to most people as yet, but you and I are such old friends that I want to tell it to you myself."

She passively let him take her hand and place it on his arm, and paced along the shrubby path by his side.

"Now, Nona, what I want to tell you, is——"

"I know it," she said without looking up.

"You know it?"

"I know what you have to say. You are going to be married."

"Why, what a wonderfully keen-sighted little Nona!"

"You are going to marry Miss Lowry. You have loved her a long time. The instant I saw you here I knew how it was."

"Yes; you have guessed aright, Nona. I wanted to tell you this news myself, because I thought you liked me well enough to be pleased at hearing how happy I am. You are right, too, in saying that I have loved Mary a long time. I have loved her ever since I was a young subaltern;—and that's ages ago, Nona, for I am getting to be quite an old fellow; almost old enough to be your father."

She walked on beside him with a drooping head, and made no answer. But she understood him; she understood him well. Then he began to talk to her of her own fortunes, and the change in her life made by her father's arrival; of the pleasure she would have in foreign travel, now that she could see all the beautiful and artistic things of Southern Europe with means and leisure to enjoy them. He went on talking gently and cheerfully, not

seeming to expect a reply from her, but putting the bright side of her lot before her, until she gained self-command enough to look up and answer him.

“No doubt your father will take you to Athens, Nona?”

She shook her head. “No; I shall not go to Greece. Papa would take me there if I asked him; but I don’t want to go to Greece.”

“No? Why, how’s that, Nona?”

“I want to go away from here, and I made Papa promise to take me;—but not to Greece. I want to keep one thing to dream about. All the realities of life seem so different from what I fancied. I suppose I have been a fool, and ignorant, as my father says. I thought my birthright made me something superior to common people,—and I was only more foolish and ignorant than the rest of the world. But still—I don’t find my new wisdom such a very happy thing; and I don’t want to see Greece except in my dreams.”

She spoke in a sad, humble tone that went to Maude’s heart. Poor little Nona! But it was better to speak cheerfully to her, and without too much tenderness of sympathy. Even if she thought him a little hard,—better so! But he need not have feared, or fancied,

that the girl would misapprehend him. There was scarcely a movement of his mind with regard to her that she did not divine. When they came near to the house again, she said that she would go in. As they parted on the steps, she gave him her thin little hand, and said humbly, "Thank you for telling me yourself."

The change that had come over Ænone was noticed by all those who had known her in Green Street. There was something subdued and resigned about her whole manner. Never loquacious, she was now almost mute; and her great luminous eyes had a wistful, appealing look in them. Many a coarse-grained speech of Lady Lowry's, which she would fiercely have resented a year ago, she now let pass, if not meekly, at least in silence.

My lady marked this improvement in Miss Balasso's demeanour, and considered it to be a very unaccountable phenomenon. "There never was such a queer, contrary"—(I am obliged to confess that my lady said "contrairy")—"disposition as that girl's," she observed to Mary. "When she was a pauper, as one may say, there was nothing to come near her uppishness. And now that she really might have a right to consider herself

somebody,—did you notice her collar and cuffs? Real Valenciennes, every thread, and uncommonly fine, too!—she is as mild and meek as anything!”

Another peculiarity of Enone's manner was that she seemed to shrink from Mary Lowry. She avoided being alone with her, and even as much as possible speaking to her when others were present. And yet she would sit with her eyes fastened on Mary's face whenever she thought herself unobserved. And once when Mary happened to be out of the room, and my lady made some slighting remark about her to Wigmore, Enone suddenly flashed out: “Miss Lowry is above the little crawling thoughts of the world. Her face is like her soul; and both have a beauty too lofty to please the vulgar.”

Amazement and dismay sat on every face. “Upon my word!” said my lady. “Oh, I see you haven't quite given up all that nonsensical, high-flown kind of talk that Sir Cosmo warned you against.”

But Percy, who had positively gasped at Enone's sudden attack, as if she had flung a cupful of cold water in his face, now made a stout protest.

“Oh, come now, I say, Miss Balasso!

Jove! You ought not to come down like that, don't you know? I'm sure, as far as I am concerned,—although I do *not* go in for what you may call the 'lofty' style of thing;—never did, and never shall, and don't mind sayin' so fairly, you know,—still I have the most sincere admiration and respect for Miss Lowry. Hang it all, you know!"

"You speak your own praise in saying so," answered C'enone with perfect coolness and gravity.

So there was some touch of her old self left in her still. But my lady did not intend to allow C'enone Balasso's eccentricities, old or new, to divert her from the main object she had had in view in bringing the girl to Lowry Place. Indeed, my lady's purpose had grown into a devouring passion. She regarded all things and people either as means or hindrances to her end, and treated them accordingly. It was almost impossible to be in Lowry Place for half an hour without in some measure catching the infection. The search for the will seemed to draw the whole household into its vortex like a whirlpool. A feverish excitement ran through Lowry Place like an epidemic. My lady lost not an instant in arranging what she called "a little quiet

sayuns all to ourselves," in which she hoped Ceneone might be the means of obtaining important revelations from the deceased Sir Rupert. "Dr. Flagge is staying with our neighbours the Elcasters, — the Earl and Countess of Elcaster, you know; he will come over this afternoon before dinner if I send him a line. We can be quite undisturbed in my dressing-room. I want you to give me one more sayuns before you go," said my lady. Her tone was not quite so commanding as it would have been in Green Street; but still she showed plainly that she expected to be obeyed.

Ceneone was almost passive. She was perhaps the only person in the house who appeared to have escaped the prevailing agitation. Flagge said a word or two to her privately before what my lady called "the sayuns" began.

"I don't believe they're going to find this will, Nony. Your dream didn't prophesy true, after all."

"It does not matter much now," she answered, with a quiet air of abstraction.

"Why not *now*? I guess it never did matter very much to you or me. But why not now?"



"Do you not see that she is so happy that she cannot care much about inheriting more or less money, nor what poisoned tongues say of her? He will love her just the same!"

There was a fibre in Flagge,—unscrupulous adventurer though he was,—that responded to this romantic simplicity. He never thought of suspecting, still less of despising, it as her father had done. "I thought long ago as there was something not of this dirty earth about you, Nony," he said. And as he looked at her his eyes were moist. The emotion was genuine; but it did not prevent him from adding, "Well now, Nony, I reckon it's about time to play the last card. Lady Lowry has pretty nearly ransacked this house all she can. I shall tell her to-day to look in the walnut desk once more, on Sir Rupert Lowry's authority. You won't mind that?"

"They have searched it, you say, already?"

"Miss Lowry and that old lawyer have searched it, of course. It was the first place they'd look in. And I guess if 'twas there Mr. Flint would have found the will. He's a smart man."

The fact was that Flagge had already discounted CEnone's dream to a great extent, although he had not mentioned her name in

the matter. He had represented to my lady (with what flights of fancy and strength of colouring he judged best calculated to impress his auditor) that Sir Rupert had appeared to him (Flagge) in a vision, and had desired that a minute search should be made in Lowry Place: promising, if his behest were complied with, to reward his daughter-in-law's faith with more precise revelations. And Flagge had kept in reserve the walnut desk as a last resource, when it should be impossible to draw any more subsidies from my lady by putting off the discovery.

"Come," said Sarah, running into the room, "are you ready? I have only this moment got away from the luncheon table. Miss Lowry asked for you," to Ænone, "and I told her you were in my room."

"But Dr. Flagge cannot mesmerize me now," said Ænone. "If that is what you want, it is impossible."

Sarah did not understand her. "Oh come, Miss Balasso," she said, "I can't suppose you will disoblige me just at the last! I'm sure Mr. Balasso could have no objection. I heard the other day of the Honourable Miss Bullaby, who was quite a celebrated clairvoyante, and she had been a Maid of Honour!"

"Let me try, won't you, Nony?" said Flagge in a low voice.

Enone seated herself quietly in an arm chair, and fixed her eyes on Flagge as she used to do. She was perfectly calm, almost listless. But all Flagge's coolness seemed to have deserted him. His hand shook, his eye was unsteady. Lady Lowry sat by, anxious and impatient. It would not do. Flagge got up from his chair, and walked across the room tossing his hair back with his hand.

"There's an adverse influence," said he. Then he looked uneasily at Enone. There was a sentiment at the bottom of his heart which made him shrink from proceeding to downright lies and trickery in her presence, now.

"Nona!" cried a fresh young voice at the door. "Are you there? Aunt Mary says you *must* have some luncheon."

Flagge caught at the interruption, and made my lady a sign not to detain Enone.

"You'd best go with Miss Rosamond," said he, hurriedly. "Pray go."

"I do not want to eat."

"But beef tea isn't eating!" cried Rosamond, showing her blooming face at the door. She gave a look of amazement at Dr. Flagge,

whom she had by no means expected to see there. But she did not linger. "Come, Nona!" she said, and drew her friend away, shutting the door behind her.

That evening, after dinner, my lady made a grand *coup*. She solemnly requested Mary's permission to make another search in the study. Mr. and Mrs. Flint were dining there, and Sarah would rather have taken another opportunity of making this demand. But there was no help for it. Time enough had been lost, as it was; "and if I wait until those Flints are out of the way," said my lady to herself, "I may wait a pretty long time, for there's scarcely an evening that one or the other or both of 'em don't poke their noses in at Lowry Place. Ah! Well, I shan't allow that when *I* live here."

"You know that the study has been thoroughly searched," said Mary, in answer rather to Mr. Flint's raised eyebrows than to Sarah.

"I know you have looked there."

"I promised Lady Lowry," said Mary, speaking to Mr. Flint—to my lady's unspeakable indignation: what had *he* to do with it?—"that she should search wherever she pleased throughout my house, if

that would tranquillize her mind and my brother's."

Sir Cosmo sniffed. "I can't say I have found all this hullabaloo, and farce of ransacking the premises, particularly tranquillizing to *my* mind," he said. "But I'm much obliged to you for your kind intentions."

"I should scarcely think Miss Lowry has found it tranquillizing to her mind, either," observed Mr. Flint with irrepressible indignation. "But I agree with you, Sir Cosmo, in thinking it a farce. Sir Rupert Lowry's will repose safely enough in the Register Office at Doctors' Commons."

"We shall see!" said my lady.

Miss Lowry gave the signal to rise from the table, and the company left the room altogether, except Sir Cosmo, who remained behind to smoke a solitary cigar. Rosamond drew Enone's arm within hers, and whispered, "What is going on? Lady Lowry seems to be in a wonderful state of excitement! Has that horrid Dr. Flagge been making any more mischief?" But Enone's eyes were fixed on Mary Lowry as she listened, with a faint sweet smile, to some words which Vincent Maude was pouring into her ear, and she made no answer to Rosamond.

"There's no time like the present," said my lady resolutely. "Will you have lights taken into the study, Mary?" Then, half turning round with an insolent air to the others, she said, "Since you *are* here, you may as well be witnesses."

"Mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint with raised hands and eyes, and in no very subdued tone of voice. Then the whole party entered the study, where a fire was burning, and into which James had brought a lighted lamp.

And now all eyes were turned on Lady Lowry, who marched straight up to the walnut-wood desk and opened it with a key which Mary had given her. There were a few packets of neatly docketed papers lying on a blotting pad. In the drawers, which my lady pulled open one after the other, were the vellum-bound volumes of accounts of which mention has also been made.

"Was there nothing else here?" asked my lady, turning round to Mary with rather a blank face.

"There were a few letters, which have been sorted and tied up, and which I think you have already seen in the library."

"Well," said Sarah, "I must look through

these packets, I suppose, if there's nothing else."

"I examined the papers tied up there in Miss Lowry's presence," said Mr. Flint. "They are chiefly receipted bills, as far as I remember. There is also a warranty for a horse, and an estimate from a builder in Elcaster for some alterations in the stables which Sir Rupert thought of making."

"Oh yes; I dare say it's all right. But I shall look through them," said Sarah.

She seated herself in front of the desk, and began to untie the packets.

Mrs. Flint, with another uplifting of hands and eyes, sank into an arm chair by the hearth. Maude drew his chair near to Mary's. The two girls and Mr. Flint placed themselves behind my lady, watching her as she unfolded paper after paper. No one spoke. There was scarcely a sound to be heard except the crackling of the fire, the beat of the wintry rain on the window-panes, and the rustling of the papers in my lady's fingers. So breathless was the silence, that a low, scratching sound at the door made every one start; and Conone looked round solemnly, as if she were prepared to see a supernatural visitant. But it was only poor old Con, who had followed his

mistress, and, being admitted by Maude, went and laid himself at her feet, and watched the proceedings with his nose between his paws.

The packets were all examined one by one.

No result!

Then Sarah opened the vellum-covered account-books, shook them, turned them this way and that, and placed them on the blotting-pad beside the papers.

There remained now only four side drawers. My lady stood as if nervously irresolute for a moment before trying this last chance. But all at once a thought struck her. "There may be some secret drawers," she said, "or a false bottom, or something." She tapped on the solid old-fashioned cabinet work as she spoke, as if expecting it to sound hollow. But this possibility beyond seemed to give her courage to proceed with her investigations. It was not quite the last cast of the die. She thrust her arm to the back of the deep side drawers, and pulled out their contents. These consisted of old rusty keys, a broken spur, one or two empty cigar boxes, and a flat morocco case tied round with a broad black ribbon. Into this band of ribbon was stuck a large square envelope with an inscription on it in a crabbed, tremulous hand-writing.



"What's this?" cried my lady, pouncing on it.

"That," replied Mary, "is my mother's miniature——"

"But this,—*this!*" pulling out the envelope from the band.

"Those are letters from my mother to my father. He must have been looking at them the night before his death. I found the cover and the miniature just as they are now. You can see the inscription for yourself: 'Letters from Mary.'"

"Oh! Is that Sir Rupert's handwriting? Well, I may as well look through these, since I am about it."

"This is monstrous!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint. Her husband checked her: but my lady took not the least heed of her.

"I ascertained, before replacing the cover, which is not fastened, as you see, that it contained only about half a dozen letters in my mother's writing. They must have been all she ever wrote to him in her life," replied Mary.

"Did you read them?"

"Read them! No! I found them here on the morning after my father's death. From that time no hand has touched them."

"I shall look through them," said my lady resolutely.

"Really, Lady Lowry," said Maude, stepping forward, "there can be no necessity for this! Mary's feelings ought to be respected. Those letters are sacred in her eyes."

"It's time *somebody* interfered!" said Mrs. Flint, disregarding her husband's signs to her to be quiet.

"Do you mean to break your word?" asked Sarah, looking defiantly at her sister-in-law.

"No; it shall be as you wish. But understand that after to-night this must end."

Sarah turned her back abruptly, and seating herself once more at the desk, proceeded to examine the contents of the envelope. All her varnish of gentility had disappeared. She was rude, intense, unaffected.

"Aunt Mary," whispered Rosamond, "may I see my grandmamma's picture?"

Mary opened the case, and the others gathered round to see. As they stood so, they heard Lady Lowry mutter, "'My dear Vincent?' Who is this from?"

"What!" exclaimed Mary.

"It's signed with your name, 'Mary Hovenden Lowry.' But there's something else folded up with it." The next instant she

gave a shriek and started to her feet. "*I have found it!*" And then she sank back on to her chair, panting, and clutching a paper in her hand.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

At this moment Sir Cosmo and Percival Wigmore appeared at the door. "What is the matter? Is Sarah ill?" asked the former, glancing round with a startled face.

Mr. Flint had seen that the document, which my lady clutched convulsively in her hand, was a sheet of common blue ruled paper; and it flashed on him in a moment that such was the paper described by Quickit as having been witnessed by him.

"Lady Lowry is not ill," said Mr. Flint, "only agitated. She thinks she has made an important discovery. Allow me."

He took from Sarah's fingers the paper she held, and glanced at it. "By G—! she *has*, too!" he exclaimed after a second.

"What?" cried Cosmo, looking almost scared.

"What do you say now, Cosmo?" burst out my lady excitedly. "Oh, your poor dear

father will be able to rest in his grave now! The will! I have found the will, Cosmo; I have found it!"

"Is it so, Mr. Flint?" asked Mary.

"Yes, Miss Lowry; to the best of my belief it is so," answered Mr. Flint, wiping his forehead. He was in a violent heat notwithstanding the wintry temperature.

"I am most thankful!" said Mary earnestly.

My lady broke out again, triumphant, excited, with flushed cheeks and roughened hair. Mrs. Bolitho would scarcely have recognized her pupil. "Oh, it's very well to say you're most thankful, now it's too late to be anything else! But it wasn't your fault if that will was not buried and hid for evermore. No, I *will* speak, Cosmo! If it hadn't been for me it would have lain huddled up there with a lot of rubbishing old letters. Mary's feelings were too fine to have them looked at. Oh yes, Sarah was to be sneered down by Miss Lowry's friends, wasn't she? Ha! What do you say now? Your poor dear father, Cosmo, kept telling us over and over again to have faith and persevere; but nobody paid any attention to what he said, but me. Nobody, nobody!"

"Sarah, keep cool! You'll do yourself

an injury," said Cosmo, placing his hand on her shoulder, and making her resume her seat.

"I say," put in Wigmore, "she ought to have some sal volatile or something. She'll get hysterical."

"Be quiet!" cried my lady roughly. "You're not required to interfere."

Mrs. Flint murmured something about a strait-waistcoat and the county asylum. Percy stared in bewilderment at this revelation of the fair Sarah's unvarnished self. Cosmo was white to the lips, and trembling violently. The others looked shocked, amazed, dismayed, in their different degrees; but no one spoke, until Mr. Flint, who had been examining the paper in his hand with the closest attention, said, "Sir Cosmo and Miss Lowry, I believe this to be indeed the veritable last will and testament of your late father, Sir Rupert."

"Of course it is!" cried Sarah. "I should like to catch any one trying to say it isn't!"

"It is signed by two witnesses. The name of one of them,—Thomas Wright,—is unknown to me. The other is Mark Antony Quickit."

"There, Cosmo!" interrupted Sarah once more. "Oh, the dear, blessed spirits! You

hear? Read the will. Read it at once in the presence of witnesses!"

"Is it your wish that I should do so, Sir Cosmo and Miss Lowry?"

"Yes," replied Mary.

Cosmo seemed unable to articulate a reply; but he bowed his head in assent. There was profound silence for a second or so, and then Mr. Flint said, "This document, Sir Cosmo, was discovered by your wife, Lady Lowry, a few minutes ago, wrapped up together with a packet labelled, in your father's handwriting, 'Letters from Mary.' The packet contained, besides some half-dozen letters from your mother, one other, which is, I think, in Miss Lowry's hand." He held it out to her, and as she took it she whispered to Maude, who was close beside her, "My poor farewell letter to you, Vincent! My father had kept it all these years!"

"I am inclined to believe," continued Mr. Flint, "that Sir Rupert, feeling, as he said in that last letter to me, some presentiment of his approaching death, had been looking over his papers, perhaps re-reading old letters, and recalling past times with some tenderness, as a man might who felt that the world was nearly over for him. And I believe that he

inadvertently folded up the will with that letter of his daughter's."

"What's the good of all this talk?" cried my lady coarsely. "We all know that Sir Rupert never meant to hide the will,—whoever else might! It may have been somebody's interest to poke it away there;—but it wasn't poor dear Sir Rupert's intention to do so."

Flint turned upon her sternly. "I advise you, Lady Lowry, for your own sake to show more moderation and decency," he said.

"Oh, I say, you know," put in Wigmore, "you must make allowance for Lady Lowry bein' upset and excited. Come now, Lady Lowry," said the little man, who looked genuinely distressed, "you're not yourself, you know, or you wouldn't talk so. You don't mean anything offensive against Miss Lowry, do you, now? You've too good a heart, don't you know!"

"Don't you trouble yourself about what I mean, or what I don't mean. Them the cap fits, let them wear it. As to Mr. Flint's impertinence, I take it from whence it comes. I have carried out my duty in spite of the whole crew of them. And of course that is displeasing to certain persons." Then addressing herself to Mr. Flint with imperious insolence,



"We don't require any more of your comments, sir. You'd better read the testament at once, and have done with it!"

Mr. Flint looked full at her for a moment. Then he said firmly, "*I will, madam.*"

There was a thrill of intense expectation throughout the little circle. Cosmo passed his handkerchief nervously across and across his white lips. My lady fixed her round bright eyes fiercely on the lawyer. He began by reading aloud the usual formal preamble; then followed one or two legacies to old servants, precisely the same as those contained in the former will; then, in a low, distinct voice, Mr. Flint went on as follows:—

"I give and bequeath to Leonora, wife of John Northam Peppiat, of Nelson Place, Bloomsbury, the sum of two thousand pounds, in acknowledgment of her humanity towards the neglected and sole surviving child of my son Cosmo.

"Further, considering that my aforesaid son has a second time deceived his family and disgraced his blood by a marriage, the knowledge of which accidentally reached me on this day, I hereby revoke and cancel all my former testamentary dispositions in his favour, which I was mainly induced to make by the

generous intercession of his sister; and as to the residue and remainder of all my real and personal estate, I give, devise, and bequeath the same absolutely unto my excellent and dearly beloved daughter, Mary Hovenden Lowry, as some poor amends to her for the years of her youth sacrificed to filial obedience; and I humbly pray Almighty God to bless her.

“And I hereby appoint Samuel Flint, of Elcaster, and George Akroyd, of Clevelenall, or the survivors of them, executors of this my will. As witness my hand this fifth day of July, 187—.”

Then followed the attestation clause and the signatures of the witnesses.

For a few seconds after Mr. Flint's voice ceased, there was a dead silence. The tears were streaming down Mary's cheeks as she sat holding Vincent's hand, and Mrs. Flint had her handkerchief to her eyes. Sarah's face wore a strange, stunned look. She put up her hand to her ear like a deaf person. “Well?” she said, with her eyes still fixed on Mr. Flint. “Why don't you go on? That's not all.” Her voice was faint and muffled.

“That, Lady Lowry, is all.”

“But what is it, then? I don't understand. I can't hear. What is Cosmo to have?”

"I—I shall dispute this—this document, Mr. Flint," stammered Cosmo. His hands shook, he gasped for breath, and his lips could scarcely frame the words he tried to say. "It's a monstrous—monstrous iniquity."

Mr. Flint silently shrugged his shoulders.

"What do they say, Cosmo? I don't understand. I can't hear," whimpered Sarah. Then all at once she uttered a series of piercing cries, and fell back in a fit of violent hysterics. They carried her to her bed, and sent for Dr. Akroyd, who shook his head gravely when he saw her, and announced that he should remain at Lowry Place all night. Hours passed before Sarah recovered consciousness. She fell from one hysterical convulsion into another. And when the wintry morning light began to whiten the window panes, it fell upon a dead infant prematurely born. But the mother's youth and strength had triumphed, and she was safe.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE world continued to talk about Dr. Flagge, the celebrated medium, long after the story of Sir Rupert Lowry's missing will was forgotten, save by the few persons nearly interested in it. Dr. Flagge had kept himself before the public. The affair of the will was a famous advertisement for him. He was received by sovereigns and caressed by the aristocracy of the Continent in general, and Paris in particular.

He left England soon after the discovery of Sir Rupert's will, and travelled, mainly on the Italian Riviera, and in other parts of the South of Europe which are celebrated for their mild winter climate. He was to be seen constantly at all the places frequented by a stout smiling gentleman with gorgeous rings and shirt-studs, and his pale invalid daughter. One year, indeed, Dr. Flagge went up the Nile in the wake of their boat. Another winter he spent in Rome, and afterwards wrote a work about it, in part mystically

spiritistic, in part socially scandalous, and wholly ungrammatical, which met with considerable success. That year was marked in Rome by the conversion to Catholicism of the rich Levant merchant's daughter, Miss Cenone Balassopoulo, who afterwards took the vows of a severe religious order and entered a convent in the South of France, where the arid melancholy plain steeped in sunshine stretched before the barred windows of her whitewashed cell for many a weary mile. Before she took leave of the world, she wrote a letter to Mary Maude, of which the last words were, "I have found a stronger shelter than my own poor pride, a better rest than Nirvana. Do you remember? Farewell."

Shortly afterwards it was announced in one or two of the public prints that Dr. Flagge, the celebrated medium and gifted author of that sparkling and poetic volume entitled "Cavolo Romano," intended to leave Europe on a long and distant voyage. It was rumoured that he meant to rejoin the wild tribes of the West, amongst whom he had passed his youth, and from whom he had imbibed much of the romance and defiance of conventionalism which so strongly marked his singular character. So said the public prints which dealt in such

gossip. At all events, he disappeared, and the world, very naturally, forgot all about him.

But a small circle of quiet, happy folks in the country remembered him for many a year. He appeared one day unexpectedly at Lowry Place, and asked to see Rosamond, who lived there with her aunt. He was dressed in the deepest mourning, and looked so haggard, ill, and unhappy as to touch Rosy's warm heart at once.

"She's gone, Miss Rosamond," he said. "Nony's gone; same as dead to me. I'm a-going to leave this country and Europe altogether. I'm going to cross the big water, and I'd thank God if He'd let me drown in it. But I won't do anything violent nor wicked, if I can help it. She talked to me before—before she went away"—here his voice was choked by tears—"like an angel. She wasn't fit for this world. If the Lord wouldn't take her right up to heaven, why, she'd just got to shut herself up and wait a while longer. I see that was so. No; she never was fit for this wicked world. But it's—it's cruel hard on me. Well, I ask your forgiveness for coming to disturb you; but I want to beg a favour of you. You've got a photograph of Nony, Miss Rosamond. It's but a poor cheap

1

thing, took when she was at school, far's I remember. But if you will give it to me, just out of pity and kindness, I'd be more grateful to you than you know of!"

He obtained the photograph and went away, and Lowry Place saw him no more. The Peppiats sometimes said that they believed he must be dead; but Quickit, who had struck up quite a friendship with Captain Pep, and, together with Papa Czernovic and others of the old set, often discussed past times over a tumbler of whisky punch in Bloomsbury, shook his head and declared he would turn up again. "He's an elastic ball, sir, is Flagge. He was hit hard, no doubt, about the young lady; but he'll rebound and rebound again and again, will Flagge, sir, take my word for it!" But, perhaps, Mr. Quickit was chiefly inspired to say so by his vigorous spirit of contradiction.

Of the other chief personages whose fortunes have been chronicled in these pages, all that need be told may be made known by describing a little scene that happened at Lowry Place one bright June day five years after the finding of the will.

Mrs. Vincent Maude sits in the library reading a letter. The room looks much the same as when we saw it last, except that on *the* Turkey rug the contents of a box of toys

lie scattered, and that a fat puppy is exercising his mischievous teeth on a small, square-toed shoe, unobserved by his mistress, whose eyes are fixed on the letter in her hand.

To her enters our old acquaintance, Major Maude, booted and equipped for riding, but meanwhile serving himself as a spirited steed for a bright-eyed, rosy little fellow, who rides triumphantly on his shoulder, shouting "Dee up, papa! Dee—e—e up!" in a manner to satisfy his fond parents as to the robust condition of his lungs.

"Hush, Rupert. Run away to Cousin Rosy, or go and play with the puppy, my boy," says his mother. Then, looking up at her husband with fond, trusting eyes, she says, "Here is another letter from Sarah."

A shade darkens Vincent's cheerful face. "More complaints, I suppose, and demands for money?" he says.

"No, dear; not this time."

"No? What miracle has happened?"

"I don't know whether you will consider it a miracle, Vincent; but Sarah is going to marry again."

"To marry!"

"It is not very surprising, after all. She is quite a young woman still, and it is three years since poor Cosmo died."



“What valiant man is going to make *that* venture?”

“Some one in her own part of the world—a farmer, I suppose. Here is what she says: ‘You will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that I have at length consented to bestow my hand on one who has been long and faithfully devoted. My parents urge me to accept him, and his means are quite satisfactory. Also his character and his manners quite the gentleman. He took a first prize last winter at the County Show for shorthorns, and is altogether everything that I could wish. I trust my new marriage may obliterate the remembrance of a former alliance which I must ever deplore, as connected with unmerited misfortunes. (“Ungrateful hussy!” ejaculated Maude.) But I shall be thankful to the last moment of my existence that I did *my* duty.’”

“Ouf! Well, thank goodness, my dearest, that this incubus will be lifted away from you. I make no doubt that she will withdraw the light of her countenance from you, now that she wants nothing more. Indeed, I wonder why she writes now.”

“I think you will soon see that. I was almost between laughing and crying when you came in, Vincent. Sarah touches tender

spots in one's heart so roughly! And yet she is really ludicrously unconscious of it nine times out of ten. Just listen to this: 'His name—I seek not to mitigate it—is Budge. But after enduring for three years the trying and aggravating temper of one who bore such an aristocratic appellation as your brother, I cannot conceal from myself that happiness is not bound up with what name you go by. And at the request of Mr. Budge I shall drop my title. The last payment of the little pittance which you allow me as your brother's widow was made on the 20th of last month, and before the next falls due I shall have a home of my own, and be in an independent position. Mr. Budge means to keep a pony chaise for me, and a man out of livery, and I can truly say that I look forward to my nuptials with a tranquil heart. I shall become the bride of Mr. Budge on the 15th, and the money is not *strictly due* till the 20th. I admit this openly, because I wish to act straightforward and according to the ladylike principles in which I have been educated, and which have always enabled me to do my duty under the most *trying* circumstances. At the same time, if you think it due to yourself, as a mark of respect for your brother's memory, to pay

over the whole of the last quarter at once, without deducting those five days, the money will come in useful for my clothes; and I *cannot* but think you would wish your only brother's lawful widow to make a creditable appearance.' What am I to do, Vincent?"

"Whatever your own feeling prompts, my darling."

"May I?"

"*May* you! Rupert, may not mamma do whatever she likes?"

"Es! And me, too, papa!" returns Master Rupert, who has just succeeded in rescuing the fragments of his shoe from the puppy.

"Then," says Mary, "I shall ask you to send a cheque for fifty pounds to Lambrook Manor Farm. And most thankfully do I look forward to Sarah's transformation from Lady Lowry to Mrs. Budge."

"Certainly. And may Providence have mercy on Mr. Budge!"

THE END.