

IN THIS WORLD

A Novel.

BY

MABEL COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "AN INNOCENT SINNER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
New Schools and Old	1
CHAPTER II.	
Mingling Streams	16
CHAPTER III.	
Compromising	30
CHAPTER IV.	
Counsel on both Sides	47
CHAPTER V.	
“ Walks Abroad ”	66
CHAPTER VI.	
Unmasking	91
CHAPTER VII.	
Thunderbolts	105
CHAPTER VIII.	
Doctors in Consultation	128
CHAPTER IX.	
A Wooing Half Undone	142

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
Breakfasting	153
CHAPTER XI.	
The Hospital	165
CHAPTER XII.	
Lovers !	173
CHAPTER XIII.	
Some Desultory Talks	195
CHAPTER XIV.	
At the Hospital again	213
CHAPTER XV.	
About Nothing in Particular	226
CHAPTER XVI.	
About a Door-plate	233
CHAPTER XVII.	
“ My Niece, Laura Doldy ”	243
CHAPTER XVIII.	
“ What Burden Besides Love ? ”	252
CHAPTER XIX.	
Married and Done For	261
CHAPTER XX.	
Is it Peace ?	272
CHAPTER XXI.	
The Whip-hand	284

IN THIS WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

NEW SCHOOLS AND OLD.

“MY dear Miss Armine, I assure you we shall have the greatest fun imaginable this afternoon. Dr. Ernestine Vavasour is coming to see me—you know Miss Vavasour, do you not?”

“Yes,” said Miss Armine, “I have seen her. She is tall, fair, very handsome, with beautiful deep dark eyes.”

“You always remember people by their pictorial effect, you odd girl.”

“That’s because my work lies in what you call ‘pictorial effect,’ I suppose, Mrs. Silburn. What do you remember them by, I wonder?—as a writer, I imagine you must have some special, if different method?”

“I never forget people’s little odd ways and pet weaknesses,” said Mrs. Silburn, smiling. “Now Miss, Vavasour has only lately taken her M.D. And you know she is almost as proud a woman as ever existed. If I were in her place I should chatter to every one about my new dignity. But she wishes our sex to be viewed as entirely equal, if not superior to the other; so that of course becoming an M.D. is nothing at all to boast of. Consequently she never can be got to speak about it in society; and the best fun of all is to see her with a real old-fashioned doctor, who regards her as an extraordinary new sort of animal when she shows medical knowledge—which, in consequence, she can’t often be got to do. Well, Coventry and I have had great amusement lately because several times she

has met, at our little gatherings here, Dr. Doldy—you know his name, of course.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Miss Armine, “everybody knows his name. He made his reputation ten years ago, I have heard, out of the Duchess of Taffeta’s kneecap. He’s one of *the* doctors of fashion, is he not?”

“Just so, my dear, if not *the* most fashionable of all. Well, his presence acts like a refrigerator on Miss Dr. Vavasour. She has such a horror of being sneered at, that she becomes the mere lady of fashion the moment she sees him; and the best of it all is that I believe our orthodox medico has fallen head over ears in love with her.”

“My dear Mrs. Silburn! Isn’t he too old for her?”

“Not at all; he is at what I consider the prime of life, and he really is a charming man. *I* shan’t tell him she’s just got her M.D.; *I* shall not spoil sport, if I can only keep Coventry quiet, for I think it would be a capital thing for her to marry him. They are

both of good birth and social standing, and she would get her medical position at once."

"You won't keep me quiet much longer," said a voice from a corner of the room. "I nearly died from internal convulsions last time they were here, to see the dear, gallant Doctor so desperately smitten. But I marvel not, for Dr. Ernestine is a delicious woman."

"I didn't know you were there, Mr. Silburn," exclaimed Miss Armine.

"Ah, I'm fond of my quiet nook," said that gentleman. "Dorothy never knows how much I hear of her chatter." And so speaking, he drew back a curtain which fell over a deep bay-window, and became visible, just emerging from a hammock which was slung therein. He presented a quaint appearance as he advanced to shake hands with Miss Armine, for on each shoulder clung a very small kitten. The lady looked at him with professional pleasure; and, indeed, it was no wonder, for Coventry Silburn's face was of a dreamy,

artistic beauty, and his movements were full of an entirely unconscious grace.

“Dorothy lets me have my hammock there on her kettledrum days, on condition that I don’t make myself ridiculous—it’s very good of her, isn’t it? I never know what dear practical Dorothy regards as ridiculous, so I keep quiet and enjoy myself with my babies, who never scold me.”

A knock was heard at that moment, so Coventry, with a laugh of childlike glee, vanished behind his curtain again. Dorothy’s eyes followed him with a soft sweet look in them which he alone could bring forth. Dorothy was, in truth, essentially prosaic—while her husband not only wrote lyrics but lived them, after his own gay, graceful, careless, loving fashion. Coventry was seldom seen by anyone without some little helpless animal on his shoulder or in his pocket, a favourite volume or a manuscript book devoted to scribbling, in his hand.

Ernestine Vavasour entered, just as Mr.

Silburn had made good his retreat. There was an unwonted look in her handsome face which both ladies noticed—with a less proud woman it might have been a blush—and both ladies thought it explained, when Dr. Doldy appeared behind her, at a distance measured only by the trail of her long dress.

“Together!” exclaimed Mrs. Silburn; and then added hastily, “How charming! Come near the fire, Miss Vavasour—you must be so cold!”

“We met,” explained Dr. Doldy, with his gallant, punctilious manner, “at the corner of the street, Mrs. Silburn, and found that we were both coming to visit this most pleasant drawing-room of yours.”

“Miss Armine—Dr. Doldy,” interposed Mrs. Silburn, anxious to spare him his excuses; and then she drew her little kettle-drum table near the fire, and rang for the tea. Dr. Doldy, who was a man of the world, and full of pleasant gossip, began at once to talk to Miss Armine—but that quick-eyed lady ob-

served that though he spoke to her, his regards were fixed on Miss Vavasour, and that he often tried to entice her into the conversation.

But Miss Vavasour was unusually silent. She never was a woman of small talk, although she went much into society. Perfectly gentle in manner, she was of a kind of burning, fierce disposition; if she might speak on her favourite subjects she would speak so earnestly and so well as to delight, even if not to convince. But if those around her talked of mere ordinary matters which appeared to her not worth notice; or if they were uncongenial to her mode of thought, then, instead of quietly following the lead, as many women would, she preferred to lean back in her chair, very composed and handsome, with the abstracted look that came at such moments in her deep, soft, earnest eyes. That look had brought her many admirers, although most of them were rather afraid of her.

Dr. Doldy and Miss Armine were talking of

some of the picture galleries that were open at the time.

“Take care, Dr. Doldy,” said Mrs. Silburn, as she handed him a cup of tea. “You don’t know that Miss Armine is an art-student.”

“Indeed !” said Dr. Doldy, stirring his tea, and bowing to Miss Armine with a gallant air that had a very decided undertone of sarcasm. “I must take care ; I am very much afraid of Mrs. Silburn—a lady journalist who can write a leader upon one in the *Morning Mail* is sufficiently alarming—but I had no idea I was speaking rashly in the presence of another learned lady.”

“Oh, I am not very learned,” laughingly replied Miss Armine. “I am only a student yet, and shall be nothing more’ for many a year.”

“Ha ! ha ! ha !” laughed the Doctor, softly. “Well, I remember hearing of Fuseli’s fury when first the admission of ladies to the Academy School was broached. He stumped off down the stairs, growling as he went,

‘Have they no stockings to darn? Have they no puddings to make, that they must come here?’ But those days are over. There’s a new school rising now, Miss Armine, is there not—and you, I suppose, are of it?”

Miss Armine shrugged her shoulders and said nothing; but looking up she caught such a flash from Miss Vavasour’s deep eyes as made her feel that though Dr. Doldy might be a grandee of the old school she need not be crushed, for a champion was by her side, only waiting to be roused.

“And are you a student at the Academy?” resumed Dr. Doldy, as a little pause followed his last speech.

“No,” she answered, “the Akropolitan School of Art is much more advanced in its system, so I entered there.”

“The Akropolitan School? Ah—is not Mr. Richy the Professor there now?”

“Only temporarily,” answered Miss Armine. “We are very anxious to learn who our Professor is to be.”

“Mr. Richy is a talented man, and very agreeable,” said Dr. Doldy. “He is a patient of mine.”

“Oh, he is very agreeable,” said Miss Armine, a little brusquely, “but he is no artist.”

Dr. Doldy lifted his eyebrows. “You are always very hard on Mr. Richy,” said Mrs. Silburn. “I don’t understand pictures, but he really paints very nicely.”

“*Now*, Mrs. Silburn,” exclaimed Miss Armine, “was it not *you* who wrote that paragraph about his making Lady Mechlin buy a shawl to be painted in that cost some hundred pounds, and you suggested that he probably got a commission from the shawl people?”

“Come, Miss Armine,” answered the literary lady, “this is talking shop with a vengeance! I have to make gossipy paragraphs, and it does not follow, because Mr. Richy will only paint the portraits of very rich people, and makes them always have new silk

dresses and India shawls for the occasion, that he does not paint well."

"New silk dresses," groaned Miss Armine. "Yes, that is just Mr. Richy. Could anything be more inartistic? And I know if we don't have another Professor soon he will do away with our life class. He is afraid of what the grand old ladies say that he meets in society—and he is just one of them himself!"

"Now, Miss Armine," laughed Mrs. Silburn, "you are losing your temper."

"Well, no wonder—I shall have to leave the school if we lose our life class; I don't want to paint silk dresses—I want to draw my figures correctly, and to learn how from Nature itself!"

"Of course," said Miss Vavasour, "you can do nothing thoroughly unless you go right through with it. And I fancy Mr. Richy himself is a little doubtful about his anatomy, from the drawing of the figures in his picture in the Academy last year."

"Are *you*, then, an artist?" said Dr. Doldy,

delighted to hear Miss Vavasour's voice at last.

"Oh, no," said she, drawing herself in at once, and with that odd look which might have been a blush coming over her face again, "but I know just a little about anatomy."

"Do you? Dear me! what an odd subject for a lady to be interested in!—that is, if she does not really need it for her—her—profession."

Dr. Doldy's funny way of bringing out the last word made them all laugh, even Miss Vavasour; and in the midst of the laughter Coventry Silburn appeared, the kittens both on one shoulder this time.

"My dear Dr. Doldy," said he, "I have come to take care of you. I really had not the heart to leave you alone with so many learned ladies any longer. How do you do, *Dr. Vavasour?*"

Dr. Vavasour shook hands with him—but now she blushed outright, a beautiful vivid blush: for Dr. Doldy had set his teacup down

with a suddenness that made a ringing sound, and had risen to his feet. He looked at Miss Vavasour's face, and then he turned to Mrs. Silburn with an imploring gaze. As her husband had done the mischief, that lady was quite prepared to enjoy it.

“Yes, Dr. Doldy,” she said, maliciously, “I fear Miss Vavasour belongs to a new school, as well as Miss Armine. She has taken her degree, and means to carry out some modern ideas in her practice. If you chanced to disagree with her views, you might find her a sharp antagonist on some points of medical doctrine.”

Dr. Vavasour had turned to Miss Armine and was speaking earnestly to her about her studies—her back was nearly turned to Dr. Doldy, so that she could not see his face—but she could hear his silence. After forcing a smile for Mrs. Silburn, he had sunk back in his arm-chair—for the moment he forgot where he was, or who was speaking to him.

“Good heavens!” he was saying to himself,

“ what have I done?—I, that have not lost my head for twenty years, to lose it now—and make such a ridiculous fool of myself! To fall in love with a lady doctor—it’s no use now—it’s too late—the woman dazzled my senses away—I proposed on the doorstep—and was accepted on the stairs! What little Puck has been tripping my steps? If I had but waited a decent opportunity she would have told me what she was—and I couldn’t wait! Well—God bless me, how handsome she is—I couldn’t have given her up.”

And rising, he moved across the room to her chair, and, in the next pause in her talk, congratulated her on her entrance into the profession in his most gallant and courteous manner.

“He *is* infatuated!” whispered Mrs. Silburn to her husband. Dr. Doldy had at the same moment whispered a word to Dr. Vavasour. She bowed her head slightly. He turned to the Silburns.

“Mrs. Silburn,” he said, “you and your husband are such good friends of ours that I

am sure you will be pleased to hear that Miss Vavasour has consented to become my wife ; and," he added, with an inimitable courtly grace, "as I am not now so young as to enjoy delays, she has allowed me to announce the fact at once."

A little buzz of chatter and congratulation followed this speech, for they all tried to help out a rather awkward moment. In the midst of it Coventry went quietly to Dr. Vavasour's side.

"Minerva Medica," said he, "I am ashamed of you."

"What was I to do?" she answered ; and looking, he saw tears in her eyes. And his poetic heart recognised that she was in love !

CHAPTER II.

MINGLING STREAMS.

DR. DOLDY'S carriage, as he well knew, was waiting for him at the door. He had to make one or two professional visits which would barely leave him time to reach his house at the dinner-hour. And so after a few minutes more of talk, he tore himself from Miss Vava-sour's side and made his bow. Miss Armine very soon followed his example; for general conversation did not flow very easily after Dr. Doldy's little announcement. When they were gone, Ernestine drew nearer the fire, and sitting between Coventry and Dorothy, talked

far into the twilight, about her thoughts, her hopes, her future.

“You are a strange woman, Minerva Medica,” said Coventry, rising from his seat by her side, after a while. “You are in love thoroughly, for you can only do things thoroughly—and yet it seems to be quite a side affair in your life.”

“Not necessarily so,” said she, gently, “because I talk of other things more—and think of them more, too. Is it not likely that the real centre of our lives is not that about which we busy ourselves the most? I suppose a man’s home is his centre of life, when it is really a home; but it is to him his place of rest, not his place of worry, as most women’s homes are to them. You know, Mr. Silburn, that I believe a woman only enlarges her life by work, not alters it; and if she enters a larger sphere, surely her capacity for rest and affection will but be the greater?”

“I am glad to hear you say that so sweetly,

Ernestine," said Dorothy, "for indeed I was beginning to think you were growing daily more practical."

"Surely *you* don't object to that, Mrs. Silburn? You set us all an example in practical capacity."

"But it suits me—I'm just a commonplace little woman—but you have always made me feel as if you were the sort of woman to consecrate yourself to something."

"That is what I am doing," said Ernestine, quietly. "I do consecrate myself to my beliefs. But in the nineteenth century it is necessary for us to understand the practical; to obtain power by knowledge, and to be afraid of no details, for these are days of details. If we have inspiration it is of very little use to us, now that the masses obtain education, unless we can give it a backbone by means of both knowledge of the world and knowledge of the sciences."

"And yet," said Coventry, "knowledge, even of the sciences, of the arts, of this life

—knowledge even of human nature—knowledge is but a little thing. Inspiration ought to carry us far beyond this life—beyond anything we know or understand—into the great realities.”

“You are speaking of poetic inspiration,” said Ernestine. “The poet or the seer may escape from the limits of our present life; but not so the practical teacher, the practical worker. I suppose all my largest aims might be reduced into the simple fact that I want to help people around me in their lives. And to do that I must be perfectly practical, or I am nothing.”

“I admire your courage,” said Coventry. “I believe I should die if I put myself in your fetters. I admire you: but, oh! I thank Heaven for the ideal!”

“The ideal is greater than the practical, Mr. Silburn,” said Ernestine, gravely. “It has wings which carry it over the mud in which we practical workers have to walk. But you grant me that if our vocation

lies in the practical we should follow it thoroughly?"

"Indeed I do," said Coventry, with a sigh; "and I say again I admire your courage."

"Come," said Mrs. Silburn, "you two are turning into a Mutual Admiration Society. Ernestine, have you ever met Dr. Doldy's ward, Laura Doldy?"

"No," she answered, leaning back in her chair again, and retreating within herself a little. Mrs. Silburn knew her sufficiently well to know what the look meant which came into her dark eyes.

Ernestine Vavasour was greatly disliked by most of her female acquaintances because she was entirely incapable, by her very nature, of taking any interest in gossip. Many women, in her present position, would have keenly pricked their ears at the mention of Laura Doldy's name, and would have proceeded to extract from Mrs. Silburn everything which she knew about her. But Ernestine never took any

interest in personal details about individuals ; when she herself met them she tested them by her own standard, and quickly decided whether they could belong to her real life or not. Possibly she sometimes decided a little too quickly, for Ernestine, though a creature whose bosom was full of burning faith and love, had been made into rather an unbeliever in the value or loveableness of the mass of human beings. And though she was regarded in her own circle as a champion of her sex, there was perhaps not a woman of her acquaintance whose integrity she deeply trusted in save Mrs. Silburn. For Ernestine's standard of integrity was different from that of many ; those deep eyes of hers probed far into the characters of her friends. The small artifices, frivolities, weaknesses, which appeared to her so abundantly characteristic of her sex, made that very sex for which she dared to plan a great future very unacceptable to her in the present.

“ I hardly think you are likely to see much

of her," resumed Mrs. Silburn. "She is scarcely ever at her uncle's house as it is, for she is always visiting. And then I heard something of an engagement not long ago. I don't know whether it is settled yet. But at all events, whether she marries this man or no, she will marry *some one* before long," concluded the little lady, with a wise shake of her head. But even these suggestions failed to arouse Ernestine, or at all events failed to provoke her into showing any interest.

Possibly, if she could have guessed how much this matter of Laura Doldy and her engagement was troubling Dr. Doldy's mind, she could not have been quite so indifferent.

He looked at his watch as he entered his brougham after his last necessary call, and saw that he would just be able to reach home in time for dinner. Laura was to arrive in town late this afternoon, and was waiting to meet him; and, although Laura was only his niece, yet

there was something in Dr. Doldy's nature which made him unable to be impolite to a woman, and he would have been as uneasy if he had been late to-night as if Laura were a visitor in his house. Mrs. Silburn had wickedly said of him that he was more a gentleman than anything else; but after all she did not succeed in saying anything very malicious, for to be a gentleman in any genuine sense a man must have some latent qualities which are by no means of a kind to be despised. And no one—not even Mrs. Silburn—could have said of Dr. Doldy that he was not a true gentleman.

And that very characteristic of the man had won him Ernestine Vavasour's love, although he was so wholly unlike her ideal—so wholly unlike herself.

For, like the generality of men, he lived in this world, having acquired an easy toleration of what was repugnant to his better self, of the world's conventions and even its shams, in consideration of its allowing him

to pass his days in comparatively peaceful ease. What more than that do most people purchase at the hands of the world by their work in it, their toleration of it, even their countenance of its manifest humbugs and evils? There was a true man latent behind that quiet and well-governed face which was Dr. Doldy's presentment, and yet at this moment, driving home in his carriage to meet his niece at dinner, he was uncomfortably conscious of an absurd feeling that he should not dare to meet Ernestine's deep, glowing eyes if she were enabled to overhear all that might pass between himself and Laura.

And that not because he had done anything which a man would be ashamed to own in most ordinary circles of society; but because he had placed himself in a false position. And now that Ernestine Vavasour's image filled all his soul, he could not help fancying how, if he should ask her counsel, she would say, "You should never have got into such a position." Ernestine hated any-

thing mean, and at the present moment Dr. Doldy felt himself to be mean. His gentlemanly instincts, when aroused, led him to the same conclusion as Ernestine's intense sense of right-doing would have led her.

He had to meet Laura at dinner. He knew that Laura's purpose was to persuade him into giving his final consent to her engagement to, and speedy marriage with, a certain Mr. Yriarte, a Spanish gentleman of aristocratic connections. Laura was set upon the marriage, as Dr. Doldy well knew; but Dr. Doldy had so great a contempt for, and aversion from, Mr. Yriarte that he would have exerted all his influence to dissuade Laura from a marriage which he felt sure would bring her unhappiness, had it not been that—he had placed himself in a false position.

He could not dissuade her because he dared not. And yet he felt he was scarcely fulfilling his charge of his brother's child in giving his consent to this marriage.

The thing had never looked so bad to him before to-day ; but since he had seen the love-light in Ernestine's eyes, he felt as if he were indeed passing from one sphere of existence to another, in leaving that in which Ernestine lived, and entering that of Don José Yriarte, with his own uncomfortable feelings about him.

The Doctor's reflections were cut short by the stoppage of his carriage at his own door. In a few moments he would be face to face with Laura and her pretty pleadings—with the difficulty, in fact. "Well, I suppose I must give my consent," he thought with a sigh, as he stepped out of his carriage.

Dr. Doldy's was a handsome house in a large and fashionable square ; lighted up as it was now, it looked attractive and suggestive of luxurious and pleasant living. He paused an instant on the steps, the thought of Ernestine, as its mistress, in his mind. It would indeed be an attractive home with such a

woman within it. But—good heavens! a thought struck him—a thought that in spite of the shock it had caused him at first, he had forgotten to realise—Dr. Vavasour! He had heard it with his own ears!—Dr. Ernestine Doldy! Conceive the thing!

No—no—he put the idea aside with a gentle little laugh at his own folly. Dr. Vavasour had consented to become his wife, and in doing so she would leave behind her everything but what might be suitable to Mrs. Doldy. If she loved him as he believed she did, she could need no other title than that of his wife. So he re-assured himself again on this point.

He entered the hall, walking as though in a dream; lost, for the first time in his life, in a maze of emotion. He had forgotten Laura in the few seconds which were occupied in passing from his carriage to the dining-room door; he put his hat and gloves aside, and was about to turn into the room when he was aroused by a voice on the stairs.

“Forgotten me, uncle?—complimentary indeed! What has come over you? I never saw you look so absent.”

“Forgive me, Laura, my child! My mind was so full that I had positively for the moment forgotten that I should find you at home. I needn’t ask you how you are—your looks tell me!”

A little woman had come down the stairs and stood by his side. A little woman with a skin like cream-coloured satin, and dark, almond-shaped eyes. Very effective were Laura Doldy’s eyes as she raised them with one of her sudden glances, and then drooped the heavy eyelids over them again, so that the dark lashes swept her pale cheeks. Perhaps a little pearl powder and bella-donna added to the effective contrast, but what of that, so long as the contrast *was* effective? In this world, as Laura was wont to say herself, the question is, Do you get things? not, How do you get them? At all events, as Dr. Doldy looked at

his niece, he thought she really was too good a prize for Mr. Yriarte — but, as dinner was not yet an accomplished fact, he, like a wise man, put the disagreeable vision of that gentleman aside for the present.

CHAPTER III.

COMPROMISING.

LAURA chattered gaily all dinner-time. She used her eyes upon her uncle as it was natural to her to use them upon any man. She would never have dreamed of laying any request or desire of hers before him in its simplicity, and expecting it to carry the day by its own weight and reasonableness. Not so : that would have been a reckless wastefulness of the advantages vouchsafed to her by kindly Nature. Laura believed herself capable of doing anything she really aimed to do with any male being, by dint of those eyes of hers and her quick-

tripping, soft-sounding tongue. Therefore, although she and Dr. Doldy very fairly understood their present relative position, it was natural to her to commence the producing of an effect upon him as soon as they came in contact. She approached him on all sides, by all avenues—calculating, as such small intriguers will, the effect of the warmth, the dinner, and every glass of wine, upon his accessibility. There is something of the pussy-cat in this disposition ; it watches its game as keenly as the cat observes the mouse's movements, even if it be a comfortable, civilised, well-fed tabby, and does not mean actually to devour. Laura meant no harm to her uncle ; indeed, she was feeling rather especially affectionate towards him ; all she wanted was her own way. And that own way she set about getting after the fashion that seemed best to her.

She had plenty of time during dinner to talk, for she did not eat much ; cream-coloured women seldom do. Dr. Doldy dined with

epicurean science, as had been taught him by time and experience. He had long ago accepted the fact that to live easily in this world you must take as much of the richness of it as comes within your reach, and shut your eyes to the skim-milk which you are leaving for somebody else. He who does not follow this plan more or less is accounted a fanatic. Why not, then, let the world wag on its own way, and enjoy our after-dinner port with our best gusto?

At all events, Dr. Doldy's '34, sent him from the Duchess of Taffeta's cellars, afforded him a certain pleasure; and though, when he held it to the light, he saw Ernestine's face within the glowing liquid, yet he did not forget to enjoy the lingering flavour on his palate. The man who is matured, though he may lose his head in a sudden awakening of the finer emotions, will not, like the boy in love, lose himself; he cannot lay aside in a moment the quiet habits of personal enjoyment by which he has made life endurable.

Laura related amusing little anecdotes about her last visit, from which she had just returned, giving her listener to understand, by a subtle thread which ran through her avowedly funny stories, that she had been amazingly happy all the time ; and insinuating, though without the mention of a name, that one particular person had caused all this happiness. And then, when the servants had left them alone, Laura rested one white arm upon the table until she saw her uncle's eyes attracted by the flash of certain brilliants which adorned it.

“A new bracelet, Laura? a magnificent one, too ; pray whose gift is this?”

Laura said nothing, but drew her hand from the table.

“Mr. Yriarte again, I suppose,” said Dr. Doldy, a little more testily than Laura quite liked ; even all her arts had failed to make the idea of her lover agreeable to him. “You mean to marry him, I presume, with or without my consent, as you not only keep his presents now, but openly wear them?”

Laura still did not reply; and looking across at her Dr. Doldy was surprised to see that she had flushed deeply. The colour very soon died away, leaving her pale as ever; but not the less was her uncle unaffectedly surprised at this exhibition of some genuine emotion.

“Laura,” he said, almost startled out of his ordinary self-possession, “you don’t mean to tell me that you are really in love with this man—that you positively care for him enough to blush at the mention of his name?”

“Why should I wish to marry him,” said Laura, in her lowest, softest voice, “if I did not care for him?”

Dr. Doldy looked hard at her. This girl, whom he had known ever since she wore long clothes, often puzzled him more than he would have chosen to own.

“Well, you see, Laura,” he answered rather drily, “knowing the position in which you are placed, of course I am likely to expect another motive in your wish to have your marriage

settled. But, you know, child," he went on, more gently and earnestly, "I don't see any reason to hasten your marriage—there is yet plenty of time. There is a full year before the end of your freedom—you may have a dozen more proposals—you need not marry Yriarte, unless—unless you really care for him."

"But I *do* care for him," cried Laura, angrily. "Why will you persist in thinking I don't?"

Dr. Doldy leaned back in his chair without answering her. He was too considerate, after her avowal, to say "Because I should as soon expect you to fall in love with a monkey!"—And as that was the first reply that rose to his lips, he took a moment to prepare another less unpolite.

"I am made too anxious, I suppose, Laura, by our position. I would not have you sacrifice your happiness for the sake of money; and as you have thrown away so many offers before, I feared you might be accepting this

one merely because you had left yourself so little time in which to make a choice. I know you must marry somebody, or we must face complete ruin; it is of no use to hide the fact, for we both know it only too well. How I wish your brother had lived, Laura!—It would have been far better for you to have had a single thousand pounds to use as you chose than to be the heiress you are at such a price as this.”

Dr. Doldy rose from his chair as he spoke. His feeling in this matter was most genuine—it roused him to anger.

“I don’t know about that, uncle,” said Laura, dropping her eyes. “I like money—and diamonds—and dress.”

Dr. Doldy turned sharply to look at her, as he stood on the hearthrug.

“Well,” said he, drily, “if you are so content, of course it is not for me to complain of your grandfather’s will. At the same time, I do regret that I have ever allowed myself to be in the position I am. My conscience would

be easier if your remaining unmarried had only meant poverty, not ruin ; or if you had found love in a cottage, rather than this marriage, which at the bottom of my heart I cannot approve. If you had not been so wastefully extravagant—if you had not demanded money of me—”

“ And,” said Laura, in her softest, most composed voice, “ if you had not been very glad to share the responsibility for the sake of sharing the loans—you needed the money, too, you know, uncle. And now you are only growing sentimental over it.”

Dr. Doldy hesitated and stood silent. He was indeed ignominiously situated.

“ True, Laura,” he said, after a little pause, “ we are both in the same box. We are equally concerned in the matter now—that I know full well ; you have our whole fortunes in your hands. There is no escaping the fact—which perhaps you hardly realise to its fullest extent—that we have borrowed so largely on your prospects as to require, with interest, a full

third of the fortune which will be at your disposal, if we paid the debt at once. And, as we have neither of us any resources, and I have only my professional income, we cannot for a moment think of not fulfilling the conditions of the will. But, Laura, as I said, you have a year before you. If your marriage is consummated the day before your twenty-third birthday, you will safely inherit. Therefore, all I say is, don't get frightened into a hasty marriage—be careful about it."

"I am not making any hasty marriage, uncle," answered Lanra, quietly. "I have repeatedly told you that I marry Mr. Yriarte simply because I—well, I care for him."

"Strange!" muttered Dr. Doldy below his breath, as he returned to his seat and his unfinished glass of port. "Passing strange!"

"And," he said, aloud, after an appreciative sip, "don't be angry with me, Laura, if I ask you whether you are sure it is yourself and not your money *he* cares for?"

“I am quite sure,” answered Laura, “that whether he cares for my money or not, he cares for me too.”

Dr. Doldy looked quickly up at her as she spoke; and saw again the dark flush which before had surprised him rise for an instant in her face.

“Humph!” he said, setting down his glass, “then of course I have nothing more to say about it. At the same time, Laura, let me tell you that if I were not placed in the position I am, I should insist upon an engagement sufficiently long for us to know him a great deal better than we do.”

“But as it is,” said Laura, clasping her hands, and turning her eyes upon her uncle’s face, “you consent?”

“I must, I suppose,” said he, with no very good grace; “his connexions are excellent—I have no reason to refuse my consent. But, Laura, don’t be hasty. Let the engagement last as long as possible; you have a little time yet before you!”

“But,” said Laura, “he has a right to his feelings, and I to mine. I dislike long engagements, and he is most anxious to be married soon. As you feel you can’t but consent, why not let us have our way quietly in this?”

Laura was showing her teeth again. Hedged in as he was, Dr. Doldy could but say as amiably as might be, “Well, child, have your way.”

“Now, you are being delightful,” said Laura, in her sweetest manner. “It is all settled, so don’t look cross. I told José he might come to-morrow—you will see him?”

“I must, I suppose,” repeated the Doctor. He felt himself so entangled in the meshes of this uncomfortable net that he could think of nothing else to say.”

“That’s all right then,” said Laura. “Now I have another affair to talk of. The marriage now being an arranged thing, we had better consider how to settle our money matters. I propose that I should at once make over

ten thousand pounds to you, and that you should then make the best arrangement you can to settle our debts with Mr. Lingen, either now, or at my marriage, or by degrees. That would leave me about another ten thousand free money, and the income from my settlement; while you, when you had done with Mr. Lingen, would have some slight return for all your anxiety about and care of me. A very small return it is to offer—I wish I had a million to share with you!”

The emotion was, as far as it went, genuine. She really was fond of her uncle, and grateful to him. At the same time, she had proposed an excellent mode of freeing herself of all trouble—trouble being a thing she detested. Dr. Doldy was a little conscious of these two sides of her as she spoke.

“You are generous, Laura,” he answered, gravely; “and, I dare say, wise. Your grandfather’s intentions that his money should descend in a direct family line would in no way be sinned against, for you cannot touch the sums

"I don't want you would not enter upon anything so hampered with complicated details. We will think about it."

"No, no," cried Laura, "I want things done and I shan't have bothering about them. Drive to Mr. Lingen's office after breakfast tomorrow, and have the documents made out, to be ready to sign on the day of my marriage. You will see Mr. Yriarte, and let the engagement be announced. Everything will be delightful, and I shan't have any more bother, but have all my time to enjoy myself."

She started up and ran away to her room, where she wrote a note to Don José, telling him to come early in the afternoon of the next day. That done, she descended to the drawing-room to pour out coffee and sing arch little French songs to amuse her uncle. They did amuse him very much, when he was in the mood to be amused in that way. For he was by no means deficient in powers of observation; and he had discovered long ago that Laura's bewitching way of singing these sweet little

songs was diligently practised. When a gentleman was to be had, she liked him to turn over her music for her, whether at the right place or not did not matter, for she knew all her songs by heart; and when he leaned forward to do this he always got a thrilling, bewildering glance from those almond-shaped eyes. As it required practice to send these glances with perfect ease, and a throwing of all the singer's soul into the eyes without making any mistake, Laura kept up her proficiency in this enchanting little way of hers by casting up her eyes in exactly the same manner at a certain statuette which stood just beside the piano, and which had received in private many hundreds of these sweet oglings, with a profound and impenetrable calm.

Dr. Doldy did not bestow much attention on his charming ward to-night, however. His mind was back with Ernestine. When would she take Laura's place in his house? He allowed himself to dream a little of that future which he found it difficult to picture. Ernes-

tine's individuality was so distinct and vivid that the mingling of their lives was a strange thing to look forward to.

Yes, a strange thing. So thought Ernestine herself. Even now, as Dr. Doldy was dreaming and striving to realise his dream, so too was Ernestine Vavasour.

She was an indefatigable student; and though now that she had finished her course of study and had returned from Paris, where she had gone through it, with her new dignity of M.D., she might well have granted herself a little breathing space, yet she returned, with the true scholarly love for them, to her books—and her bones.

In London she always resided with some connexions of hers, who, though moving in good society and rather disapproving of Ernestine's "ideas" and mode of life, yet very gladly gave her a little room in their town house. This was more of a home than any other that she had; and here she came to-night to study—and to dream.

She had come to a place in her life where were cross-roads and a sign-post. Patiently, in spite of many difficulties, she had climbed the long hill of student life. She had got to the top of that—she had achieved something which was a sort of triumph in its way, but which, as Mrs. Silburn said, Ernestine was far too proud to boast of, even to herself. The only thing she ever had to say about it was that she had taken longer in obtaining her degree than most young men of medical ability, because in her childhood she had had the misfortune to be educated as a girl.

All that was done with, now, however, and she had her real life before her. Well, there were cross roads just at this place in it, and one of the roads was marked—*Marriage*. With her eyes open she was walking this way: this very day she had turned down that road; and now that she had shut herself up with her books, she did not find it easy to take her thoughts from this new step of hers.

Her dreams lay very near her heart. She

did not fancy herself beside Dr. Doldy's fireside in the flesh, as he fancied her; but she marvelled much whether indeed her heart was to be warm henceforward. Not easy was it for Ernestine to love—not easy for her to find sympathy. She had climbed the long hill to this point in her life, alone. Was it possible that she was now entering into an existence where loneliness was not, and where unbelief and disappointment in mankind would be forgotten in the truth of one soul?

CHAPTER IV.

COUNSEL ON BOTH SIDES.

LAURA DOLDY thought herself to have achieved something when she had actually persuaded Dr. Doldy, the next morning, to drive her to Lewis Lingen's office. He made resistance: he attempted to understand what his conscience was trying to say: but Laura and the difficulties of the situation were too much for him. So it was finally settled that Laura was to marry Don José Yriarte, and that on her wedding-day a round sum was to be handed over to Dr. Doldy.

The consequence was that soon after Mr. Lingen arrived at his office Dr. Doldy's carriage stood at his door, and he himself was

closeted with the two valued clients who had emerged from it.

Laura—looking deliberately bewitching in her dark furs, but keeping her eyes and ears both very wide open—sat in an arm-chair by the fire in Mr. Lingen's private room. Dr. Doldy, on one side of a table heaped with papers, etc., was explaining Laura's wishes to the lawyer, who sat with his back to the light on the farther side of the table. Laura always preferred her uncle to do all the talking with Lewis Lingen, for she particularly disliked being transfixed by his large eye-glass, behind which his quick, frequently blinking eyes seemed to take shelter and see nothing. She hesitated always before even making a remark, for the eye-glass was instantly turned upon her, with a rapidity which made her nervous, and then retained a sort of steady hold upon her until she had become quite silent.

Lewis Lingen was a fine man, who affected style, had an inveterate tendency to lavender kid gloves and button-hole roses, and carried a

smelling bottle in his breast pocket, to protect his delicate nostrils against the horrors of police-court atmosphere and office fustiness. His brow was of beautiful proportion, and might have hidden behind it the brain of a poet, were it not, perhaps, a trifle too narrow in its bounds. This fine head seemed strangely counteracted in its effect by a peculiar knife-like formation of face; his nose, sharp and keen, looked as though intended to cut through things, while all the other lines of the face led up to that characteristic organ.

Another reason why Laura disliked talking to this gentleman, and also why she trusted in his vast wisdom, was that he always appeared to weigh every word he uttered before he allowed it to escape him. When expected to give advice, he would sit silent, with a frown between his eyes like the Greek letter π ; and then, when he spoke, the frown would vanish, and the transfixing eye-glass come into play. The man always veiled himself behind either the frown or the eye-glass.

“Disagreeable man!” Laura would say; “he talks as though he were playing chess—I hate that, because I can’t play chess. But I’m sure he’s very clever.”

The document was duly made out and signed, which placed Dr. Doldy in prospective possession of half the money which Laura inherited, free of any condition, save her marriage. A proposed arrangement for payment of the moneys owed by the Doldies to Mr. Lingen was then broached, and slightly talked over, in a manner much too suggestive, Laura thought, of a game of skill being played by the two gentlemen. Dr. Doldy soon terminated this by saying that he would have occasion to call again before long, and he must take Laura away to fulfil other engagements. “She is full of business and pleasure,” he said, smiling, “for you will have understood from what we have said that she has at last made up her mind to marriage, and that very soon.”

“Indeed, Miss Doldy—are you allowing

yourself to be congratulated at last? Am I not an old enough friend to know who is to be the happy man?"

The frown cleared away, and the eye-glass seemed comparatively harmless; he felt no special interest in the question, though he had known Laura since her childhood.

"A Spanish gentleman," said Dr. Doldy, the smile on his face dying away, "a Mr. Yriarte."

"Oh—indeed," said Mr. Lingen, a little absently, and Dr. Doldy rose to go, for the tone sounded as though the matter had not much interest for the lawyer. But, at the sound of the name, though he had spoken so unconcernedly, Lewis Lingen had almost imperceptibly started, and had, with his habitual rapid movement, turned his eye-glass full upon Laura.

She returned the look he gave her: that look which was intuned and revealed nothing, and yet seemed to penetrate. She expected some further words of congratulation, accom-

panied by a peculiar bright smile which distinguished Lingen when he put business matters aside. But he did not speak or smile; and after a second or two, her eyes dropped; but still she felt the terrible eye-glass upon her, and, a moment later, the dark flush which Yriarte's name had before called to her face covered it again.

She rose impatiently, and turned away. "We must make haste, uncle," she said; "we are already late."

Lingen politely bowed them out, and Laura's eyes once more met his in a resolute and matter-of-course unconcern; but again that eye-glass was too much for her, for she found it still transfixed her, and that still an unaccountable expression came through it which made her drop her eyes and hurry away to the carriage.

She quickly entered it, and sank back with a sigh of relief. But at the same moment she gave a start of surprise, and leaned forward again. There, on the pavement, stood her lover,

Mr. Yriarte. But the carriage was off, and Laura had but just time to lean towards him, blow him a kiss—and observe with surprise that he turned into Lewis Lingen's office.

Nothing could have been more natural. He, too, had but yesterday returned from that country house where he and Laura had spent so agreeable a month; and he, too, probably was one of Lewis Lingen's clients.

Quite natural; but none the less the idea made Laura uncomfortable. She told herself that there was no reason why it should have such an effect; but all the same, she was conscious of a feeling of unpleasantness.

But she drowned all foolish senses of vague discomfort in her anticipations; for in a couple of hours Don José might be expected at her home, and was to be received as the accepted lover.

“We pass Mrs. Silburn's, uncle, don't we?” said she, presently; “put me down there. I must call on her while I'm in town, and if I go now it will just fill the time till lunch—for

I've nothing to do at home. You must send the carriage for me in half-an-hour," added the imperious young lady.

"By all means," said Dr. Doldy; he was always glad that Laura retained even the acquaintance of so straightforward a little lady as Dorothy Silburn,—for he was placed in that awkward position occupied by some men of the old school; he thoroughly liked the characteristics of the independent, upright sort of womankind, while he entirely disapproved of the modern woman's position in society, and disbelieved in her real capacity for anything beyond puddings and bonnets.

But, when he had spoken, he thought of Ernestine. He could not have Laura hear of his engagement from others first; and he had had no heart to introduce the subject himself. Indeed, he had been wondering this morning whether words do not with different people mean entirely different things: the idea of marriage seemed of so changed a colour when

connected with Ernestine from that it took when he thought of Laura.

But he decided quickly to trust in Mrs. Silburn's shrewd discretion. She would be sure to see what Laura knew before revealing anything. He misdoubted Coventry more; the poetical nature has sometimes an unfortunate habit of following out its own thoughts without keenly observing the thoughts of others.

However, as there was nothing else to be done, the Doctor decided to put faith in Providence; he also decided to speak to Laura of his own engagement, that evening after dinner, when he had got over the interview with Don José Yriarte and had shaken off the atmosphere of Laura's own love-affair a little.

So he assisted her out of the carriage at Mrs. Silburn's door in silence.

The lady in question had entered the house only just before her visitor.

"Dorothy," said Mr. Coventry Silburn, as

she entered the room where he lay swinging in his favourite hammock, "will you give me your opinion on some verses?"

"Still perpetrating poetry, dear boy? Do you know you forgot to feed the birds this morning, you were so engrossed over your verse-making?"

"What! have I let the dear babes starve so long?" cried Coventry, starting up.

His wife laughed.

"If you and your babes hadn't me to take care of you, where would you all be?"

"Delightful Dorothy, how often you say that, and how true it is. What is this—a cheque?" as she drew something from her muff and held it up before him. "Bread and butter provided for ever so long. What felicity!"

"There's my money from the *Morning Mail*, and I've seen the editor of the *Monthly*. He's ripe for a poem from you, if you will but get one ready."

“Alas,” said Coventry, with half-comic pathos, “it still goes hard with me to sell my imagination for gold coins. However, my Dorothy here is ready to manage the matter of the money, if I but turn out the verse. Have you called on *Minerva Medica*?”

“Not yet, it’s too early; she would be at her hospital. Ah! here comes her future step-niece.”

“Coming here?” exclaimed Coventry.

“Yes. Dr. Doldy’s carriage is at the door, and Laura is getting out of it. How I wonder whether those two women can ever get on together. They are so different.”

“As different as stars and shell-fish. Let me go—I shall be miserable for the whole day if you make me talk to Laura Doldy.”

“Why do you so dislike her?” asked Mrs. Silburn, as her husband was vanishing from the room; “she is an agreeable girl.”

“I don’t know,” he answered, “I am but a creature of instinct, like my kittens, who always set up their backs at her. I am sure

Laura would not hesitate to wring their necks if they annoyed her."

So saying, he disappeared. Mrs. Silburn threw off her fur cloak, and drew a chair near the fire, to await her visitor's appearance.

It was a charming little drawing-room which owned Mrs. Silburn for its mistress. It was not, perhaps, very tidy, but its very untidiness was both comfortable and artistic. Two circumstances much aided its pleasant appearance; one was that Coventry so passionately loved flowers, ferns, birds, and, indeed, all living things, that with them he made the room alive; the other was that Mrs. Silburn had never had either time or talent for fancy work, so that no antimacassars or useless and indescribable woollen things were scattered about as they are in most unpretentious drawing-rooms.

Otherwise the room was simple indeed; for the Silburns had no money to spare for splendid surroundings. But it was full of taste and equally full of comfort.

Nevertheless, it was a room which Laura despised. Laura had been brought up to love money, and all that money buys. She despised people who had to economise. She regarded the Silburns as people hardly worthy of notice, and frequently wondered at her uncle's fast friendship for them. With all her acuteness, she had not yet discovered what various sides there are to people's characters; and so it did not occur to her that the Silburns brought out and satisfied a side of Dr. Doldy which she knew nothing of.

She visited Mrs. Silburn principally to please her uncle; but she did not at all mind doing it, for two reasons. One was that Mrs. Silburn knew most of the "lions"—the people with "names," and could introduce her to them; and the other was that Mrs. Silburn pleased her by understanding how to admire her dress.

"I had no idea you were in town, Miss Doldy," said Mrs. Silburn, rising to greet her with the conventional affectionateness into

which she relapsed with people whom she did not much like. She kissed Laura—her dearest friends she shook by the hand, like the stern little modern woman that she was. And Laura, not knowing the kiss to be an inferior form of salutation rather than otherwise, returned it with the effusive caress habitual to her.

“I am only in town for a day or two, dear Mrs. Silburn,” replied Laura, as she took her place in a low chair, and arranged her dress with an effective sweep.

They chattered awhile about Laura’s visits and Laura’s friends; and then Mrs. Silburn noticed the new bracelet which had slipped low upon Laura’s wrist, and sparkled from among her furs.

“A magnificent bracelet, Laura!—is it not something new?”

“Yes, Mrs. Silburn,” said Laura, looking down at it with a smile, “it is new, and it is connected with a piece of news which I have to tell you. I have at last made up my mind to enter the holy state of matrimony.”

“Really, Laura! Well, I am very glad, and congratulate you heartily.”

“And, Mrs. Silburn,” said Laura, the dark colour beginning to rise a little in her face, “I tell you because you know something of the position I am placed in about my fortune—and because I think you will believe me—I am *not* marrying for money, but for love.”

“Then I congratulate you doubly,” said Mrs. Silburn, a queer little smile at the corners of her mouth. “And when will you introduce me to this favoured lover?”

“Not yet, dear Mrs. Silburn, because I shall be away. But I shall not stay away very long probably, because I must be preparing for my wedding.”

“Is it anyone I know?” asked Mrs. Silburn.

“I don’t think so,” said Laura. “It is Mr. Yriarte, a Spaniard. And now I must run away, for I expect the carriage will be waiting for me, and my uncle and I have so many engagements to-day.”

Laura made her exit, with a good deal of soft, purring effusiveness, and Mrs. Silburn sat down again by the fire. When the front door was heard to close, Coventry walked into the drawing-room.

“Gone!—thank the gods! Dorothy, I wish you would cut that young lady!”

“How can I, Coventry? You would not have me offend the dear Doctor? And now Ernestine will be of the family, you know. Besides, Laura amuses me. I like studying her character.”

Coventry shuddered.

“A morbid taste, Dorothy. You treat literature as if it were a profession instead of an art. You should have gone in for medicine—the dissecting room would have just suited you.”

“Nay, Laura is only frivolous—I see nothing horrible in her. And she is doing something now which I am sure you will approve of. She is marrying, and that for love, not for money.”

“Nonsense,” said Coventry, impatiently. “You have but to look at Laura’s mouth, and the shape of her head, to see that she has no idea what the word means. Few people have, I allow, but certainly Laura is not one of them.”

“Well,” said Dorothy, “all I can say is that I was puzzled, for she not only said so, very earnestly, but blushed deeply as she said it.”

“Laura blushed!!” exclaimed Coventry. “Well, I allow that to be extraordinary, and—yes, puzzling. If Laura is in love it may make a new woman of her. Love is the true, indeed, I fancy, the only educator.”

“Well,” said Dorothy, doubtfully, “she puzzled me, I confess; but at the same time I agree with you that I don’t see much capacity for so big a thing as love in her.”

The young lady thus discussed drove home to lunch with her uncle and prepare herself for Mr. Yriarte’s call, with a very pleasant fluttering of something which she considered to be her heart. She was under a delicious

excitement, as she thought of her present position.

Lunch over, she paid a very careful visit to her looking-glass, and then sat down in the drawing-room to await, with as much patience as might be, the advent of Don José.

Quite still she sat. Laura always sat still when she was impatient. She had placed herself picturesquely; she had adjusted her draperies gracefully; she held in her hand an open book. The only sign that she was not absorbed in her reading was the slight monotonous fret of one foot upon the fender.

The afternoon wore on, and as Laura found herself still in solitude, the fret of the little foot became quicker and more decided. Otherwise she showed no signs of emotion, and refrained from even looking round, when, after some hours of expectation, the drawing-room door opened.

“All alone?” said Dr. Doldy’s voice.

“Yes,” said Laura; “all alone, and rather
of it.”

“I must go out now, as my consulting hours are over; and I have one or two cases I must attend to before dinner-time; so you must keep Mr. Yriarte to dinner, if I am to see him to-day.”

“Very well,” said Laura, languidly, as the door closed. Then she raised her left arm and looked at the bracelet on her wrist.

“Little villain!” she exclaimed, after a moment’s contemplation of it. “Why do you treat me like this?”

A quick gleam flashed from her eyes upon the jewels which were so much more than jewels to her; but immediately afterwards those eyes drooped, and the whole face softened into its most voluptuous beauty, as she whispered to herself, “Come, José!”

But he did not come.

CHAPTER V.

“ Whene’er I take my walks abroad,
How many poor I see ! ”

IN the dusk of that same afternoon Dorothy Silburn called at the house where Ernestine Vavasour was staying, and’ asked for that lady. She was shown straight up into Ernestine’s own little room, for she was one of her few intimate friends.

Ernestine was sitting in an armchair near the fire, but she still wore her out-of-door dress, and started when Mrs. Silburn was announced, as if she were deeply buried in a brown study.

“ Are you going out ? ” said Mrs. Silburn, as Ernestine rose to greet her.

“Oh no, I had forgotten to take my hat off, that is all,” said Ernestine with her grave smile. She took it off, and sat down again with an abrupt half-sigh. Her soft, fair curly hair fell over her brow in a way of its own that was very pretty to look at, but annoyed Ernestine greatly. She was not quite strong-minded enough to have it all cropped close, but she often wished its tendencies were less artistic.

Dorothy looked with affectionate questioning into her face as she sat down by her.

“You are tired?” she said.

“No, I am not tired,” answered Ernestine, “at least, not in the way you mean.”

“Tired, not in body, but in spirit?—is that it?”

“Chafed, rather than tired,” said Ernestine, as she lifted her eyes, from their gaze into the fire, and turned them upon Dorothy.

When Ernestine was absorbed in any line of thought, her eyes set far beneath her brows, and always remarkable, became positively

cavernous in the revelation of depths beyond depths, and the flashes of sudden fire which illumined those depths. They wore this look now, and provoked Dorothy to say—

“Why, what has chafed you so bitterly?”

“Oh, a very little thing. But then it is always the little things that do disturb me. Big troubles are made to be conquered, but little ones—they chafe.”

Dorothy said nothing, but waited for further enlightenment, which came, as she expected.

“I do hate the streets of London,” went on Ernestine, after a little silence, “the city oppresses me. I don’t know whether I could endure it without the knowledge that the country is no better—that is, that the people in the country are no purer by dint of inhaling pure air, than the people in the town.”

“You can shut yourself away from things more in the country,” said Dorothy.

“That’s no relief. No, I will face life as

it is, in this world. It is part of my deepest beliefs that if we are placed in this world, we are not to screen ourselves from it. There must be some jewel hid for us in its dark earth—something which, if we dig for it, will give light and joy to ourselves and others. Else, even we that try to keep our hearts full of faith might ask, why should we stay in such a dirty place?”

“What makes you so angry with our poor world to-day?”

Ernestine half-smiled at herself through her indignation, as she answered—

“A very common incident—only that a foolish little dandy followed me home from the hospital. A dark-skinned, miserable, unhealthy-looking man, whom I should like to have had put under sanitary regimen—actually he took the trouble to pass me and meet me half-a-dozen times, in order to give me an insolent stare with his little evil twinkling eyes, and to show two rows of projecting white teeth in a hideous grin. I suppose he

must have thought himself attractive—I felt as if I were being followed by an evil spirit.”

“I suppose you were,” said Dorothy, with an amused smile, “only it was embodied. But I expect you are mistaken as to his thinking himself attractive—he would expect to please you by staring at you. Most handsome women *are* pleased to be stared at.”

“Don’t talk like that,” said Ernestine, with a look of such weariness and disgust that Dorothy sobered herself.

“I can understand,” she said, “how much more annoying it may be for a woman to be handsome if she seeks independence.”

“I am not thinking so much of that,” answered Ernestine, “but of the travesty on manhood that such a man is! But, indeed, most of the human faces one meets in the streets are more or less caricatures upon the ideal of humanity. How infinitely more shapely within their limits are the animals! I am sure that some of the most benevolent

and trustworthy faces I see upon my daily walks are those of the big dray horses. They are simple faces, the faces of workers who do not look up or around, but only upon their path, yet in that simplicity, and in the strength which makes them patient and willing, they appear so grand and friendly. The men and women who walk through the streets look as though they had dissipated half their energies, and wasted or never reached half their natural strength and beauty.”

“Of course we all waste our strength in one way or other. But you cannot say much about that. How long have you been working to obtain your independence, and now that you have just got it you give it up again!”

For a moment Dorothy thought she had gone too far (for intimate as they were, she often found she did not understand her friend), but directly afterwards Ernestine smiled her sweetest smile.

“I have thought about that,” she said;

“and it seems to me that true affection cannot injure true independence.”

“Why, no,” said Dorothy, drily; “but then this is a world where an approximation to truth reigns, rather than truth herself; without saying that there is not a great deal of true affection in the world, I think I may say that the words, true independence, might mean very different things to different people. And now, I have but a few moments before I must run home to dinner, and I have not yet asked you what I wanted. Here is a book sent me for review from a paper on which I am anxious to get regular work, as it pays very well. I was a little taken aback when the first work offered me was to review this; it is number one of a series called ‘Special Subject Primers.’ I was determined not to refuse it, though the worst of it is, the editor said he must have a review showing technical knowledge, and a rather minute examination of the work; so I have to beg information from my friends. All I want is just to take

one or two points, and show whether the author is right or wrong; and as there is a great deal of medical opinionation in it, I thought, perhaps, you would give me a minute or two to help me out.”

“With the greatest pleasure, if I can,” said Ernestine, smiling. Dorothy’s way of working often amused her. Her own mode was to go to the very bottom of any subject she had to handle, however long it might take her. Dorothy had been a literary hack too long to attempt anything of the kind.

“Now,” said Dorothy, opening her book, “he makes a great number of statements under the headings of ‘Popular’—I suppose he means prevalent—‘Diseases,’ ‘Treatment of Poisoning Cases,’ and so on. Here is Typhoid Fever, under the first head. He says that the exploded system of cure was by cathartics, and that patients fell like ninepins. The modern cure, and, as he considers, the only safe one, is dosing with brandy.”

“Just so,” said Ernestine, “and now the

correct thing is to die drunk! He may consider that the safest way of sending a person into the next life, but for my part I had rather make my entrance in a more dignified manner. It is a cruel system. I have nursed several cases of typhoid, and have had it myself; and I am positive that cool baths and cool packs are not only the most grateful treatment to the half-conscious patient, but great aids to the recovery. Typhoid depends more than any known disease on good nursing."

"That disposes of him on that question," said Dorothy, who was quite ready to take up any idea, and was making rapid notes, feeling elate at the consciousness that they would easily be expanded into at least half a column of most learned disquisition.

"If," said Ernestine, "he is making medicine easy for the people, he ought to say of typhoid fever that more mistakes are made about it than about anything else. I have known it called galloping consumption in the

first half of the illness, and towards the middle it is often supposed to be brain fever——”

“ Don’t waste your energies,” cried Dorothy, “ I have quite enough. I don’t want real knowledge—I only want just to look as if I know more than he does. Now, the great subject of poisoning! He tells you all the symptoms and details, and leaves you under the impression that you know all about it, and would find out immediately if anybody were being poisoned.”

“ I must look at that to see whether I can pick any holes for you—you see he may be quite correct up to a certain era in poisoning, but then poisoning is a science which is continually advancing. The poisoners are always ahead of the analysts. I have heard it said that the swindlers keep one step in advance of the detectives, and are never really overtaken. The same is true of poisoners; the instinct of their desire gives them a perpetual advantage over the scientists, who proceed more intellectually.”

“That will do; I shall put all my scraps of information together and make a capital result. I am so glad if I can do this extra work. Coventry has been sighing for a fusty old dictionary—a first edition—that he saw in Booksellers’ Row the other day, and I shall be able to get it for him now. I have seen him open that book and peep inside two or three times, and he has never said a word about it; and when he does that about anything it always makes me want so much to get it for him.”

Dorothy had risen, and was putting her papers and book together; when she turned to say good-bye she was startled at the look on Ernestine’s face.

“Why, what is it now?” she exclaimed; “your thoughts have never gone back to your monkeyish admirer?”

“Partly they have,” replied Ernestine, “and partly——” she hesitated, and said no more. She had been wondering whether it were possible that she should in reality ever

have such a resting-place in the world as Dorothy had in her home. Her strong, independent soul was very much shaken by the thought of the new and different life she was now looking forward to; and she could not help speculating upon her future. If, indeed, she was to find so pleasant and tranquil a delight in the home side of her life, how much more strength she would be able to put into the outer side of it! That was Ernestine's thought, which brought into her face a new beauty. But that expression passed and left behind it the weariness which Dorothy had first seen there.

“Come home with me,” said Dorothy, when she noticed this look, “we are not very busy to-night.”

“May I?” said Ernestine. “I should like to, if you are really not busy, for there is a dance here this evening, and I somehow don't feel attuned to that sort of entertainment. I am too full of the visions of the streets to

dance for joy, and I never could understand dancing for anything else."

"Then come!" cried Dorothy, picking up Ernestine's hat and handing it to her.

"I will just go and tell my aunt," said Ernestine, "for I said I should probably be in to-night."

She went away, returning in a few moments, and then they went out. Dorothy put her hand within Ernestine's arm, a habit that had grown upon her lately. Ernestine was considerably taller, and Dorothy, though so independent in her quiet practical way, rather enjoyed the sense of seeming to lean upon someone else.

They had walked half way down the street when suddenly Dorothy felt a sort of tingle in her hand, as if something had been communicated to it from Ernestine's arm. She had been walking quickly and silently, her eyes upon the ground; and now looking up, she saw that just in front of them, within the light of the next lamp, stood a gentleman,

smoking a cigar. As they passed him, Dorothy just caught a glimpse of a sallow face, two gleaming eyes, and some prominent white teeth; a second later she heard the words, “Deuced fine woman, that.”

He must have been awaiting a hansom which he had hailed, for immediately afterwards he drove past them in one, craning his neck to catch the last glimpse of Ernestine.

“Was that your admirer of this afternoon?” asked Dorothy.

“Yes,” answered Ernestine.

“I hope he won’t annoy you,” said Dorothy; “he knows where you live now.”

“I should as soon think of being annoyed by a midge,” said Ernestine, in her most wearied tone, “as by an insignificant little man like that; but I really wish he had some better way of amusing himself than attempting to annoy other people.”

“Don’t mistake motives,” said Dorothy, with mock severity. “I told you before that he expects to please you. If you live in this

world, Ernestine, you must really try to be rather more of it."

"I wonder," said Ernestine, "whether, if I devoted half-an-hour to a serious talk with such a man as that, I could show him how ridiculous he had appeared to-day, and how unworthy of a man such an appearance is?"

"No," answered Dorothy, promptly, "he would only think it a great pity that such a 'deuced fine woman' should be a chatter-box."

Ernestine laughed, and they said no more till they entered Dorothy's home. Dorothy let herself in with a latch-key, but the sound of the opening door was evidently expected, for immediately Coventry appeared.

"Late for once, Dorothy the punctual," he exclaimed, "but I forgive you, as you have actually brought *Minerva Medica* home with you."

Ernestine smiled. "Yes, Mr. Silburn, I was in such a deplorable frame of mind that your wife insisted upon saving me from myself.

And very grateful I am to her ; for, indeed, after the rough atmosphere of ordinary life it is like a bath of cream to enter into this drawing-room of yours.”

“ I can tell you why that is,” said Dorothy, “ it’s because nobody ever quarrels in this room. Coventry is fond of saying that even with a pretty paper on the walls, and the most perfect harmony of colour, no room will be nice to look at or to be in if people disagree in it. We don’t do much worse here than groan and sigh a little now and then, when the cheques are dilatory, or a cold in the head makes brilliant writing difficult ; occurrences which just serve to tone down a little the general light-heartedness of the kittens—and Coventry. And now we must hurry to dinner ; for I am ashamed of being late.”

The kittens in question being established in a basket in the middle of the hearthrug while dinner was discussed, formed the centre of the group after that meal was over. Coventry (who had a rooted objection to chairs) stood

leaning against the mantelpiece on one side, not with his back to the fire like a true-born Englishman, but with one elbow resting on the shelf and his eyes on Ernestine's face. She was silent, gazing into the glowing coals, and Coventry, who loved to study faces, was tracing the lines of character in hers, and wondering to himself how the fiery energy that beneath all its gentleness was so predominant in it, would eventually find its vent. Would it be worn out in ardent labour? would it stand the test of married life and social intercourse, and not be gradually led into a more ordinary channel of activity? He thought to himself that it would subsist, from every other sign which he saw in the face before him; for Ernestine's passionate will was scarcely a more marked quality in her composition than the rare characteristic of a purity as perfect as may be in a mere imperfect woman. It was that which gave the finest and most delicate beauty to her face. The soul whose flame burns purely cannot look upon the world

through eyes of flesh without bringing into them a charm of its own, altogether separate from the beautifulness of the physical form.

“ I suppose,” said Dorothy, breaking the silence which had fallen upon them, “ that you are sufficiently the champion of your sex to still feel an interest in the vexed question of English degrees for women, although you have got over the difficulty for yourself? ”

“ Indeed, yes,” answered Ernestine, still gazing into the fire. “ I am but an individual atom of the humanity which blindly struggles to find some light. And for some years past I have had more love for that half-blind, half-dumb humanity than for the individuals which form it. It seems as if one had some personal acquaintance with mankind as a whole—one has heard of its struggles, triumphs, and failures, in the course of its long development—one is prepared, by experience, for its actions. We can judge what a nation will do under certain circumstances ; we can almost calculate on the actions of a collection of men—and we

can prophesy with some safety how far mankind as a whole is likely to change its habits, its creeds, its moralities, within a given time. We have so much knowledge of the character of humanity to go upon that we cannot be so deeply and unexpectedly disappointed in its actions and motives as we continually are in those of individuals. The time is at hand for women to obtain any dignity in England that they are capable of obtaining. We have no cause to complain of our country as a whole. It is advancing as rapidly as it is possible for it to advance. Before very long there will be an Alma Mater for us upon our own soil—universities will open their arms to us, and confer their honours upon us. And from the actions of the university and of the nation I am learning to look for more comfort than can be found from those of individuals.”

“ I like the idea of a lady who considers no man big enough or respectable enough to shake hands with her, except Humanity himself,” said Coventry.

Ernestine smiled a little. Probably Coventry Silburn was the only man of her acquaintance who could laugh at her with impunity. And, probably, though he seemed so gentle and inoffensive a being, he was the only man she had ever known of whom she really was a little afraid. And this was because she found that the poetic nature which made him appear to live in the froth of life, really led him to the very heart of things.

“I don't say that Humanity is much more respectable than the individual man,” she answered; “but I find him more reliable and intelligible. When some of our greatest physicians—men who must have a vast experience of life, and should have a great possession of knowledge—openly avow their belief that innocence is only possible in conjunction with ignorance — is not that disappointing? These men have refused to learn by experience—they judge by prejudice. We cannot depend on them. When men who take up the cudgels for advance and reform

can condescend to vulgar and immodest jokes upon the very reforms which they advocate—is not that disappointing? When men start suddenly to the surface of these discussions in order to vehemently oppose anything which should destroy the innocence of woman, and you find them to be notorious evil-livers themselves—is not that disappointing?”

Ernestine had flushed, and her face had filled with animation. Dorothy, amused and half-smiling, sat and watched her.

“True,” said Coventry, “I grant you all this; but at the same time, the individual will also startle and amaze us by unexpected revelations of beauty and of solidity. You must remember that every man has a drop of God somewhere in him; the difficulty is to find it; for the generality of people have bodies so much too large for their souls. When you get a soul and body that are well-proportioned one to the other, you have something like an intelligible individuality. A soul which is a complete and shapely thing, appears to me to be

unable, very often, to get more than a portion of itself into its body. I fancy the most contented people have bodies too big, bodies comfortable to move about in, and leaving plenty of room for the expansion of the small tenant. But when it is the other way—when a great soul is partially imprisoned in a too small body—then comes distress and pain. The whole force of that soul will be centred upon the part of it that is embodied and active, and the poor frame can scarcely stand up with such a weight upon its shoulders.”

“Coventry,” said Dorothy, with mock severity, “I think you are talking nonsense.”

“I always am,” he answered; and then, with a sudden change of mood, he opened a little old manuscript-book which he drew from his pocket, and began to walk about the room, reading aloud from it, in a soft and exceedingly delicate manner.

Like light feet of laughing children
At a woodland ball,
The river is leaping o'er rocks that are sleeping,
Above the water-fall :
Softly sounds and echoes mingle
In one lingering lay,
Of a sweet maid straying, and love-words saying,
Where mists hide her, far away.

Never seems she to come nigher,
Yet wait I and list
For a voice awaking, and silver tones breaking,
Through the shadowy mist.
Darken the red wings of sunset,
The last bird leaves the sky,
Stilly night is falling, and one heart calling
For sweet sounds that ne'er come nigh.

Eve's first star atwixt the tree tops
Blossoms into sight ;
Paths meet for true lovers its ray discovers,
With live finger of light.
Pressing mosses of the woodway
With her faery feet,
Comes out from the shade an elf or a maiden,
Tryst to keep where waters meet ?

Now the waters move to music
 Of a glad surprise,
 And the thin white mist has opened in vistas
 Where her pathway lies.
 Her breathing warms the misty gloaming,
 And her voice is heard by flowers ;
 Like the star her eyelight compels the twilight
 Away from trysting-place of ours.

Sing, O waterfall, and waken
 Choirs of sleeping birds ;
 O night-hiding blossoms, expand your bosoms
 To catch her softest words ;
 'Tis mine to be like shade, like blossom,
 Her presence makes to glow,
 Betwixt our two faces, no darksome space is,—
 Blended hearts will have it so.

Ernestine, listening to the dreamy verse, seemed to herself to be carried away in spirit from the sphere in which men jar in words together, and poison women with evil looks, to a dream-land where mingling purity and truth produce a mystic atmosphere of love.

Neither of the women spoke when Coventry

stopped reading ; and, as he passed the bookshelves in his walk, he drew out a volume and read aloud some stanzas, to refresh them, as he said, after listening to his own. And thus, after a familiar and favourite habit of theirs, the evening passed, Coventry following out his own thoughts, and illustrating them by many passages from different authors, the two women sitting by the hearth, mostly in silence ; though Dorothy felt in duty bound to make fun of her fanciful husband now and again. And Ernestine, carried thus into a world which she called ideal yet felt to be not wholly unreal, went home stronger and calmer.

CHAPTER VI.

UNMASKING.

NEXT morning, just about the time when Ernestine was starting off to her hospital, armed with perhaps a little more patience than usual to face the manifold interests and experiences of a walk in the streets, Laura Doldy came down to breakfast. She had purposely waited until Dr. Doldy's carriage had driven away. She did not want to meet him again before Mr. Yriarte's call, for she had no new conjectures to offer as to the reason of that gentleman's absenting himself on the previous day. The incident annoyed her more than a little, when she had been representing him as so ardent a lover, and she

felt as if she would rather postpone further mention of it until the occurrence was explained.

So she came down to breakfast later than usual, and lounged over it alone. She sat by the fire, her two pretty slippers on the fender, a novel in her hand, and a drowsy drooping look about her eyes, as if sleep had scarcely consented to surrender them. The footman informed the kitchen that Miss Laura looked lovelier than ever this morning, for she had all her languid ways on, that so became her. The little lady was quite aware that these languid ways became her, and when a loud knock at the door was followed by a familiar voice in the hall, she suppressed the excitement which would have made her start to her feet. Without raising her eyelids even, she quietly told the footman to show Mr. Yriarte in; and she waited until he had nearly approached her chair, and she had heard the servant close the door, before she looked up at him.

“My angel! You are more beautiful than ever to-day!”

“Are you paying compliments in order to try and make me forget your neglect yesterday?” Laura looked up as she spoke, and beheld Don José Yriarte standing by her side, with clasped hands, and eyes bent sideways on her in an extraordinary leer of admiration.

“I could not come; but now I am here, and my angel of beauty will not be cruel to me.” He drew a chair up as he answered, and sat down very near Laura, gazing on her the while with an insinuating ogle. He retained this smile on his face all the time he spoke to her, showing an upper row of formidable-looking white teeth.

“You will remember,” he went on, “how you saw me go into the office of Mr. Lingen, which you had just left. I found there business for me which kept me all the day. It was very disagreeable; and how often did I not long for my charmer that I could not fly to.

This explanation, even helped out by that singular sideways smile, did not seem to quite

satisfy Laura. She put on a little petulance, and tapping one foot on the fender, said impatiently, "I believe you might have come if you had cared to."

"What! can you doubt your dear José? Did you find that nasty lawyer's office agreeable to stay in? do you like business? No, I know my Laura is too gay and brilliant to care for such things; and yet she will not be sorry for her poor José, condemned to business all the afternoon. I wondered, indeed, what could have prevailed on such a fair butterfly as my Laura to stray into that nasty office."

"Oh, I went to settle some money matters," said Laura, carelessly, with her eyes bent upon the bracelet on her arm, which she was clasping and unclasping as she spoke. She was thinking of the bracelet, not of the money matters, and was entirely unconscious that the gaze which was so fixed upon her had become penetrative instead of admiring as soon as she cast down her own eyes.

“Money matters! they are disagreeable for a fair creature like my Laura. Well, soon your José will take away all that trouble from you, and will arrange these things, while all you will have to know will be that you have the finest jewels and prettiest horses in London. Ah, my Laura shall have such a pair of bays—your José understands the horses a lady should have—and you must drive in London in an open carriage. I will not have my jewel hidden away in a brougham like I saw her yesterday, when she was driving from Mr. Lingen’s. And what was it you went to Mr. Lingen’s to arrange?”

He had laid his hand on her arm while he spoke, and poured his words, so pleasing to Laura, softly into her ear. The question at the end came so naturally, and Laura was so lost in the sensations which he was adroitly imparting to her, that she replied at once. She would have answered him in any case, for she had no idea of concealing anything, but possibly she would not have spoken so

straightforwardly if she had not been thinking of other matters.

“I went to assign to my uncle some of the money which will come to me on my marriage. He will pay such debts as I owe, and I shall be released from the trouble of trying to understand them.”

“How much have you assigned to him?” asked Yriarte.

“Ten thousand pounds,” answered Laura, her eyes still fixed on the bracelet, and her soul still full of the conviction that Yriarte was absorbed in contemplation of her profile. But she was doomed to be speedily startled from her dream; for as the words passed her lips, Yriarte took his hand from her arm and started to his feet. Laura looked up in surprise and saw standing before her, her lover, in so new a guise that she sat motionless, gazing on him in the deepest amazement. The man, who in his handsomest and most engaging moments was regarded by Dr. Doldy as a fair imitation of an amiable monkey, now

showed himself with the brutal part of his nature outward. It was visible in every line of his cadaverous face—in the glaring of his sunken eyes, in the lips quivering over those prominent teeth, in the feverish movement of the long white fingers, tipped with long nails—he was in a passion.

Too much in a passion even to speak, apparently. For a moment he gasped for breath, while Laura remained dumb and amazed. But at last he found words.

“You tell me!—tell me to my face!—you dare to tell me this!”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Laura, her face growing white.

“I mean,” went on Yriarte, stumbling over his words in the excitement of releasing his rage, “that you have no right to give away your money. You are engaged to me, and I understand that you have certain money. And now you actually give it away as if it were a matter of no importance.”

Laura was thoroughly frightened and alarmed

at this first sinking of the lover in the man ; she scarcely realised what his words meant, so great a surprise were they to her. She loved money, but she had never known the dire need of it ; and was scarcely able to realise a state in which every other love is subordinate to that. She trembled as she sat in her chair ; but she made a great effort to recall her habitual imperiousness. "I think," she said, "that it is only of importance to myself. And I am sure you ought not to speak to me like this."

"But I ought. I cannot tell how you dare do this without first consulting me. I am very glad you have told me now, instead of deceiving me to the end. You must go again to Mr. Lingen and have that deed cancelled. You must destroy it—you must burn it."

Laura pushed back her chair and rose. Two little red spots were coming in her pale cheeks. "I shall do nothing of the kind," she said.

"But you must. Do you not see that you

must? You have no right to alienate your money when you are engaged to me."

"I have a right to do what I like with my own money," said Laura. "I shall bring with me ten thousand pounds even now, and my income which is enough for both of us."

"Ten thousand," repeated Yriarte, contemptuously; "do you call that a fortune? And what's an income?" he added, peevishly, "*I don't care about that; you said you had twenty thousand down—a sum just worth the having.*"

"You are speaking rather plainly," said Laura; "it seems, after all, that you care more for the money than for me."

She said it, half expecting that the reproach would touch him. She had not, even yet, awakened to the full sense of this new brutality; he had so completely sheathed his claws while he was winning her that she was really staggered when she saw them.

"I mean to have it, at all events," he said, savagely.

Laura looked in his face, and for the first time in the interview fully understood that he was quite in earnest. She felt, too, that her words, her eyes, had no power over him. Her gaze produced no change in him, her reproach failed to bring him to her feet.

“José!” she exclaimed, “what do you mean by such words? You have taught me to love you, by the love you professed for me. Surely that is not gone! Surely you are not changed!”

She laid her hand on his arm, and looked with passionate appeal into his face. But even her touch seemed to have lost its magnetic power. He shook her hand from him.

“Come,” he said roughly, “we can’t afford to quarrel. Just you destroy that deed, and we’ll have smooth sailing again.”

“I cannot,” said Laura, passionately, “how could I be so mean, so ungenerous? how could I face my uncle? Indeed, José, you do not know what I owe to him. He has been every-

thing to me, a girl left fatherless and motherless. He has spent his own income, year after year, in keeping up a house and a style which he would not have needed for himself alone. He has supplied me with money for my own expenses—he has denied me nothing. I insist upon leaving the matter as it is, so that he shall be left with a few thousands, which will but inadequately repay him for these years of expense and care.”

“Laura,” said Yriarte, sullenly, “you know it is no use talking like that to me. What are your debts to me? Let Dr. Doldy pay them. We must quarrel unless you do as I say; and we cannot afford to quarrel.”

“I don’t care,” cried Laura, now thoroughly roused; “you show too plainly that it is my money you want. You shall be disappointed. I’ll break the engagement even now. I can live without you, José Yriarte, though you may think I cannot.”

“Very well,” said Yriarte, quietly; he was cooling down while Laura was growing hot

with anger ; “ as things stand now, that will suit me very well. Only just bear in mind that you have broken the engagement yourself. It is your own doing, Mees Laura.”

Laura staggered back and leaned against the wall as if her limbs were inadequate to support her. She said nothing—she was aghast. The tone in which these words were uttered, and the accent which he imparted to the “ Mees Laura ” struck her with a chill horror of conviction. All was indeed over between them—and how easily !

“ Go ! ” she exclaimed, as soon as she found voice ; “ wretch ! don’t insult me with your presence. I hate the very sight of your false face ! ”

“ Good-bye, Mees Laura, ” he said, and smiled. That smile, so familiar to her, now seemed new in its falseness, and filled her with loathing. She turned away, but as she moved, her eyes caught the glittering of the diamonds in the bracelet she wore. She unclasped it, and held it trembling in her hands,

while her pale cheeks grew slowly full of dark colour. She turned again towards him, holding the bracelet. He had taken his hat and was moving towards the door. In a changed manner she looked at him, in a low voice began to speak.

“ But — remember — ” she hesitated — stopped—and stood silent.

Yriarte looked at her and laughed; a little, low-toned, cunning laugh peculiar to him.

“ Ah, remember; and remember that this is all your doing, Mees Laura. Good-bye.” He put on his hat, and moved again towards the door. Laura stood as under a spell for a moment, and then suddenly cried out violently — “ Take the vile trinket away—and Heaven defend me from the sight of your evil face again ! ”

She flung the bracelet at him, and then threw herself down in the arm-chair beside her, and buried her face in the cushions; striving, with that sort of pride which be-

longed to her, that he should not hear the sobs which were rending her bosom.

Yriarte stooped, picked up the bracelet, and with a glance to see that it was uninjured, put it in his pocket. He then quietly walked out of the house, pausing on the doorstep to light a cigar. The excitement, of course, had not been altogether without its effect upon his nerves; they were about the equivalent of a cigar and a glass of brandy below par.

CHAPTER VII.

THUNDERBOLTS.

YRIARTE, having lit his cigar, proceeded leisurely on his way down the street. He was unable to walk very fast, for he had unusually high heels on his boots, which continually threatened an ignominious overthrow. He had them put on specially for him, as he laboured under the impression that they made him look taller and more imposing. It was one physical defect that he was conscious of—he could not disguise from himself that he was not as tall as he would like to be. He certainly was unable to help seeing that he was

rather sallow, but he imagined every feature in his countenance was glorified by his carefully practised engaging smile.

Walking leisurely down the street, he was met abruptly by a man who was hurrying round the corner.

“Halloa, my good friend!” cried Yriarte, “where are you off to so quickly?”

“To my work.”

“And what may that work of yours be?” asked Yriarte, in a tone of infinite contempt. The man he addressed was considerably taller than himself and with a fine figure, but he looked cowed before Yriarte’s lofty manner.

“Nothing I am proud of,” he answered, “it is but a resource when I can get nothing else. I should not be at it now if you had not got me into trouble.”

“Well, what is it?” asked Yriarte again, imperiously.

“I am a model at the art school in the next street. There’s one of the lady students

coming this way. Do you wish to be seen with me?"

"Why, no; but come to my house to-night. I must have your address, as I may want you soon."

Yriarte walked on, without further ceremony, and puffed his cigar smoke, after his usual gentlemanly habit, into the face of Miss Armine, who, with another lady, was following very quickly in the steps of the model. As it happened, her companion was Mrs. Silburn.

"How one meets the same faces again," remarked that lady, when Yriarte had passed. "That ridiculous little dandy followed Ernestine Vavasour all the way from the hospital yesterday."

"That was our model he was speaking to," said Miss Armine, "so he can't be anything very grand."

"Indeed!—well, he may be an artist. His diamonds and boot-heels look as if he had plenty of money."

"He's no artist," answered Miss Armine,

quickly, "he doesn't use his eyes like an artist. Come, we must make haste, or the Professor will be down in the life class, and I couldn't very well take you in then."

"Have I to go into the room of the life class then?"

"Yes, the skeleton that has the bones marked hangs up there. We shall be in plenty of time, I think, as the model has only just gone in; but he is late this morning."

They turned out of the long street in which Dr. Doldy's house stood, and after traversing some small cross streets, found themselves in another wide one, nearly opposite the college gates, which the model had just entered. Miss Armine went quickly in and Dorothy followed her. They went up some steps and entered a door on which was painted the words, "Art School." Another flight of broad stone stairs, and then Miss Armine opened a door and admitted her friend into a large room, lighted from above by great windows partially darkened

by green blinds. Under these windows sat a semi-circle of young men and women working busily away behind their easels. Otherwise the room was entirely unfurnished.

As Miss Armine closed the door, Dorothy observed the words, "Life Room," painted on it.

"Where is your model?" she asked.

"Behind the screen," said Miss Armine, pointing to one which shut off the door from a part of the room. "He is so nervous about draughts that the screen which makes the background has to be pulled forward at this side because of the door. There is plenty of grumbling about it when the class is full, and some of us have to peep round the screen; but it's no use, he *will* have his way. Will you just come and have a look at my study before we go round to the skeleton?"

She softly advanced towards an empty easel which was evidently hers, being the only one unoccupied. Some few faces turned and stared curiously at them as they passed, but most of

the students took no notice of them at all, going on eagerly and abstractedly with their work.

“Are you always as quiet as this?” asked Dorothy, in a whisper. “What a class of good children you are!”

“Oh, we are indeed. The life class here is a marvel. You know we are very anxious to show the effects of Professor Varden’s system; he created this life class of mixed men and women, and he used to work so desperately hard himself that we caught the infection. Now we are determined that if Mr. Richy does away with our mixed class, he shall not have any excuse for it; so we are all working like heroes.”

“What do you mean by Professor Varden’s system?”

“Oh, I only mean his way of making his students work. It was done partly by being so much in earnest himself, as I say; and partly by a plan of hardly ever looking after us. It gave us a feeling of responsibility and

‘grown-up-ness,’ to coin a word for myself, which certainly had the effect of making us orderly.”

“What a curious view you have chosen, Miss Armine! but it’s pretty too,” said Dorothy as they reached the easel.

“So I thought. Everybody tries to get his face, and as I’m a little short-sighted I always come off best if I don’t attempt to find room on the favourite side. And I think the marks in his back are quite lovely,” she added, naïvely.

Dorothy laughed. She was much amused with the scene—a novel one to her. The model, a fair, handsome young man, was already there, sitting on a red dais, inside the screen. It was not to be wondered at, thought she, that he was afraid of draughts, for his garb was scanty, consisting only of a crimson girdle. He sat in an attitude of exquisite feminine grace, and the soft droop of his limbs suggested a delicious weariness. His eyes fell on the ground below in a contemplative way, as though he were

gazing into deep waters or gathering fancies from a bank of wild flowers.

“What!” cried Dorothy, “can he keep in that position all the hours you work, and yet look so easy and graceful?”

“That is the most wonderful part of it,” said Miss Armine, “he never looks a whit less graceful or loses an atom of that expression on his face. They are not all like that, you know; some of them are very troublesome. I suppose it’s because he’s such a good model that he can be so tiresome about the draughts. He often keeps Mr. Sienna running about a long time, making arrangements to please him.”

“Who is Mr. Sienna?”

“He is supposed to be the second master. He goes about with his hands always in his pockets, and smiles, and does anything anyone asks him to do. Now come round to the skeleton.”

Dorothy followed her guide, who soon left her with the skeleton and went to her easel.

She employed herself over the bones for a while and made some notes, for she was on one of those excursions after superficial knowledge which so much amused Ernestine.

When she had been busy upon this for a time, and was just ready to go, and rather wondering how to achieve a quiet escape from the solemn assemblage, a tall young man who was painting at the end of the class looked up at the clock and called out, "Rest!"

The model moved a little, stretched one white arm till the blue veins rose on it, ran his fingers through his light clustering hair, and yawned. After this lazy and luxurious stretch, he sprang lightly to the ground, and picking up a great brown rug that lay near, wrapped it around him, and leaned against the table in an attitude as full of grace as that in which he had been sitting.

Meanwhile the students had begun to chatter and move about from easel to easel, inspecting each other's productions. The hum was a subdued one, however, and the conver-

sation appeared to be purely artistic. Miss Armine came round to where Dorothy stood.

“Do you know,” said Dorothy, “this model reminds me of some picture I have seen not long since—some Academy picture of a figure sitting in a wood and looking into a stream.”

“Very likely. I have some such recollection too. He fell into this attitude of himself, and I dare say he learned it by sitting so long for the picture that the position became a natural one. I often think how it spoils one for some of the new pictures to know the appearance of the London models, and recognise the same under a dozen different disguises.”

“The man is a picture in himself, though,” said Dorothy; “just look at him now. What lights on his hair and skin, what a delightful pose. I wonder, has he any brains?”

“No, I think he has a sponge where his brains should be. Some of the models have been capable of conversation and have taken

an interest in their multiplied portraiture ; but we have all given up this man in despair."

"A beautiful animal, then—characterless? How wonderful he would look in a stream or a woodland glade with the sunshine and shadow passing over his shining skin. But he would only be a part of the landscape. We need something more than physical beauty in the human form divine. I have regarded it as a light thrown upon the grandeur of Greek sculpture, the consideration that in the days of Phidias, women were shut up and no good paid model could be obtained. The result was that Phidias had recourse to the noble and enlightened ladies of his society, who would dare to brave public opinion and go to his studio to help him in his art, and so have left us their intelligent beauty that we may slavishly imitate it. Well, I must go. I am chattering too much."

"Have you found the bones you wanted?"

"Yes. I have made my notes, and I must

be quick, for I have to write the article this morning. But I feel dull at home, for Coventry has gone off."

"Gone off! Whatever do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't mean that he has deserted me—he has gone on one of his wild excursions. Every now and then he says he can't stand domestication and regular meals any longer, and then he starts before I am awake in the morning and walks all day without eating anything. I call these wanderings tours in search of famishment and exhaustion."

"What an extraordinary idea!"

"Isn't it? Fancy anybody wanting to escape dinner in these days! I always tell him he'll be brought home on a shutter; but it seems to do him good."

"And where does he go?" asked Miss Armine.

"Generally into the country, sometimes to the East-end of London, to study the ways of the natives. Good-bye." They parted, and Mrs. Silburn went out just in time to escape

Professor Riehy, who was coming into the class. She walked home very quietly, thinking in her sober, practical way, first about skeletons, the Akropolitan School of Art, and Miss Armine. Then her thoughts turned to her friends Ernestine and Dr. Doldy, for she had again to pass Dr. Doldy's house, and looking up at its windows, she tried to picture it as Ernestine's home.

Ernestine's engagement had immediately become a subject of interest and amusement to her aunt and cousins. A delicate little bouquet of sweet flowers already had twice awaited her upon the table of her study when she came home in the afternoon. Twice had she blushed brilliantly, catching sight of the merry faces of two of her girl-cousins, who had enjoyed placing these flowers conspicuously, and then lying in wait to watch their effect upon her.

No camellias were among them, no scentless blossoms. Her room had suddenly taken upon it a new pleasantness as of home; for when she entered, the fragrance of the exotics, which

lingered there, seemed to her fancy to carry a message to her heart. She carried them to her bedroom, and in the morning, came, bringing with it a new sense of assured hope, the clinging odour of the stephanotis, appealing to her waking senses even before the streaming sunlight. This was enough for her at present. She had not seen Dr. Doldy since Mrs. Silburn's kettledrum afternoon. She was half afraid to go there, lest she should meet him; and she was horrified to hear her aunt coming to the front and announcing that she would at once ask him to the house. She listened and submitted in silence, as she had learned to submit to the inevitable.

Dr. Doldy's carriage stopped that day, as each day before, and the cluster of white blossoms was left for Ernestine. Then it took him home to dinner, where he hoped to find Yriarte in attendance upon Laura. Laura's affairs once settled and then, as he had determined, he would tell her of his own engagement.

But he was doomed to disappointment and a solitary dinner. Laura sent down to say that her head ached, and that she preferred to stay in her room. Laura often took freaks of this kind and shut herself up when anything had put her out; so her uncle, merely wondering whether Mr. Yriarte had misconducted himself in any way, went down to dinner alone without further thought about it.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Laura arrived with the tea. Dr. Doldy had settled himself in the corner which he habitually occupied when alone, with a book; he did not expect to see Laura until, perhaps, the middle of next day. He was a little surprised, then, when she came in, carefully dressed, and with very small signs of any headache about her. She said she was better, and sat down by the fireside with her cup of tea and a total absence of any "deserted damsel" appearance.

To minds of a larger make, which follow a wider track of thought, the littleness of a thoroughly small mind is inconceivable. The

larger mind is unprepared for the attacks of the small one, because it is unable to understand the positions which its opponent takes up. People who are essentially wideawake and practical in a real emergency which arouses them, are being out-witted in small matters all their lives from this cause. And it is generally women who do the small out-witting, and pride themselves openly on leading their nearest and dearest by the nose; he is welcome to attain high honours which they scarcely comprehend the meaning of, if but they "know how to manage him."

Dr. Doldy was a lover of the English dramatists; that glorious extinct race of men. He was a reader of poetry, but he had small admiration for the sweet-sounding modern school of poets. The intellectual food which every man who owns a mind at all needs to keep it alive, he found for himself in the sonorous wisdom of Shakespeare, in the stalwart strength of Marlowe, and the quaint wit of rare Ben Jonson. To-night, as he had not

anticipated having Laura's society, he had wandered far in fancy into the woods of Arden. It was not easy at once to return into a modern drawing-room and into the intellectual society of a young lady such as Laura. Consequently, he was not quite aware that she was endeavouring to tell him something. She soon grew impatient and delivered her blow outright.

"Uncle," said she, sipping the while at her tea, "I have broken with Yriarte."

Dr. Doldy closed his Shakespeare, and put it down upon a table.

"Are you dealing in thunderbolts to-night, Laura? This is rather sudden."

"I suppose it is," she replied, indifferently.

"Only a lover's quarrel, I suspect," said Dr. Doldy. "One of the cases in which people quarrel a little in order to make it up a great deal."

Laura set her lips.

"You are wrong, uncle. The affair is over."

“And you say by your doing?” asked Dr. Doldy, keenly.

“Certainly. I was tired of it,” said Laura, flushing a little. Dr. Doldy saw that she did not choose to tell him the truth.

“Well,” he said, “as you are so fond of money, and diamonds, and dress that you cannot give them up, may I ask whom you intend to marry?”

“That,” replied Laura, coolly, “remains to be seen. Good night, uncle; I am going down to the Hayters’ to-morrow, you know, and I have a great deal to do to-night.”

She had put down her teacup, and risen.

“What sort of things have you to do?” asked Dr. Doldy.

“Well, my maid is packing, and I want to look after her; and the dressmaker will be here presently with some new dresses.”

“If that is all,” he replied, “I think you may sit down again and just tell me what I am to say to the people who have been told of your engagement.”

Laura did not sit down, but remained standing where she was.

“No one has been told,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation, “except Mr. Lingen,—and—yes, I told Mrs. Silburn. We can surely stop their talking about it easily enough.”

“If they have not talked already,” said Dr. Doldy, quietly. “But that is not the point. I would as soon explain such an affair to a dozen people as to one. The thing is, have you jilted him? That is your own account; but I don’t think you are telling me the truth. I shall go to Yriarte and see if he is enough of a man to give me an honest account.”

Laura threw a swift glance at him, and for a moment looked as if she were going to speak passionately; but she controlled herself, and said very quietly, “That will be a waste of time, for Yriarte never speaks the truth.”

“Don’t talk such nonsense, Laura,” said Dr. Doldy, impatiently.

“It is not nonsense,” said Laura. “It is a

boast of his ; and I have caught him telling lies systematically."

"And you were going to marry this man of whom you can speak in such terms," Dr. Doldy could not help exclaiming.

"It amused me," said Laura ; "most people are more or less untruthful. I rather admire the pluck of a man who can carry through a system of lying."

"Come, Laura, this is too much. You are only abusing him because you are put out with him.

'This weak impress of love is as a figure
Trenched in ice ; which with an hour's heat
Dissolves to water and doth lose his form.'

He spoke low to himself ; but Laura caught the words and flushed scarlet. She could not but remember how she had spoken of the connection with Yriarte as one of love essentially.

"Come, uncle," she said, laughing a little in her confusion, "before you look down so

grandly upon my love affairs, show me something better."

Laura's view of her uncle was that though very kind and absolutely gentlemanly, he was incapable of appreciating the female sex. His apparent blindness to her arts and those of other women of her own sort convinced her of this. Therefore, what she meant to insinuate was that he ought not to talk about what he did not understand. Love affairs were outside his experience; and Laura, who had always lived in a tangle of them, regarded herself as eminently superior in such matters. Consequently, Dr. Doldy's reply rather startled her.

"Perhaps I can," he said, "at all events I can try, for I suppose it is best to tell you now, though the moment scarcely seems opportune, that I am myself engaged to be married."

Laura sat down at this.

"Well, uncle, she said, "you have successfully returned my thunderbolt! Whoever can it be! *Do* tell me.

“A lady whom you have never seen, I believe, Laura,” replied Dr. Doldy, meeting her feminine excitement with great gravity.

“Well, well,” cried Laura, feverishly, “tell me her name.”

“Miss Vavasour.” Dr. Doldy had almost said Dr. Vavasour, for he had been thinking of the scene in Mrs. Silburn’s drawing-room, when Coventry had electrified him by giving Ernestine her full title. He had put back the impulse with horror. He could not face Laura’s amusement at the idea of his marrying a lady doctor.

“Miss Vavasour,” repeated Laura, in disappointed accents; “why, I have never even heard of her. Oh, how I should like to see her. I wish I wasn’t going away to-morrow. I must see her directly I come back.”

“Of course,” said Dr. Doldy, absently. His mind was with Ernestine. He recalled himself directly afterwards with an effort.

“Now, Laura,” he said, gravely, “cannot you bring yourself to explain this sudden change

of your plans to me? or must I go to Mr. Yriarte and try to extract the truth from him?"

Laura saw he was determined, so she let her dressmaker wait while she professedly opened her heart to him. She talked a great deal, using words principally to hide the actual facts. She left him at last, not by any means satisfied, but more disposed to think he had better leave the matter alone at present. Laura succeeded very cleverly in making him feel that there were intricacies in the affair which he had perhaps best not meddle with, and this without telling him what those intricacies were.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOCTORS IN CONSULTATION.

DR. DOLDY had called upon Ernestine's aunt ; that lady had been very gracious indeed, and Ernestine herself had given him an expressionless hand to shake, and five minutes of uninteresting conversation in her aunt's presence. He had also met her at Mrs. Silburn's, where his fate had been much the same ; and he felt rather disgusted. But to-night he was going to Mrs. Silburn's and he understood that Ernestine would be there all the evening ; so he resolved to bring matters into a better state.

Laura had been gone a week, and he had tried to put her and her love affairs as much

out of his mind as possible. He knew her so well that he felt quite sure of her successfully carrying some such affair to a close in time to obtain her fortune. He thought he might safely leave her to her own devices at present, and he was very glad to do so, for he found Ernestine filled his mind quite sufficiently.

She was a new experience to him—a new sort of woman; he felt very doubtful, sometimes, how best to approach her. She would yield to him when he least expected it; he had proposed to her really anticipating a refusal. Yet she had drawn her hand out of her muff, and given it to him by way of answer, without hesitation. Then why should he not expect her to yield as easily on some other points?

The first of these—one which he had not had any opportunity of broaching—was how long their engagement was to last. As he had said himself on that odd occasion in Mrs. Silburn's drawing-room, "he was not so young now as to enjoy delays." He was very anxious to

have some idea of Ernestine's views on this subject, and he resolved that to-night he would ascertain them.

He found her sitting alone in a little room which opened from the drawing-room. There was music going on in the drawing-room, and Ernestine, who never quite understood being sociable, had wandered in here. Mrs. Silburn, who, when he came to shake hands with her, saw his inquiring glance around the room, adroitly led him to where he could see Ernestine through the open door, sitting, with her eyes closed and her head, all bright with its unruly curls, thrown back.

He went in—leaned over her chair, and said, “Ernestine!”

She started, and opening her eyes, saw him bending over her. She froze at once, and raising herself in her chair gave him her hand in some such fashion as an icicle might be imagined to extend one.

She did not know him yet. She did not understand how or why she had begun to—

love him. Alas, for that poor word, Love! Has it not been so dragged through the mire that we dread to use it—yet is it so inclusive—so large—so complete, that we are obliged to return to it. Ernestine's sense at the moment was that this man had a power over her which she did not understand. At all events, she knew that that power made him hold relations towards her which differed from those of any other being in this world. She could not resist him. The very sense of this made her into a sort of ice figure when she found herself thus alone with him.

“Ernestine!” he said, “why have you treated me in this way ever since you allowed me to announce our engagement? It is hard—it is paralysing to me! You do not regret the assent which you permitted me to make public—surely, Ernestine, you do not regret it?”

“Go and sit over there on the other side of the fire,” said she, “and I'll try and tell you what I feel like.”

Obediently he went and sat down a little distance away from her. She leaned back again and closed her eyes. After a moment she spoke.

“I feel as if the independence, the freedom, the right to my own mode of living and working, which I have fought for from my childhood until now, was about to be surrendered—and I don’t quite know whether it’s right for me to surrender it. Dr. Doldy,” she added, suddenly turning her penetrative gaze upon him, “what will you do with such a woman as myself upon your hands—a woman whose veins are afire with the independent energy of a modern woman’s life?”

Dr. Doldy was a man of the old schools—a man reared in thoughts which directly opposed the ideas of Ernestine’s school, but at this moment, when he might have lost her altogether, he was saved by two things. He had a heart, a deeply tender heart; and he had read Shakespeare.

ended ill. Your quotation was excellent, and gave me encouragement ; but don't ask me to believe that a man gives up his independence when he marries. I am no crier out for woman's rights, but truly I think it is the woman who gives up, when there is any surrender."

This was Ernestine's weak point. She was humble enough in many things, but in this she was a creature of pride, and, perhaps, of unreason.

"And," said Dr. Doldy, "is not the capacity for surrender a sufficiently beautiful one? I don't know that we men need be grateful to nature because she made us the assertive sex."

Ernestine stirred uneasily in her chair. This was a way of looking at the question which always annoyed her.

"That is hardly an answer to me, Dr. Doldy. You do but say prettily that men should admire women for sacrificing themselves."

Dr. Doldy looked at her and smiled.

“Ernestine,” he said, “I was afraid of you, if you would like to know the truth, until you said that, but I am so no longer. Surely we have neither of us any purpose in our union save that we wish to be united. Why, then, should questions like these arise in your mind? My own impression is that where love is the bond the surrender is different in kind, but mutual and equal. And now, instead of pursuing a subject which we cannot decide upon in the abstract, tell me how soon we may try the experiment, and so find out the truth of the matter.”

Ernestine did not pretend not to understand him. She smiled a little, put a troublesome curl off her forehead, looked provokingly and deliciously handsome, and said—“Well, I’ve six months yet to run of my hospital work. I must finish that first, because I couldn’t spare a day to get married in, for we haven’t enough assistants.”

Dr. Doldy controlled himself by an heroic

effort. "Come," said he to himself, "I'm going in for the surrendering business at once. I should *like* to express my feelings, but I won't; besides she really is too handsome to scold!"

"Well," he said, mildly, "is that so very formidable? Could we not easily supply a substitute for the remainder of your engagement?"

"No, indeed," answered Ernestine, "I would not lose the rest of my time for a great deal. I shall only have been a year at it then, and that's by no means too long."

"But," said Dr. Doldy, very mildly indeed, "you will really have gained every experience you can require. However great an interest you take in the medical profession, after your marriage you will not need this kind of practical knowledge."

Ernestine folded her arms after a fashion of hers, and threw her head back. "I don't believe," said she, "in a student shirking any-

thing. I mean to finish my time at this before I begin to practise."

"Begin to practise!" echoed Dr. Doldy, losing his presence of mind for a moment.

"Begin to practise," repeated Ernestine, very coolly. "I asked you just now what you would do with a woman like me on your hands. I suppose you mean to be horrified now because I intend to go on with the work and interests of my life, notwithstanding my having—foolishly—fallen in love!"

She had begun this little speech coldly, but her voice broke at the end. Dr. Doldy rose and came to her side, and laid his hand on hers.

"Ernestine!" he said, and waited till she raised her eyes to his.

"I never could oppose a woman. I never quarrelled with one in my life—and you, Ernestine, I could deny nothing to, when you look as you have been looking now, revealing to me that your heart is mine—but, indeed, you are stabbing my prejudices ter-

ribly. I will call them prejudices, yet they are part of myself. Ernestine, I shall hardly know how to bear it.”

She lowered her eyes, for a great tear-drop stood in each.

She had never dreamed of this. She had expected to be bitterly opposed. She had armed herself to quarrel. She had prepared herself for a battle of intellect, a war of words, when this vital question should be raised; but she had never dreamed of being made to see it from the point of view of the man she loved.

She did not answer for some minutes, and in those minutes her love and her work were put into the scales and weighed. If there was a greater weight on either side it was too subtle to detect; the result appeared—she was in love: but she was Ernestine.

“You must take me,” she said in a very low voice, “as I am—or not at all.”

The words were obstinate; but how can be described the voice in which they were uttered?

Its sweetness filled her hearer with a yearning which dimmed his eyes. It opened the way into the recesses of his soul—it showed him the loneliness which dwelled there supreme; it filled him with dreams of the possibilities of riper and fuller existence.

“Ah!” he said, “I can’t give you up—no—you have got into my heart and there’s no putting you out—you have filled my future and my life—so I suppose I must try to take you as you are.”

He attempted to cover a depth of emotion new to him by a half-humorous tone; but a moment after he added gravely—

“Shall we agree to talk about these things when we know each other a little better?”

“If you will,” said Ernestine, a twinkle of fun in her eyes. “I fancy we shall neither of us have changed our position.”

“Ernestine,” said Mrs. Silburn’s voice, “I want you—you have been monopolised long enough.”

Ernestine, a faint bright blush on her

cheeks, rose and followed her hostess without a word; leaving Dr. Doldy alone with his thoughts.

They were strangely confused. This man who had been in the world, and of it, during his whole career, had given himself up to a creature who, though professedly practical, was utterly unworldly. She was set upon making herself continually uncomfortable, working hard, fighting against opposition, in order to carry out an idea, when she might so gracefully have merged her identity in her husband's—have let him work for her after the good old fashion, and have sat quietly in his drawing-room for the rest of her life! The thing was almost unintelligible to her lover. He was confused by it.

He realised, as soon as she left him, that he had not gained a single point with her. He was left just in the same position as that in which he began to talk to her. When were they to be married? must he really wait out this ridiculous hospital engagement? He

shuddered at the very thought of Ernestine employed in such work. "Utterly wrong—utterly wrong," he muttered to himself, "it will ruin her health—positively ruin it. What a pity it is there was no one to prevent her beginning it!"

CHAPTER IX.

A WOOING HALF UNDONE.

THE prouder a woman is, the more bitter is it not to be able to give herself wholly to a man whom she really loves.

The most highly educated, and most self-sustained woman is the most capable of the absolute humility of true feminine love. How can it be otherwise? She is more highly developed than the uneducated woman; her sensibilities are keener. She realises with an exquisiteness of delight her inevitable subjection to the power of masculine love. She the more delicately enjoys the surrender of her independence because she really has an independence of mind and soul to surrender.

And Ernestine, in the midst of her defiance, and notwithstanding that this very subject was the one on which she could be the most readily aroused, felt that she was wrong. She was experiencing the development of the irresistible womanly yearning to yield up her separate life, her separate responsibilities, and behold them merge into another and a stronger life.

But unfortunately, with a woman like Ernestine, all this surrender cannot be accomplished with a kiss and a vow. She must be won at all points; and to-night she felt as if some of the wooing was undone again—although she sighed to herself with a half regret as she thought that there was some which never could be undone. Nothing could restore her to the state before she was in love!

Yet it went hardly with her proud soul to feel that she could not give herself wholly—that she must draw herself back and assert herself. It went hard with her even to fancy her lover less wise than herself upon any

point—less enlightened, less open-minded in anything! Her assertion of herself stabbed his prejudices; but the fact that he had prejudices wounded her deeply.

Ernestine had always been more or less solitary. She had been, possibly, too extreme in some of her ways and views for most people; and she had learned to maintain existence without much sympathy. But now that the gate of her heart had indeed been touched, it craved to open itself fully—to expand and admit—well, Ernestine, who looked so unbending, was a sufficiently foolish woman to whisper to herself in the recesses of her soul—a master. But the gate could not open thus, howsoever it might desire, to any who was not monarch at all points of mind as well as soul.

And so Ernestine, after mounting the Hill Difficulty, thinking to have left prejudice behind, was at the top met by it full in the face. And met by it, too, more bitterly than she had dreamed of: not among

outsiders and people who might matter little to her, but in the person of one to whose judgment she desired to yield her own. It was no use blinding herself to that last fact; instinct and her woman's nature made her desire, for the first time in her life, to give up her own will.

But it could not be. The man showed his weakness—he let her see that in some things he did not exert himself to judge, but gave way to the fashion of the world he lived in. This to Ernestine's active mind was weakness—she could not be utterly won while she saw him thus, and therefore she could not yield her will. Had she felt, however blindly, that he stood on a higher platform than herself, her new and even yet despised power of surrender would have silenced her brain.

She stayed awhile with Dorothy after the others had gone. Coventry was away on another of his wild excursions, and Dorothy, who was always anxious on these occasions as the night closed in, made up the drawing-

room fire and prepared herself to wait for him. Ernestine had fetched her wraps and was ready to go, but Dorothy had beguiled her into a talk by the fireside.

“Ernestine,” she said, half laughing and half in earnest, “Dr. Doldy’s house has a fascination for me, now I am at liberty to picture you presiding over it. I always look up at the windows as I pass, and try to fancy you behind them. Tell me now, do you really expect to subside into a quiet and uneventful married life, playing hostess and ordering dinners?”

“Do *you* find married life so quiet and uneventful?” was Ernestine’s reply.

“Why, no,” said Dorothy, shrugging her shoulders, “but then we are such arrant Bohemians. There is always a certain excitement in living from hand to mouth, as we unfortunate literary people are compelled to do.”

“Come,” said Ernestine, smiling, “you may amuse yourself with the misfortunes of life,

but they are not the sources of your real excitements ? ”

“ Well, I don't want to discourage you, Ernestine, for this marriage is just what I wished would come about ; you must forgive me if my imagination, which, by the exigencies of literature, is kept in a sort of red-hot state, persists in trying to give me pictures of your future. It will be a delightful one with two such charming people to mould it ; but really, you will have to do something with those curls,” she said, putting back the soft locks that fell so thickly on Ernestine's forehead. Ernestine laughed.

“ I don't think they will be my greatest difficulty in playing the quiet matron.”

“ The quiet matron ! — imagine it ! No, Ernestine, it will take a good many years of something severer than a union with Dr. Doldy to produce that appearance in you. Ah ! there is Coventry ! ”

Dorothy was away out of the drawing-room

and down in the hall, like a flash of lightning, and Ernestine, as she put on her shawl, smiled gravely to herself at Dorothy's talk about the quietude and uneventfulness of married life.

"Don't go, Ernestine," cried Dorothy, coming back into the drawing-room; "you must see me turn out his pockets — that's the fun *I* get out of these excursions."

Coventry followed her into the room.

"You look a perfect Pagan!" exclaimed Ernestine, as he entered. "It is quite refreshing to see you!"

Coventry was slightly built and almost boyish in figure; there was nothing in his form to attract attention except the extreme ease of his movements. He was even delicate in appearance, yet this delicacy was curiously counteracted by innate masculine force which lay within and made itself felt through the slenderness of the outer man. Now as he walked in, there was a fresh vigour in his step,

a freedom that was not of drawing-rooms. He was dirty, muddy, untidy; and his pockets dragged heavily—he certainly did not appear respectable. But Ernestine forgave him that, for the look in his face refreshed her like a draught from a woodland spring: the poetic soul had so plainly taken an imprint.

“Well, you are dirty,” remarked Dorothy, gravely surveying the husband whom kind fortune had restored to her. “Where have you been?”

“Don’t ask me that intolerably practical question, for I cannot answer it—I have walked many miles in places where robins and larks were to be heard and seen—where prim-roses grew”—drawing a wet-rooted cluster out of his pocket—“and where the sky was visible.

“And in the end the Providence which takes care of me on those occasions when life is altogether too delightful to leave me time to take care of myself, guided me to a railway

station, otherwise you would probably have never seen me again."

"Oh, you always say that," said Dorothy, hastily taking charge of the decidedly damp floral treasures which Coventry was holding up to admiration.

"You have seen something worth seeing to-day, have you not?" said Ernestine.

"Ay, that I have. I met with some green mosses by the side of a brook that took me half the day to look at, and I thought those and some grandly-formed trees the colouring of whose unclothed tracery harmonised perfectly with the dim wintry sky which made their background—I thought those were enough to revel in for one day. But Mother Nature was too good to me; she intoxicated me with a perfectly bewildering sunset. Dorothy, I shall not be sober for days."

"Write it off," said the practical lady, "write verses; they'll do you good, and I can sell them."

“ Which comes to making money out of a sunset. Don't scatter my dreams! I already find it sufficiently difficult to understand how such an incoherent populace as ourselves came into the midst of such a divinely beautiful natural world. *Minerva Medica*,” he said, abruptly changing the subject, after a habit peculiar to him, “ how soon are you going to be married ? ”

“ Not, at all events, until I have finished my work at the hospital ; I have six months of it yet.”

“ And does the Doctor approve of waiting six months ? He seemed to me to be rather in a hurry.”

“ Well,” said Ernestine, “ we separated to-night agreeing to differ on that particular subject. I don't see that a few months either way matters much. And now, good-night, Mrs. Silburn ; I have some work at home to finish to-night, and I can't afford to be up too late.”

So she went off.

“There will be trouble between the dear doctors yet,” said Coventry, after she had gone. “I believe they will become one in the end, but the process of mixing may be long and difficult.”

CHAPTER X.

BREAKFASTING.

“Is Mr. Yriarte at home?” was the inquiry made by Mr. Lingen one morning when the door of a small house in a quiet street in Kensington opened in answer to his knock.

A young boy opened it; a dark-skinned, white-toothed youth, evidently a countryman of his master's.

“Oh, yes, sir, he is in, but he has not breakfasted yet.”

“Take him my card, and ask how soon he can see me.”

Mr. Lingen was ushered into a pretty little room, and there left to wait while the boy went on his errand. The visitor planted

himself on the hearthrug, to get the benefit of the pleasant fire.

His eye-glass was in repose; his hands delicately clothed in lavender; his buttonhole flower was perfect. His brow was smooth and unmarked. But at the same time he was not in his sociable mood; there was not the lurking smile at the corners of his mouth which was always to be found there when Lewis Lingen was taking life easily.

No; though he seemed to be merely enjoying the warm fire after the sharp air outside, Mr. Lingen was really using his brain and his eyes. He was keenly observing everything in the room, the character and appearance of his surroundings, even to a rapid glance over the articles of vertu which were scattered about upon the tables.

He was in the outer one of two small rooms which were divided only by curtains, now drawn back. In the inner room a table was laid for breakfast, and very dainty it looked. The rooms altogether were well appointed.

Mr. Yriarte did not very quickly appear, so after awhile Mr. Lingen turned to some portfolios of photographs which lay upon the table, and began to look through them rather absently. One was full of Spanish notabilities; he soon passed over them, and laid the portfolio aside. The next was filled with Spanish beauties—this he closed even more quickly, and returned to solace himself with the warmth of the fire.

At last the boy returned, and saying his master would be ready in a few moments, proceeded to busy himself about the breakfast table. Soon afterwards Mr. Yriarte himself entered the room, looking wonderfully radiant, although his eyes were perhaps a little more bloodshot than usual, and his hands had rather more of a tendency to tremble than the fresh morning air would account for.

“Good morning,” said Lingen; “up late last night by your appearance.”

“Ah—well—yes—but then I am not in the habit of going to bed very early. Will

you take some breakfast? I am delighted to see you."

"No. I breakfasted some time ago, thank you. I have an inveterate habit of getting up early. But pray go on with your breakfast. I only want a few minutes' talk with you."

They passed into the next room, and Lingen sat down in an arm-chair by the fire, crossed his legs, and put up his eye-glass. Yriarte, meanwhile, drew his chair to the breakfast table, smilingly; he was evidently not the sort of man whose appetite is spoiled by nocturnal dissipation.

The boy brought in several savoury dishes, which his master prepared himself to attack with gusto. When they were alone again Lingen opened his battery.

"I called yesterday upon Rodriguez, the manager of the Spanish Commercial Company."

"Ah, indeed," said Yriarte, with undiminished interest in his fish.

When Mr. Lingen first made Yriarte's acquaintance, the latter was known as holding a considerable post in the Spanish Commercial Company, and indeed as being intimately connected with its promoters, who held positions of the highest respectability. The Company itself was regarded as thoroughly good, and Yriarte's business connection with it, and personal relationship to one of the excellent Spanish houses concerned in it, had been continually turned to account by him.

"It appears," went on Mr. Lingen, "that you have not been employed by the Company for some time."

"Exactly," assented Yriarte, smiling still.

"In fact," added Mr. Lingen, "that you were turned out of it."

"A-hem," said Yriarte, drawing his table napkin over his mouth, "that means?—Excuse me, you forget I am not English. I suppose you mean that Rodriguez and I agreed to part. You know," he went on,

confidentially, "it never pleased me to be under him—it was not the right position for a brother-in-law of the house of Chirruca."

"Well," said Mr. Lingen, dropping his eye-glass suddenly, and leaning back in his chair, "I don't care what reason you give for it, or under what circumstances it occurred; the point that concerns me is that you have been keeping me under the impression that you were still in with the Company and had money in it; now I find that neither is the case."

"My good sir," cried Yriarte, with hilarity and dash, "are you afraid of your money? Bah! I will make over this house and its contents as security this moment, if you are afraid."

"I will take that for a portion of what you owe me," answered Lingen, imperturbably, "but it will only go against a very small portion. And now that you have not only been metaphorically kicked out by your relations, but have also broken with Miss

Doldy, your affairs seem to me to look serious."

"Well," said Yriarte, who had been drinking hock for some time and was getting even more cheerful, "it was you did that last, practically, so you can't blame me. If you hadn't told me about that ten thousand, I should probably have gone innocently to my fate. Dios! how you would have been done if she hadn't come to you about it! I should have got the other ten thousand out of her and absconded for a while."

He threw himself back in his chair and screamed with laughter.

"I daresay you would," said Lingen, drily. "But that does not matter now, as I prevented it."

"It was amusing too, when I pretended to make her tell me about it. Ha! didn't the minx's eyes flash! The cat had been friendly, but she could scratch!"

"I don't want to hear about that," interrupted Mr. Lingen, with a lingering feeling

of respect for the Doldy family. "The question is, what are you going to do? I should never have lent you a penny had you not made it plain that your marriage with the heiress whom you professed to have in your power was an inevitable thing. Unless you act at once I shall have you arrested, and go straight to the Chirruacas."

"Dios! don't do that," cried Yriarte, starting to his feet in a fluster; "you'll ruin me, and get no good by it! And moreover, I *am* acting—why, my good friend, I am doing splendidly. Last night I won two thousand."

"At cards?"

"Yes—at cards. To-night I play again, and the next night, and the next. I tell you fortune is always with me. Don't fear—if I have lost the rings, here are the fingers still, as we say in my country. I am never without money—I think it is bad to play cards too much," he said, with absurd gravity, "but I will play now, and I always win."

“Humph!” said Mr. Lingen, “and you can always spend also.”

“Ah, well, I can get money to spend in other ways. Don’t be alarmed, my good friend; if I don’t catch another heiress, I will be winning the money for you in some way. And for my expenses—I can always get money, as I say. I could get a good deal from Miss Laura if I chose; I have not altogether given up my power over her.”

“How?” asked Lingen, quickly.

“That’s my affair,” answered Yriarte.

Mr. Lingen said nothing further, for there was nothing to be said. His unspoken thought was, “Laura Doldy is a greater fool than I think her, if she has let this boastful monkey keep any real power in his hands.”

“If you have finished breakfast, Mr Yriarte,” he said, aloud, “I will just have a look at the house.”

“Certainly,” said Yriarte, with the greatest amiability. “You will find I have some nice

things of considerable value. Some of them have been given me by my sister who is married into the Chirruca family.”

He led Mr. Lingen through the rooms and upstairs. They passed on the way a luxurious little place full of cushioned seats, with plants in large tubs, which made it look like a conservatory. This, Yriarte said, was his smoking-room. Then they looked into a very handsomely furnished drawing-room; and behind it was Yriarte's own bed-room. Some fur rugs lay on the carpet at the sides and foot of the bed, and a beautiful silky one upon it. An open French novel, which was left upon the not long deserted bed, showed that Yriarte had not been sleeping all the time he occupied it. On a table at one side of the room stood an old cabinet of some black wood, with carven and dome-like top. It had a sort of ecclesiastical appearance, and indeed seemed like the model of some sacred building. Yriarte went to it and opened the doors in front, showing a shrine where a light was burning

beneath the figures of a Virgin and child in metal and of very beautiful mediæval workmanship. The name "Maria" shone upon the pedestal in letters of gold.

"You see," said he, "I am very religious."

He spoke condescendingly, though quite in earnest; his manner suggested that he consecrated religion by professing it.

The lurking smile made itself visible at the corners of Lingen's mouth; he turned away, and remarking that he had already stayed too long and must hurry off, led the way downstairs. Yriarte bowed him out with effusion, and returned to the smoking-room, where he settled himself down with a sigh of content to lie upon a couch, smoking, and pretending to go on with his novel. Spaniards are not particularly sleepy, but how ineffably lazy they are! Give them but cigars and warmth and they are happy. Wild excitement is necessary to them now and then, but the intervals of repose are enjoyed to the utmost.

Yriarte had no call to make in the City to-day ; no reason to exercise his cunning brain until the evening ; therefore he prepared himself for a long day of absolute idleness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOSPITAL.

ERNESTINE'S unexpired six months of hospital duty lay heavily on Dr. Doldy's mind. He did not know how to act about it.

He could not help thinking that had he been engaged to any other woman under such circumstances, he would at once have settled the matter off-hand. But Ernestine! There was a look he had seen once or twice in those dark eyes which made him feel that if he were not very careful how he argued any matter where she saw a right and a wrong, that even yet he might lose her altogether, and have to face the

loneliness of his heart—a thing intolerable now once so fully realised.

Ernestine herself, meantime, went perhaps the more ardently about her business than ever, after having withstood the temptation of evading it.

For of course that was a temptation. Ernestine was not made of a different flesh and blood from other mortals. And she was wearing herself out at her work ; and that without any reward but the consciousness that she was being of use to people who were more often ungrateful than anything else. She could have done without the additional experience she was gaining, for she had gone through the usual hospital course. When she first came over to England after taking her degree in Paris, she was full of the idea that she had not had enough experience to commence practising on her own account. With her characteristic thoroughness, she was anxious to place herself under a doctor and so to see something of English practice before attempting to

gain a livelihood. Her little inheritance had been mostly spent on her education, but she had retained enough of it to feel free for a year or two to follow her own wishes. So she had looked around her when she arrived in London for some opportunity of the kind she needed.

It had presented itself, and though not quite what she would have wished, she had taken it. A lady whom she knew, came to her as soon as she heard of her being in England, anxious to see whether Ernestine was to be secured for the work she herself was in, for she well knew how, if Ernestine's sympathies were once really enlisted, she would work in genuine earnest.

Mrs. Marland was assistant house-surgeon at a hospital which was somewhat languishing for want of funds, as very useful charities often are.

It was intended to alleviate the sore problem of illness when it comes to decayed gentlefolk, that unhappy class whose sorrows

have produced such a definite and ugly shape in the midst of the many beautiful forms of our modern civilisation. It was a hospital for the especial use of ladies and gentlemen; who, paying a moderate sum, could obtain good nursing and proper care within its walls.

Its principal promoters were a gentlemanly but poor member of Parliament, and a man of philanthropic crotchets; the former was of influential position and connections, but of next to no means. He had many a time been ill in lodgings and knew well enough what needless suffering is endured for want of scientific nursing. His interest in it was a thoroughly honest and earnest one; he regarded the class of people who are poor but refined as the most to be pitied in all the range of civilised humanity. The man of philanthropic crotchets had thrown himself into it as he had thrown himself into a dozen other schemes for benefiting mankind. He had never been ill a day in his life, so he had not

the personal sympathy with the idea which animated Mr. Redburn, M.P. But he was always precipitating himself upon something which was to be of the utmost benefit to some class or other of society. He carried a black bag with him wherever he went ; and when he called upon his friends they looked askance at it, wondering what new prospectus might be lurking in its mysterious recesses ; what new programme for the reformation of the world might be drawn from thence and explained to them.

Mr. Redburn, who had held the idea in his mind a long while, meeting this gentleman one day, immediately seized upon him as the very man for his purpose. He soon succeeded in inflaming him with it ; and these two had worked until the hospital reared itself in the midst of that London where gentlemanly poverty now walks by the side of undainty and accustomed pauperism.

The patients at first had not been plentiful, though the charges were moderate enough to

tempt them ; but when once the unfortunate gentlefolks who first took advantage of the new charity realised that all which was promised to them would be fulfilled ; that each patient would have a clean, sweet, wholesome little room of his own, furnished comfortably ; that there was skilled nursing and good medical attendance—then the news began to spread after the wildfire fashion in which good news is apt to spread. The little rooms filled rapidly ; and Mr. Redburn and the man of philanthropic crotchets were rewarded by many a genteel blessing.

It was not so easy to enlist Ernestine's sympathies as her friend expected. Ernestine had not realised the miseries of refined poverty ; she did not awaken to the philanthropy of the idea. But she went to see the hospital : found that at all events there was plenty of work to be done and experience to be gained. So she engaged herself to visit there for a year.

Some six months of this year, as we have

seen, were yet to run; and Ernestine had long ago put her heart into the work. She saw how bitterly it was needed, and she gave her sympathies and her energies to the utmost. But it was hard work, for the staff was insufficient. It is not too much to say that it required the arousal of all Ernestine's peculiar sense of what was right, to resist the temptation Dr. Doldy had held out to her.

Having resisted it, however, she went the more vigorously to her work. She even invested, next morning, in a few flowers (rashly enough, no doubt, considering that her remaining capital was by no means large) to take to a favourite patient. She might have taken some of Dr. Doldy's white blossoms which made her room such a place of sweetness; but there was a romantic spot hidden far down in her nature; she drank to herself the scent from those flowers as if it gave her life; she treasured every white petal. Dr. Doldy little thought that his love-gifts carried their message so intelligibly with them. But then

he had never realised what an unfriended life Ernestine's had been, and how ready and open her heart was to any real love message.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVERS !

WHILE her erewhile lover was industriously endeavouring to make up for his lost anticipations, Laura herself was managing to exist, notwithstanding she had lost him.

Her boast that she could live without him was true enough. During their engagement he had certainly monopolised her thoughts ; she had been devoted to him. But when he once showed her, as he had done in their last interview, that it really was the heiress he cared for and not the woman, her pride was up in arms at once. And her idea of exhibiting

pride was to equal him in callousness. The part of the deserted damsel was one she would not play. If she must be deserted, no one should know it.

Moreover, Yriarte had so thoroughly startled and disgusted her by his readiness to give her up, after making her believe that she had altogether enslaved him, that a strong revulsion of feeling was setting in. It grew stronger and stronger day by day, as she mixed in fresh society, and found that life was really quite tolerable without an enslaved lover. She was already beginning to rather enjoy the sense that she had to catch somebody else, and as she lay awake at night and thought over her affairs she resolved that this time she would look out for a handsome man. For now that the bond between herself and Yriarte was broken, she began to realise what an unenticing person he was. But that was not to be wondered at, for her mind continually dwelled upon her last interview with him. She gradually forgot the old fascination which

he had exercised over her, and learned to clench her teeth with an increasing hatred and disgust whenever her thoughts reverted to him.

She had had one other present from Yriarte besides the bracelet—a gold necklet with a large locket containing his portrait. She had sent that to his house before she left town. She marvelled now, as she remembered it, how she could ever have secretly worn that face upon her neck, and have felt a thrill of pleasure that it was there. She found it difficult to realise the state she had passed through, now that it was over.

She was staying at a pleasant country house which stood some miles inland from Brighton. There was a charming park around it, and beyond that the breezy Sussex downs. When Laura first went there, there was a large party in the house, but soon afterwards it thinned, and she would wander alone in the park and over the grassy slopes, thinking more and more bitterly of the insults she had been compelled

to suffer, and growing to loathe the very thought of the man from whom she had suffered them.

Sir Charles Hayland, her host, was both squire of the neighbourhood and rector of the little village church which stood just outside the park. He was a magistrate too, so that his time was generally full of small matters of business. And though he was the most genial and hospitable man in the world, beyond driving his guests behind a beautiful pair of his pet horses whenever he had time, and heading the dinner table, he left them pretty much to Lady Hayland. Lady Hayland was a fashionable and pretty woman, whose vocation was society, but she was extremely delicate, and now and then was obliged to remain in her own room for several days together. Thus it happened that when most of the guests went away, leaving only a few rather elderly people who did not much interest her, Laura acquired a habit of walking about alone and thinking over her affairs. It was not a

natural tendency of hers, and she rather wondered at herself for doing it. At last she grew so sickened at her retrospections that she began to think of taking flight to where there might be more opportunities of laying plans for the future. But Lady Hayland persuaded her to stay on awhile, and as she told her that a new relay of visitors would be arriving in a few days, Laura decided to at least see what they were like. Lady Hayland was fond of her, and liked to have her when her house was full ; for Laura was one of those indomitable little women who will go through any exertion for the sake of amusement, and she was always among the leaders of any enterprise which might prove exciting or interesting. Although she was such a mistress of the art of languor, when any form of pleasure was to be obtained her spirits were unflagging.

So she stayed on and resigned herself to a few more days of her own society, for Lady Hayland was not yet well enough to come

down, and there was no one else in the house whom she cared for. She read novels in the pretty morning-room, a large room which separated the drawing and dining-rooms. It was Laura's favourite resort within the house, except the hall. The latter was a great square room into which the hall-door opened and from which the wide staircases ascended. But the house was warmed all through, and the hall was a favourite lounging place, for on the large centre table, among pots of sweet scented flowers, were scattered all the last novels from Mudie's. But the morning-room was surrounded by two or three shelves, close to the floor, which were filled, along one wall, with standard and favourite novels.

Laura oscillated between a particular corner here and a particular corner in the hall when she was indoors: for she was one of those women who accomplish an amount of reading which would do credit to an undergraduate, and whose studies lie so entirely in one direction that they acquire a marvellous knowledge

of the fictitious world of romance. She devoured novels in a more infatuated way than ever now, for with no flirtations on hand she found it difficult to keep her mind quiet or at ease unless she filled it with the romances of others' lives.

But she had too much regard for her good looks to spend the whole day thus. She reflected that the air of the Sussex downs produces anything but an unbecoming effect; so every day she walked out upon them, or drove herself through the lanes in Lady Hayland's little pony carriage. Certainly this did bring a delicate bloom to her cheeks, but it gave her too much opportunity for retrospection to be at all agreeable. She would walk fiercely about on the downs, out of sight of every one but the wild birds, and would stamp her little foot as she thought of Yriarte and the sneering laugh with which he took leave of her!—she even occupied herself with trying to think of any way in which she could safely annoy or humiliate him; and now and again the personal

pride which was one of her strongest feelings would wring a few scalding tears of mortification from her eyes. But she would speedily wipe them away to find refuge in the intense hatred of her old lover which was altogether taking the place of every other sentiment with regard to him.

In the midst of this state of feeling she made a discovery which changed the whole tenor of her thoughts.

Sitting alone in her room one night a new idea dawned upon her mind—a new view of her position rose before her. It struck her with such alarm and horror that she felt quite ill, and rising to reach some smelling-salts which were on her dressing-table she fainted dead away upon the floor.

No one came to her aid, for it was late at night. She recovered, alone, slowly and painfully; and with the first rush of consciousness came the full sense of this new and overwhelming thought.

All that night she lay awake, and in the

morning, when she looked in the glass, she saw a haggardness upon her face which had never appeared on it before.

“Laura Doldy,” she said to herself, standing there before her own reflection, wrapped in her pretty dressing-gown, with her long dark hair tumbling on her shoulders, “Laura Doldy, this will never do. You will get ugly if you are frightened. There is no difficulty which a clever woman cannot overcome.”

And with that she returned to her bed, where she breakfasted—and thought.

Thought hard, and desperately. Desperately, yes ; for she could see but one way out of this terrible difficulty which had now risen definitely in her path. And that way was one which she loathed with her whole soul. The whole of her real self—all her natural feelings—her prides, her passions, her emotions, shrank with a disgust that made her physical frame tremble where she lay, from taking that way.

But Laura had another and more highly developed side of her nature. She lived in the world, and she must defend herself from the world. The sense of this was so vivid that it compelled towards that way she loathed, as strongly and resolutely as though pressure were put upon her trembling woman's emotions by another person.

Laura was essentially a worldly woman, and a thoroughly worldly woman will sacrifice any of her softer and truer self, even though the knife cut keenly, in order to keep straight with this world she is in. The social world is life and religion to her: she worships it and she must be approved by it. In fact, it is her all—the reality of existence.

Driven and torn by her thoughts and her passions, Laura lay with hands clasped over her head, thinking till her cheeks grew flushed and dark.

At last she sprang up and, opening her writing desk, began hurriedly to write a letter. She wrote on rapidly, till in amazement she

paused, finding that her rage had burned itself out upon two sheets of note paper. She flung them aside, and walked the room exhausted by her own vehemence. She looked more like some tragic actress expressing rage than the Laura known to her friends, for in this silent battle with herself the fire of her untamed passions was ablaze.

At last—wearied out—she crept into bed and lay there with silent tears quietly passing over her face. This calmed and cleared her brain; the rebellious paroxysm was over. She had conquered herself.

After lying quietly thus a long while she again got her writing case, and wrote another letter, this time so brief a one that a few lines contained it all.

She put it in an envelope and addressed it. Then, strengthened and refreshed by the sense that she had decided on her mode of action, she arose and dressed.

She put on her walking-dress, and going down passed quietly through the hall and out

into the park. She walked over the short sweet grass by the carriage drive, down to the little village. There she went to the post-office, and drawing the letter from her pocket, dropped it in. It was addressed to "José Yriarte, Esq."

Standing there in the sunshine, a little undecided which way to turn or what to do with herself, she saw Sir Charles Hayland riding up the village street.

"A pretty little minx is Laura Doldy," thought that gentleman to himself as Laura flashed her eyes up at him from under her fur hat. "But I shouldn't put much faith in her."

Sir Charles was a florid, hearty gentleman who liked people that looked him straight in the face.

He let his horse drop into a walk as he approached Laura.

"Lady Hayland is better to day," he said, "and I am to drive her over to Brighton after lunch. I am sure she needs fresh air, and

Bob and Bell want some exercise. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, I shall be delighted," said Laura, to whom the mildest form of dissipation would have been acceptable to-day. And she enjoyed sitting behind Sir Charles's pet horses, apart from the fact that Brighton was a change from the park and the downs.

"Then you must come in to lunch," said Sir Charles; "we shall start early."

She walked beside Sir Charles's horse down the avenue, and talked very sweetly, casting up her eyes in that fascinating way she had acquired, every now and then. Sir Charles began to relent in his opinion of her, and to think she really was very charming. She had never cared to exercise her arts upon him before, as he was not quite within her sphere of action.

But to-day she would have talked to the man in the moon, could a telephone have been established. Anything to distract her mind!

They drove through a not very interesting series of lanes and straight roads, but the movement was pleasant, and to Laura the life of Brighton was a charming change. Driving down the parade, Sir Charles suddenly drew rein.

“How do you do, Redburn?” he said to a languid, gentlemanly man who was pausing in his walk to look over the sea. “What are you doing here? Isn’t it rather cold for you at this time of the year?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Redburn, with a slight shiver, “it certainly is cold, but it is bracing. I have only run down for a few days’ fresh air.”

“Come over to us for a day or two,” said Sir Charles, with whom hospitality was a shining virtue. “Where are you staying? at the Queen’s? I’ll pick you up in half-an-hour.”

So Laura had a fresh companion of the male sex to make eyes at on her way home.

He did not, however, interest her much ; Mr. Redburn's mind had little room in it for contemplation of anything but his own ailments and hobbies.

"How is the hospital getting on?" asked Lady Hayland ; "the last time we met, were you not very interested in some hospital for ladies and gentlemen? It seemed to me, as you spoke of it then, most remarkable that it had not already existed. It surely must be very much wanted."

"Indeed, we have seen how great the want has been, Lady Hayland," said Mr. Redburn, warming into life as he spoke ; "our wards are full."

"I wish you would let me have some prospectuses," said Lady Hayland. "I have often wanted to tell people about it, and have not known where it is, or quite how to explain its purposes."

"I have a few," said Mr. Redburn (a little shamefacedly, for he had a particular horror of the prospectus-filled black bag of his co-

director, the philanthropist), "with me, and shall be very glad to give you some."

"Have you not some lady doctors there?" asked Lady Hayland. "I don't approve of these modern innovations at all, but at the same time I am curious to know how my sex really bears itself in such a career."

"Oh, women are certain to succeed in it up to a certain point," said Sir Charles, flicking at his horses. "Their abilities are essentially practical."

"They have shown themselves so at the work of our hospital, at all events," said Mr. Redburn. "We have two eminent lady physicians, and, I think, some younger ones as well."

Laura leaned back with eyes fixed dreamily and without sight upon the landscape. She had no philanthropy in her composition; her idea of the world was that if everybody looked after themselves it would be a much less troublesome place to live in. And as to the

“lady-doctor,” she did not expect that modern product to be a “man-woman,” as some people do ; she had too instinctively low an opinion of her sex even for that. The only remark she had ever made on the subject was that she “would never have one in the house, for they would think of nothing but what your pillow-case was made of, and whether your linen was trimmed with real lace.”

It is little wonder that some women care only for the society of the other sex, when their opinion — or, possibly, experience — of their own is so low.

So the conversation was without interest to Laura, and she communed with her own by no means too delightful thoughts for the greater part of the drive home.

It was not until the second morning after his arrival that Mr. Redburn remembered to bring out his prospectuses for Lady Hayland. He came into the breakfast-room with them in his hand, and began to talk to Lady Hayland about them.

Laura was looking at her letters, sitting on the other side of the table. One was directed in Yriarte's hand-writing. It made her feel faint only to look at it. She put the letters unread in her pocket, and tried to fortify herself with coffee.

"Take a few of these, Laura," said Lady Hayland, handing her some of Mr. Redburn's papers; "you will often meet with people to whom this place might be of the greatest use."

"Thank you," said Laura, taking them absently and putting them in with her letters. At another time she would probably have refused them with some frivolous, half-witty deprecation of the idea; but now she was altogether absorbed in the thought of this letter which remained unopened, and which, with its probability of insult, seemed to burn its way through her dress and already make her feel. Her one aim was to finish her breakfast quietly and unnoticed, and then escape.

She was soon able to do so. The morning-room was empty; and she hid herself in a big arm-chair in a corner of it, and then took out the letters from her pocket.

Yriarte's she read first; quite quietly she read it through, but then immediately started up, and ran to her own room. Once there, with the door locked safely behind her, she gave way to a storm of passion under which her whole form appeared to dilate. She took Yriarte's letter, and tearing it in half threw it upon the floor; and then, with a vehement stamp of her pretty little foot, she turned away from it and opened the other letters. She read them absently, without really taking in the meaning of the words she read. Then she took up Mr. Redburn's prospectus, and, in the same absent way read that through. As she neared the end something seemed to rouse her interest; she re-read it quickly, and then stood a moment, buried in thought.

"It may be useful to me," she said, aloud;

and gathering together the two or three papers Lady Hayland had given her, she put them in her desk, and locked them up.

And then turning, with a look on her face that for the time made it hard and haggard, she set herself to pick up the torn pieces of Yriarte's letter and put them also out of sight.

Then she sat down—her head on her hand—to think.

Yriarte, whose missive, filled to the brim with the inversion of love, had thus driven her again to hard thinking, was himself just issuing from the door of his house in Kensington, scented, dressed to the height of such perfection as he was master of, cigar in hand.

On the steps he was met by the fair-haired model of the Akropolis Art School.

“Why, Anton, is it you at last? What do you want?”

That soft-tinted face, which was womanly

in its unconscious beauty, was lifted to his with a sullen look upon it that made it as really unlovely as his own.

“I want something to do,” said he.

“I thought you were living like a lord!—receiving pay for merely displaying that charming form of yours?”

“I was,” answered Anton, “but I caught cold. How would you like to sit for five hours at a stretch with a rag round you?”

“I shouldn’t do it, you see, my good friend. Happily I possess brains. You don’t. What can I do for you?”

“Give me some breakfast,” suggested Anton.

“Oh, indeed!—well, come in; but why did you not come the other day when I told you to?”

“Because I was doing pretty well then: and I would never come near you if I could help it.”

Yriarte laughed heartily; this candid confession seemed to call out all his amiability.

“Come in,” he said, and turning back he re-entered his house with Anton.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME DESULTORY TALKS.

“You are determined, you say?”

“Determined,” answered Ernestine, with a composed gentleness seemingly born of assured decision.

“I wonder,” said Dr. Doldy, “whether you will be as fond of that word when you are married.”

Ernestine only laughed in reply to this remark, made in all seriousness.

The conversation was being held in the bow-window of Mrs. Vavasour's drawing-room. The subject under discussion was one which, temporarily tabooed, Dr. Doldy had

now again brought forward—the date of the wedding day.

“Well,” he added, reflectively, “the months we have already managed to get through have not appeared so very long. I suppose I ought to be grateful for a few hours of your society in the course of each week.”

Ernestine said nothing in reply. Leaning back in her chair in a favourite and peculiar attitude which every one who knew her always associated with her, she looked silently out into the square—an outlook of a rather melancholy if dignified character. Dr. Doldy, with a glance at her, changed the conversation.

“I met,” said he, “at a dinner party the other night, Dr. Draper.”

“Oh,” said Ernestine, with dexterously assumed intonation, as if the matter did not interest her much; “he is one of our visiting physicians at the hospital.”

“So he was saying; he appears to take a great interest in it.”

“I believe he does,” said Ernestine, a little

drily; she did not quite see where the conversation was tending, but instinctively perceived breakers ahead. But Dr. Doldy soon plunged into the actual gist of his remarks. It was an odd thing that, when with Ernestine, half his diplomatic abilities deserted him. When she turned her great inquiring eyes full upon his, it had the effect of impelling him towards the actual subject of his discourse rather more rapidly than was his wont.

“He knew nothing of our connection,” said Dr. Doldy, “and you cannot wonder that I was rather interested when he began to speak of you.”

“Of me!” exclaimed Ernestine, with something almost like apprehension.

“Yes,” said Dr. Doldy, conflicting emotions oddly visible in his face, “and though I heartily disapprove of the whole thing, I could not but be a little pleased with the way he spoke of you.”

But this did not melt Ernestine, who had turned her gaze out into the square again. So

he had to go on, without response or encouragement. This was a form of dialogue to which she was in the habit of subjecting her friends. It was one which Dr. Doldy particularly disliked. He had always been considered a good conversationalist; but he affected the frothy, bright style of talk, in which repartee and the instantaneous flash of superficial wit are essential. With Ernestine he was continually placed in an attitude new to him; by the silence with which she met remarks not very necessary, he was constantly being provoked into saying something which would have enough in it to arouse her interest.

“He says you have done much to convince him that the medical profession may be possible for women: but he thinks you are at the same time setting an example of going in the very direction in which danger is to be apprehended.”

“You speak riddles,” said Ernestine, with ominous calmness.

“I will explain myself then,” said Dr.

Doldy, his projected periods of speech cut short by the consciousness of Ernestine's impatience under them. "He says you work too hard."

"Oh," said Ernestine, "is that all he can say against me?"

"It is a great deal," said Dr. Doldy, gravely. "It is rash to work as you work, even for a young doctor who is determined to win a reputation by it; even he is not wise to make himself into a nurse. But for you, who are not endeavouring to carve for yourself a medical career, but are merely finishing the engagement you made, it is really wrong to fling your health and strength away."

"But I am not doing that," said Ernestine, with the extreme quietude of manner which Dr. Doldy did not yet know her well enough to recognise as an alarming symptom. "To begin with, I am not throwing away my health, and I don't think strength is likely to be thrown away upon wholesome work. I believe I understand my own constitution, and

know how to use myself economically. At all events, I am in perfect health at the present moment."

"Don't you leave that hospital every day, worn out?"

"I am sometimes tired when I come away; and pray, how can health be preserved without sufficient exertion to prevent organic stagnation and assist physical development? I don't wear myself out; that is as foolish as any other form of extravagance, and I have taught myself to stop short of it."

"You are a wonderfully wise woman," observed Dr. Doldy, with an expressive sigh, "if you can avoid extravagance in all things."

Ernestine flashed a quick glance at him, but took no other notice of this little speech.

"And then," she went on, "you mistake in saying that I am not endeavouring to carve for myself a medical career. Now that is just what I am doing: a career, if not of glory, at

least of usefulness. And perhaps we had better come to an understanding on this subject now; it has lain fallow for a good while."

Dr. Doldy groaned below his breath. The sound of her voice was very sweet and gentle but very meaning.

"I know you detest the subject," said Ernestine, growing a little more fiery. "And so do I. But it is one which cannot be put away, and we had better face it. Whether married or no, when I leave my aunt's house and establish myself permanently anywhere else, I shall commence practising. You are not merely taking to yourself a wife; you are uniting two different careers, and you must be content to see them run side by side. Are you prepared for that?"

"I suppose so," he answered, somewhat dolefully; "of course, if some of your lady friends choose to avail themselves of your knowledge, I cannot object."

"I am afraid," said Ernestine, laughing a

little, "that I shall want a wider scope than that."

Now and again, as days went on, there occurred between the doctors conversations something like this; and as Dr. Doldy came to fully realise that Ernestine kept to her resolutions and was to be had only on her own terms, he began to yield. Moreover, he became more accustomed to her serious idea of her future; it did not seem so utterly unendurable as at first.

But what most influenced him to accept the position was his own inward conviction that it would not last. All he had been fighting for was to deprive his old friends of the amusement which he knew they would feel if he set out upon married life after such fashion. However, Ernestine was plainly "determined," to use a pet expression of hers; and Dr. Doldy wisely gave in, reserving the assertion of himself as lord and master, after the fashion of men in these circumstances, until he should really become so. Not that he exactly looked

forward to forcing Ernestine out of her own path, but he certainly projected many plans by which, as the leader in their united living, he could tempt her out of it. He resolved, after his marriage, to take his social position a little more fully than he had yet done. His debts cleared off, as they would be upon Laura's marriage, he would be able to do this, with greater ease than ever before. He pictured Ernestine, with her unusual beauty, heading his dinner table and accompanying him to other houses, until he had almost convinced himself that what he wished was certain to take place. Once in her right position, he felt sure she would feel that she must do herself and her husband justice, and lay aside her peculiar crotchets.

And in the meantime, as he told himself, there would be no harm in furnishing for her a room which she might call her consulting-room if she liked. One morning after breakfast, he amused himself with this idea. He started on a survey of the house; truth to tell,

he had done this once or twice before, since he had felt that the passage of time was really bringing him nearer to the day when he might begin in good earnest to decorate and rearrange for Ernestine's advent. He had found great pleasure in these excursions through his demesne; so many bachelor years had rolled over his head in this stately mansion that the idea of brightening it for such a presence was full of novelty. But this morning he started with a more serious face. He was thinking of, and providing for, Ernestine, and not only Ernestine, but her peculiarities now; and this was more difficult and not quite so romantic, at first. But after a deliberate survey of the various rooms which might be devoted to the especial use of the daughter of Æsculapius with whom he was entering into so odd a partnership, he paused at last in a little chamber on the ground-floor, bright with morning sunshine; and looking round it, a smile dawned in his face. There were two doors in this pleasant room: one into the entrance-

hall, the other he now approached and, opening it, looked through. It led into a little ante-chamber, into which also opened his own consulting-room. He smiled again as he shut the door and looked once more around the room, with intent to consider how charming a nest he could make of it. Here Ernestine might pass her time as she chose—dreaming, perhaps, of patients; and here he would be able to find rest and refreshment in her companionship at any unoccupied moment. The arrangement seemed to him perfect. He took his note-book from his pocket and began to make notes of what must be done to the room before he should consider it fit for its new occupant.

That very afternoon he called at Mrs. Silburn's, in the hope of finding Ernestine. He liked to meet her there much better than in her aunt's house. To his delight, he found her sitting by the window talking to Coventry; Mrs. Silburn, at a writing-table in a secluded alcove, was scribbling away as if for dear life.

She shook hands with Dr. Doldy and took no further notice of him. Coventry, who had been leaning against the window-sash, began to walk up and down the room, and after a few desultory remarks, vanished—probably into his hammock: but no one ever took much notice of his erratic movements.

“I want you to come and look at my house soon, Ernestine,” said Dr. Doldy. “I have decided on a room which you may call your consulting-room, and I want to know whether you will like my ideas about furnishing it.”

“You don’t mean to say you have come to terms on that subject!” cried Mrs. Silburn, turning round from her writing with a face of amazement.

“Yes,” said Dr. Doldy, with a smile of meaning “we have; I mean Ernestine to have the most charming consulting-room in London.”

“Then you had better furnish it yourself,” said Ernestine, in a mingled tone of appreciation and doubt. “I have had no opportuni-

ties as yet of doing my work amid æsthetic surroundings; I don't think I should understand the combination at first." She felt rather as if a sort of treacherous mirage of the beautiful were being interposed between her and the stern realities of work.

"I should much prefer furnishing it myself," answered he, eagerly.

Mrs. Silburn had relapsed into her work again, and the scratching of her pen—it had been a stately swan-quill once, but miles of writing had worn it down—formed a sort of running accompaniment to the low-toned talk by the window.

"I should indeed enjoy doing it," he went on, "if you would be sure to be pleased; and I think I could do it so that you must be pleased, for a harmony cannot offend. And I will take you as the key-note to my harmony; the colour of your hair and eyes, the tints of your complexion shall meet with gentle colourings that shall be to them like friends. No lurking enemy to your beauty

shall haunt that room ; place yourself where you will in it, you shall form a centre to a perfect whole.”

Mrs. Silburn was not writing at all an amusing article ; but she was looking very much amused while she wrote. Dr. Doldy did not recollect, or did not know, that she was one of those superficial writers who can follow a conversation and scribble away at the same time.

Ernestine made no reply at the moment, but a little access of colour came into her cheeks. Never was woman born yet who could resist a genuine compliment to her beauty. The sex has been too distinctly taught, through all the ages, the value set by man on personal appearance to be able to disregard it. If God implanted instinctive vanity in woman, she need not complain ; for without that, the burden entailed upon her by the love of her lord and master for good looks and effective dress would have been probably too heavy to be borne. We find men every day

following Dr. Doldy's example; falling in love with a woman first for her beauty, and afterwards learning to appreciate her character. Being a woman, with an instinctive consciousness of these things, Ernestine must be forgiven for blushing a little when her lover so plainly revelled in the picturesque idea of her.

“If you want to do anything so wonderful,” she said, “pray do it without consulting me; for I know very little about the hues of my complexion. I might hold myself up to ridicule among the upholsterers, for I should require a looking-glass every minute.”

Mrs. Silburn had finished writing, and, folding up some papers, she advanced towards them.

“I had no idea you had such artistic proclivities, Dr. Doldy,” she said.

“They were latent, Mrs. Silburn; Ernestine is developing my character.”

Dorothy was putting on her hat and cloak,

which she had evidently but very recently thrown off.

“I am obliged to be very rude and run away,” she said. “I must take this article down to the *Morning Mail*.”

“Are they in a hurry for it?” asked Ernestine.

“It is to go into type at once: I went in this morning, and found them in despair, for none of them seemed capable of handling the subject. I felt sure I could do it, with the help of some of my reference books; and I expect to astonish them. I say I found them in despair—perhaps an uninitiated observer would not have detected it,” she added, laughingly. “When I had climbed the dark, dirty stairs this morning, my eyes were attracted by the spectacle of the editor, poker in hand, chasing the sub-editor round and round the room in the wildest way. I thought for a moment they had gone mad, but was reassured on receiving a wink from the sub, who is a most impudent little wretch, as he passed me.

As I was only a contributor, they did not stop till want of breath compelled them, and so I had a charming opportunity of reflecting on the dignity of the English Press."

"Well, after all," said Ernestine, with a professional air, "there was no great harm in that. I daresay a little exercise is very necessary, for literature is much too sedentary an occupation to be healthy."

"Bravo, Minerva Medica," cried Coventry from some unseen retreat."

"Ah," said Dorothy, drily, "if that were the worst of their doings I would forgive them without wanting a medical excuse. But it's like wringing the blood from a stone to get my money out of them—and they have an inner room where they hide from their creditors, each taking the responsibility, as need arises, to swear that the other is out of town."

"I thought," said Ernestine, "you were anxious to get work from them because they paid well."

“So they do, or at all events, can,” she replied. “They are backed by plenty of money. But they prefer spending it to paying contributors with it. Now I must be off; if I’m late my work will be wasted.”

“I must go too,” said Ernestine. “Furnish my consulting-room how you will, only let it be fit for some other country than fairyland,” she said to Dr. Doldy, as she rose.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE HOSPITAL AGAIN.

DR. DOLBY found that he was right in thinking that, notwithstanding the proverbial weariness of waiting, perhaps the six months of his courtship would not be so very slow in dragging out their length. Winter had passed, and melted into its cruelly deceptive successor, spring, before he had realised its swift departure. East winds and untimely frosts scarcely arrested his attention, for a glow which originated in his incorporeal being rendered his corporeal outer man almost impervious to such disagreeable incidents, thus making him into a flagrant contradiction of the doctrines of materialism. May flowers sprang up in de-

fiance of chill spring, and gladdened Ernestine's eyes, not, indeed, in shady woodland nooks, but on Covent Garden stalls, or massed upon hucksters' carts, making a passionate appeal to the dim eyes of street dwellers, by their wondrous glow and depth of sun-given colour. Once Dr. Doldy heard her say how much more she felt in sympathy with the garden flowers, which bring forth their delicate perfection in spite of scant sunshine and cutting winds, than with caged greenhouse blossoms. The next day her unfailing cluster of white scented flowers was composed of single hyacinths—much to the disgust of her cousins, who, as usual, watched its arrival. The seasons soon began to favour Ernestine's love of natural outdoor growth. The time seemed to pass so quickly over her head that she herself marvelled at its rapid passage when white June roses at last took the place of the winter exotics. Ernestine's reticence was of a strange order. She had never acknowledged these flowers by word or sign; yet they did more to

strengthen her heart's bondage, and make vain the clashing of views and prejudices between the lovers, than anything else. They convinced her continually that in one part of the two natures between which they were the message bearers, there was a deep sympathy which could never be broken or destroyed.

June—a month whose warm rains give life to the woodland ferns, whose soft sunbine fills the deep-hearted roses with the yearning to unfold and yield their beauty—this same June dragged on its weary way in London. The strengthening of summer only brought forth the greater evidence of the ever present existence of crowded restaurants and of certain favourite scents which occupy about the same relation to sweetness that piano-organs occupy to music. Laura Doldy, who had only visited London for a single day since Christmas, and that in order to purchase summer fineries, was now away in Scotland among the ferns and heather. Even she, in her occasional little notes to her uncle, could not but give him a taste of fresh

air ; and then he would open his Shakespeare to wander once more into Arden with the melancholy Jaques or fair Rosalind ; or more often fell to considering into what uncivilised and nature-haunted region he would carry Ernestine when at last he should take the reins. It was unusual for Laura to absent herself so completely from home at this time of year ; but he made no remark to her upon it, for he did not desire her society at the present time. He earnestly wished his own marriage to be over before Laura's matrimonial difficulties should again become his responsibility. He sincerely hoped that she was successfully carrying some affair of the heart to an issue in the country, as she chose to remain quietly there so long. If not, as she would certainly intend to be in London during July and August, he settled in his own mind that she must stay with an aunt, a certain Mrs. Honiton, her mother's sister, who was admirably calculated to further her in her plans. He was perhaps too much disposed to put the whole

matter impatiently from him; it was so entirely out of harmony with his present state. But he knew that Laura must marry, and he gladly and hopefully left her to her own generalship. He felt himself justified, having Laura's deed of gift, and feeling perfectly confident that she would marry, in making extensive preparations for Ernestine's instalment in his house. The whole interior was redecorated, and entirely with the aim of making of it a becoming frame for the picture which continually filled his eye. This occupied as much of his time and thoughts as his practice and Ernestine herself left unemployed; so that the summer wore on apace, and at last Laura wrote to say that she would be in town in little more than a month, in order to be present if her uncle "really did mean to get married in July!"

Ernestine grew more silent and quiet in the midst of her aunt and cousins, who were daily increasing in their chatter over the approaching wedding. As she had to be married from

their house she submitted gratefully to their demonstrative kindness; but she was very glad of the long hospital hours which kept her amid real work. At home she felt oppressed by impending orange blossoms and white favours; and among her cousins, who delighted in discussing every detail, she sat silent, wondering at her own daring in taking so quietly this new road in life. She grew afraid in the atmosphere of unnecessary accessories; their very frivolity filled her mind with the solemnity and danger of her new adventure. It overwhelmed her; she gladly escaped from it by redoubling her attentions in the hospital wards and forgetting herself in the immediate necessities of others.

One day ^{*}Mrs. Marland, one of the house-surgeons, who had originally enlisted her sympathies in the hospital, came up to her.

“It is but a little while now before your year expires, Dr. Vavasour; do you really mean to leave us at the end of it?”

Ernestine held a baby in her arms; finding herself addressed by Mrs. Marland, she gave it back to its mother, and turned to answer.

They were standing in a favourite ward of Ernestine's; one in which babies first stretched their lungs; one in which poor ladies came to have the skilled nursing, the quiet, the freedom from worry, which they could not get at home; and which are so much needed for both mother and child.

The long ward was divided into many little rooms. Ernestine was standing by the window, round which some convalescents had gathered. The mother who took the child from Ernestine's arms sat on a low rocking chair. She took the babe with a look of affection and pleasure, the sunshine of which fell half upon Ernestine—half upon the child. She was a fair, ladylike woman, the wife of a struggling curate. Her brief holiday—for so it had seemed to her—would soon be over, and she would return to the heavy cares of

parish and children and economical house-keeping.

“Yes, Mrs. Marland,” said Ernestine, “I am really going to leave you. I am sorry, for I shall leave a great many friends here.”

“And I am sorry,” answered Mrs. Marland, emphatically. She said nothing more, for Ernestine was unusually uncommunicative, even for her. Mrs. Marland knew very well that Ernestine’s avowed intention of commencing a practice of her own need not interfere with attendance at the hospital; therefore she supposed her friend to have plans which she did not wish to disclose. Indeed, Ernestine had not yet been able to bring herself to speak of her approaching marriage to any of her colleagues at the hospital. This arose principally from an extreme dislike to being gossiped about. She was very distinctly aware that her marriage with so well known a physician as Dr. Doldy would afford a topic of great interest to Mrs. Marland and certain other

acquaintances. And, both for Dr. Doldy's sake and her own, she shrank from its being thus discussed.

So Mrs. Marland had to retreat from the field of inquiry no wiser than when she entered upon it. She changed the subject abruptly. "There's a new patient come into this ward to-day," she said. "I must go and see after her. She's come here full soon, to my thinking; but she is evidently nervous and scared about herself. It's her first, so we must look well after her. She mustn't stay alone in her room too much." Mrs. Marland, who was a bustling woman, trotted off to the door of the new patient's room, and went in.

Ernestine was about to leave the ward, but a voice just then issued from a room close by, calling on Dr. Vavasour. Ernestine went in, to find a lady in distress over an ailing infant. She remained with her some few minutes, and when she came out again Mrs. Marland had returned to the group by the window.

Ernestine had business elsewhere, but she lingered a moment, for the air was balmy and soft, and the group was a pleasant one to look at. This ward was appreciated to an extent little expected when first it was opened. The rich lady can keep a doctor dancing attendance; can make it worth his while never to be out of the way while she is in danger; or can, as many do, use his house as a hospital, leaving her own undisturbed; she can have skilled nursing; while the poor woman in humble life has at least the appliances of vast charities at her disposal. But the poor lady—(who as a rule knows absolutely nothing herself of the laws and needs of motherhood, her education having been totally neglected with regard to that which is considered her highest function),—she must silently suffer, as well as her helpless infant, from second-rate medical knowledge, incompetent nursing, and, very probably, from the semi-starvation which prevails in many genteel homes. No wonder that, though out

of the wide-ranging ranks of the great army of poor gentility but a scattered few cared to leave their homes and enter the hospital, yet those few were enough to keep the ward devoted to their use always full.

It was one of Ernestine's dreams that the spread of scientific nursing and the education of woman, who thus could no longer err in ignorance and blindly wreck her own health and her child's, would raise our deformed humanity, so that it might again stand strongly on its feet and, stretching its shoulders, give expansion to its cramped lungs. She worked ardently in her practical field; for she always held the idea that no reformation can come upon mankind unless the physical standard is raised as well as the moral.

And, as she had a habit of going to the root of any matter in which she concerned herself, this ward always had an interest for her. The first efforts of the imprisoned spirit to understand and control the puny, unintelligent,

and often hereditarily depraved form into which it is born, formed continual subjects for her study.

“Mrs. Aylmer is the new patient’s name,” said Mrs. Marland, aside to Ernestine; “she is the wife of a poor artist, down in Hampshire; quite a lady, indeed, a charming person. She is nervous about herself—will you speak to her a moment, and reassure her? I think she is doing well enough.”

Ernestine followed into a small private sitting-room in which the lady sat. “This is Dr. Vavasour, Mrs. Aylmer,” said Mrs. Marland, and left them together. Ernestine drew a chair beside her and, sitting down, began to question her.

Mrs. Aylmer lifted a pair of dark, languid eyes to Ernestine’s face, and answered her with chilly reticence. But this very soon gave way to the charm of her new doctor’s manner; for, frigid and uninviting as was Ernestine on many—perhaps most—social occasions, with a patient she had at her com-

mand measureless tact. The peculiar qualities which most doctors of the male sex have to acquire painfully are the very ones implanted in a woman's breast. A woman can give sympathy—inspire confidence—wheedle out secrets—detect the inner meaning of a fleeting expression with her intuitive eye. And all these things, as well as many other feminine qualities, are necessary to the successful practitioner.

Mrs. Aylmer was by no means fond of her own sex : and above all in the form of medical women. At any other time she would have eyed Ernestine askance and avoided her ; but just then she needed sympathy, and was rather more humble than usual. Ernestine's gentle manner conquered, as true gentleness will conquer ; and after the brief talk which the two had together, a certain pleasantness was established between them.

CHAPTER XV.

ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR.

“It is very beautiful, that unfinished painting which stands beside your easel. I have been admiring it ever since I have been in the room.”

The speaker was Ernestine. She was just rising to take her leave, after paying a professional visit to Miss Armine.

Miss Armine had that remarkable feature which exists in a few women of the present generation. She believed in her own sex. And thus, when she had worked over her oil-paints from morning till night, denying herself fresh air and exercise until she fell ill, it appeared to her as quite natural that she should turn for help to another woman, who,

instead of studying art, had studied hygiene. So Ernestine, on her way home from the hospital, had called in at Miss Armine's lodgings. She was received by a ghostly-looking presentment of that young woman, in a room full of sketches and studies. One of these had fastened her attention by its unusual beauty.

"And it is so annoying that I could not finish it," said Miss Armine, in a disappointed tone; "the tiresome man actually caught cold, though the room was kept so hot for him that we could hardly breathe in it."

"Then, this is one of your art school studies?" said Ernestine.

"Yes; but it would have made something more. I should like to have used the study for a picture which was in my mind all the time I was painting it. But now Anton has taken cold, I can't finish it sufficiently. He was such a splendid model; he seemed like a statue, so motionless he sat."

Ernestine laughed. "It is curious," she

said, "how any form of intensely absorbing occupation leads human nature into a sort of cruelty. My profession is, as I am inclined to think justly, abused for its secret cruelties of investigation: art follows in its wake in a milder fashion, by demanding motionless living bodies to study from—a gentle form of torture. The musician ignores the miseries of his next door neighbour; the more musical he is, the less he is penetrated by sympathy with his unmusical kind, although music is regarded as the humanising art. I should think we might consider that disregard for the comfort of others increases in proportion to the intensity of an absorbing idea in life. But, truly, when you are well again you must finish this."

"I should like to," said Miss Armine, with a sigh. "but he won't sit any more at the school, I'm afraid; and I could never afford to pay him to sit for me."

"And your imagination and memory would not carry you through?" said Ernestine.

"No, indeed," was the reply ; and Ernestine went away wondering to herself at that literalness of art which, to her mind, reduced it almost to the level of an industry.

"Is she better?" It was Mrs. Silburn's voice on the stairs. "I have brought her some jelly—but I cannot stay a minute, I must hurry home—so just wait for me, Ernestine, and we can walk together."

She was down again directly, rather breathless.

"Poor little woman," said she. "It is very lonely for her, in lodgings all by herself."

"Oh, she will very soon be better," said Ernestine, "but it *is* dull for her ; I almost wish she were bad enough to come into the hospital. I don't think she would object ; but I shall not suggest it, for it would only make her think herself worse than she is. The poor artists are beginning to appreciate the hospital, and from some of the homes of men of real talent and ability come sad stories of

struggle and poverty. The wife of a young artist came in yesterday, into the maternity ward ; they live far away in the country, and have very limited means ; I expect she would have been very ill if she had not come to us : principally from nervous fears. Women suffer so much at all times of their lives because they know so little."

" And now I suppose you are going to wait on her, and nurse her till Dr. Doldy gets angry again and tells you you are degrading the profession," said Dorothy, half mockingly.

" Oh, Mrs. Aylmer will not need much nursing at present," said Ernestine, colouring a little.

Dorothy referred to a recent scene which had taken place in her drawing-room, when Dr. Doldy tried again to convince Ernestine that she was a delicate possession entrusted to his care. She had refused altogether to be considered as such, much to his disgust. And now that the interval before her marriage was

to be counted by rapidly passing weeks, it amused Dorothy considerably to see her struggles between the immediate sense of duty, and that inaction which comes upon the busiest natures just before any distinct event.

Of course, as might be expected in Ernestine, the sense of duty conquered rather to excess. She nursed, she sympathised, she tended assiduously. Mrs. Aylmer came a great deal under her care : an elder physician saw her now and then, and later on would take entire charge of her case ; but at present Ernestine looked after her. And although she did not get to know her any further or like her any better than on their first interview, she grew interested in the pathetic story of home troubles which gradually shaped itself during their intercourse. But Mrs. Aylmer, though pleasant and seemingly frank, plainly belonged to that un-philosophic average of womankind with which Ernestine had little real sympathy ; so that the pleasant feeling which had sprung up between them on their

first meeting rather languished than increased. This was not the usual way with Ernestine and her patients; she did not quite like it, but she could do nothing, for in addition to a dislike she felt for certain sides of her patient's character, Mrs. Aylmer seemed to have put a cloud of reserve over herself, and to have just settled down to endure with resignation until her troubles should be over.

CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT A DOOR-PLATE.

“WHAT on earth am I to do?” was Dr. Doldy’s conclusion to a speech which he had been making to Coventry Silburn in the privacy of the latter gentleman’s special snugery.

“Give in,” replied Coventry, in oracular fashion.

“You don’t mean that seriously?” said Dr. Doldy, with a despairing accent.

“I do, indeed.”

“Good heavens!” was all Dr. Doldy’s reply for a moment. Then he said, “Don’t you know what it will bring on me? Don’t you know that Sir George Degener, who said that he would rather his daughter were in her

grave than that she should pass an examination in surgery, so intolerable does it seem to him, is my intimate friend ; in fact, you know, we play into each other's hands : I can't afford to lose his friendship—I can't indeed. Besides, half my colleagues consider it positively immodest for a woman to enter the profession—my practice will suffer to a certainty ; only think of the Duchess and some of those magnificent old ladies whom I attend—they will never get over it."

"You have my advice," said Coventry, calmly, in reply to the Doctor's agitated exclamations.

And all this was about a door-plate—positively, nothing more than a door-plate. But that door-plate, though a very small one in reality, had assumed perfectly gigantic proportions in Dr. Doldy's eyes, for the simple reason that it was to bear upon it his wife's name with the letters M.D. thereafter.

"You can't mean it," said he, in reply to Coventry's discouraging remark. "You don't

realise my position. I must make you understand it; for unless you will try and bring her to reason, I don't know what the result will be."

Coventry burst out laughing.

"My dear Doctor," he exclaimed, "women can't be brought to reason—not to what men call reason. Your view of the matter is reasonable to you; to you it seems not only disagreeable, but extravagant, for Miss Vavasour to begin a new practice under your roof, because it will probably injure your practice already formed. That view is clear as daylight to you; but Miss Vavasour won't see it, because she doesn't look at things in that way."

"But she might be made to see it, if anybody would show it her."

"Not a bit of it; she is a high-spirited woman, who has given the best years of her youth to the study of a profession in which she believes woman's influence and instinct to be necessary. She is not only practical but

enthusiastic; and in addition to, as she says, justifying her existence by making herself useful to her neighbours, she has various theories and principles which she wishes to bring out to the world. If you expect a woman of her calibre to give up such a career as that which she has sketched out for herself because of the ridiculous or the monetary aspects of the affair, you have yet a good deal to discover in her."

"I expect I have," said Dr. Doldy, with the oddest mixture of pride and ruefulness in his countenance. For, though he was angry at Ernestine's determination to have her own way, he was proud of her through it all. Coventry knew that well enough, or he would not have spoken as he did.

"And, positively," went on Dr. Doldy, "she insists upon her consulting-room, which even you allowed to be beautiful, being disfigured by various fittings which she has bought herself——"

He was interrupted by Coventry's laugh.

“They won’t spoil it, Doctor: they will just make the room fit her character. She is lovely, and she is practical. The room could never belong to her while it only made her look more beautiful.”

“Silburn, you are incorrigible,” said Dr. Doldy, good-humouredly. “I really expected some common sense from you, notwithstanding that you are a poet. But, seriously, do look at the matter from an every-day point of view and come to my rescue. I believe Ernestine will listen to you when she will to no one else.”

“That is possible,” answered Coventry, “simply because she knows I am sincere. And, honestly, my dear Doctor, I could not be sincere in speaking of this—a door-plate more or less seems to me so perfectly immaterial.”

“But it isn’t the door-plate; it’s what the door-plate means.”

“Well, if the door-plate means Miss Vava-sour’s principles, I think she’s right to stick

to it; for her principles are her object in life, the centre of her career."

"I see I must submit," said Dr. Doldy, despairingly; "you were my last hope, and if you won't help me, I suppose I must follow in the wake of mankind generally and let love befool me."

"Right, right, dear Doctor; and you will begin to find out something about wisdom when you have submitted to the process of being made a fool of."

Dr. Doldy shrugged his shoulders.

"Very pretty and very poetical, I daresay, all this: but there are realities in this world of ours which can't be done away with. Ernestine, taking her place socially as my wife and not shocking any of my old-fashioned friends, might do me material service, but as it is, I confess the prospect is not pleasant. I don't like these men to regard her as immodest and 'advanced'—I don't like the ladies to whom she will have to be introduced, to look half doubtfully upon her as 'extraordinary.' I

allow I am coward enough to dread Laura's wonder at a ladylike woman choosing such a profession; as to her aunt, Mrs. Honiton—what she has to say about such things I know only too well."

"Well, Doctor," said Coventry, tranquilly, "if you can't trust her to live down these opinions you speak of, you had better give up the enterprise even at the eleventh hour."

"Ah," said Dr. Doldy, rising, "I see you will not help me. I must make the best of my own folly; and be grateful that Heaven has granted it to me in such charming shape."

The Doctor gone, Coventry turned into the drawing-room, where Dorothy sat reading a very large book.

"What has it been all about?" asked she, looking up.

"Minerva Medica and her door-plate," said Coventry. "He wanted me to try and show her the worldly-wise view of the matter."

“He should have come to me,” exclaimed Dorothy, scornfully; “the idea of expecting anything like that from you.”

“With all his worrying about these ridiculous difficulties,” said Coventry, who from the window had been watching Dr. Doldy’s carriage drive away, “he looks younger than I have ever seen him; he is a young man again with all his life before him.”

“I suppose Ernestine will get her own way?” said Dorothy.

“Oh, of course she will. He tries to take the upper hand, but he dare not risk a quarrel with her now.”

“So you think I may safely order my dress for the wedding?”

“I think so; and may the gods provide us the wherewithal to pay for it.”

“You have written that critical article for the *Bi-Quarterly*, haven’t you?”

“Yes; I finished it last night.”

“Oh, well, then the *Quarterly* cheque will

pay for it. I don't want any of that for house-keeping."

Dr. Doldy, on his return, found a letter from Laura awaiting him. She wrote from Scotland, approving the suggestion he had made that she should stay with her aunt, Mrs. Honiton, over the wedding, and, indeed, until Dr. Doldy should have returned from his honeymoon. The plan evidently pleased her, much to Dr. Doldy's satisfaction. She told him that she was sick of the country, and would be very glad to get back to town, insinuating delicately, but very clearly, that nothing would have kept her in the country so long save the conduct of a promising love affair, which, however, she had found it necessary to break off. This reason for her continued stay in Scotland was quite what he had expected; but the conclusion to the tale brought a gentle sigh forth. He had much wished that Laura would emerge from this state of indecision, and present herself in London with a reasonable suitor in tow.

But he soon put the letter aside, and forgot it, and everything but the fact that the interval which separated him from the troubles and delights of a new state might now be measured by days.

CHAPTER XVII.

“MY NIECE, LAURA DOLDY.”

ERNESTINE was asked to try on her wedding-ring a day or two before that on which she was to be married, and, turning it round, wondered to herself, with downcast eyes, how much of bondage might not lie in that little symbol. Looking up, she met Dr. Doldy's gaze, and something in it made her say aloud, “Not much, I think.” But she would not explain her enigmatical speech. She was beginning to feel how terribly real the matter was, and she scarce dared trust herself to speak.

At the hospital she had absorbed herself more than ever in her work, so that she might

escape the congratulations of her colleagues, who knew well enough by now that she was to be married immediately to the well-known Dr. Doldy. She had devoted herself to Mrs. Aylmer, and had given to her case such incessant attention as to greatly aid the rapidity of her recovery. She had cheered her in her convalescence, conquering a certain dislike she felt for her, in order to impart vigour from her own healthful presence and active mind. Mrs. Aylmer grew strong steadily under the auspicious surroundings, and by the aid of a certain indomitable strength of constitution which lay hidden beneath a fragile appearance. This seeming fragility helped to strengthen a tendency, evidently natural, to make slaves of all who surrounded her. She quickly learned to regard Ernestine as one appointed to do her slightest will. Ernestine did not rebel against this until Mrs. Aylmer was nearly strong enough to leave the hospital. Then, much to that lady's astonishment, she was comparatively deserted. . Not altogether,

however, for Ernestine had a habit of making studies of her patients; and there was one feature about Mrs. Aylmer which kept her attention upon her, although she would no longer be her slave. This was the fact that Mrs. Aylmer appeared to take no interest whatever in her child. She treated it apathetically, apparently having no dislike for it, but at the same time no affection. This perplexed Ernestine, for she had thought Mrs. Aylmer only shallow, and shallow women have, as a rule, no lack of at least the physical mother-love. Ernestine often watched her when the babe was with her, and tried in vain to discover from her expression the secret of this peculiar apathy.

At last Mrs. Aylmer was strong enough to go home; she said her husband was very anxious for her return and she must delay no longer. Her simple preparations were soon made, and a dark-skinned, voluble nurse came to fetch her and take charge of the baby. When they were starting, Mrs. Aylmer,

meeting Ernestine in the ward, wished her an affectionate farewell, and thanked her for her kindness. Ernestine replied coldly, for she was regarding the baby, as it lay in its nurse's arms, and wondering to herself whether it was indeed never to know any deeper mother-love than Mrs. Aylmer showed for it. It was not a pretty babe; but still Ernestine's heart yearned over it.

. It is, perhaps, a bad thing for a doctor to have a tender heart. Ernestine was unreasonably haunted by that little baby face; and she was glad of the excuse, on her way home, to call and see whether Miss Armine were quite well again. Miss Armine did not expect her, and looking up as she entered, blushed suddenly a startled blush. She threw down some sewing she was engaged on and advanced to meet her visitor.

“I did not expect you,” she said, “or I would not have had my room littered with dress-making. I suppose you have enough of that sort of thing at home just now.”

“Why, yes,” said Ernestine, with a sigh. “I am afraid I am very unappreciative; but really I think there would be more genuine romance in being married in a morning-dress at the registrar’s office, than by a ceremony which necessitates all these flounces and furbelows and fittings on. But you are making something pretty?”

“Well, I want to come and see you married, Dr. Vavasour; and positively I possessed but two shabby black dresses. So, as I would not be defrauded of my little dissipation, I have been stitching for myself.”

“You buy your pleasure dearly,” said Ernestine, for Miss Armine looked very tired.

“Yes, we workers generally do. But after all, I daresay we prize the pleasure more than those who do not pay for it. At all events, I try to believe so, for I have always worked hard, and always shall, I suppose.”

Ernestine went home, grave, but with Miss

Armine in her mind instead of Mrs. Aylmer and her child.

“This is such an artificial world,” she said to herself, as sitting in her little room she refreshed her eyes with the beauty of her white flowers. “Why should not that poor girl, who works already too hard at her true work, blossom out naturally into appropriate dress, as these flowers clothe themselves in their beauty?”

But her mind was soon distracted. One of her pretty cousins rushed in, wild with excitement; the wedding dress had come home, and, positively, Ernestine must come and try it on at once. So Ernestine, in smiling submission, was carried off, and was soon in the midst of a cluster of buzzing women. Her cousins combed out her soft hair, and fastened it up; then they put on the long white silk robe, which trailed its delicate folds upon the ground. Ernestine stood like a queen among them: and her cousins, who really loved her, though she puzzled and often shocked them,

went into ecstasies over her appearance. But she, looking into the mirror, saw only the wonder in her own dark eyes: the awe and trembling of her soul shone out of them, and she lowered her lashes, feeling as though her inner self was writ too plainly there for her to dare to meet the gaze of others.

What lay before her? What did this dress mean? She had left behind a piece of her life: she had done her last day's work at the hospital. And only a brief space of freedom was left her, for but one day after the next she must assume the wedding-ring, and take upon herself the interpretation of its meanings.

She spent the first part of the intervening day in a species of apathy—a long dim dream. But in the afternoon she roused herself, and dressing carefully, went down from her own little den, sacred to her dreams, to the drawing-room. For Dr. Doldy had told her that Laura had returned to town, and though too tired with her long journey to call before,

would come with him that afternoon to make her acquaintance. For this meeting Ernestine, half unconsciously, put on a sort of war-paint. She was only anxious about one thing with Dr. Doldy's friends and relations—that she should appear in their eyes ladylike and fashionable. A power of assuming this appearance and manner had long been a refuge of hers in the presence of persons disposed to regard her as “extraordinary ;” and she well knew how much her possession of this power delighted Dr. Doldy. So she called up her resources to-day, determined that his ward should receive her first impression of her simply as a woman accustomed to society.

Ernestine's capacity had been described by Mrs. Silburn as a power “of doing anything if she would but give her mind to it.” It was a fair definition : only many things she would not give her mind to.

Having given her mind to pleasing Dr. Doldy to-day, she naturally succeeded. She was alone in the drawing-room when he

arrived, her aunt and cousins having driven to Covent Garden on the vital business of dessert fruit. He thought at first, as he entered, followed by Laura, that the room was empty, but from the depths of an easy-chair Ernestine rose, laying aside a novel with which she had been endeavouring to amuse herself. She looked so womanly and so beautiful as she turned towards him that he forgot all about Laura for a moment, and was about to advance and tell Ernestine that she was perfectly glorious. But he quickly remembered that Laura awaited introduction, and pausing between them, he said—

“This is my niece, Laura Doldy.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“WHAT BURDEN BESIDES LOVE?”

LAURA had paused just behind her uncle; but now he had stepped aside, and Ernestine's eyes fell upon her. She was dressed with the utmost taste, and, though very pale, looked her best. Laura had paid a good deal of attention to dress and effect in her time, and she, too, intended to make an impression to-day. She certainly seemed to succeed. Ernestine's eyes wandered in a bewildered way from Laura to her uncle, and she repeated his words as if trying to understand them—“Your niece—Laura Doldy.” But this was over in an instant, and she bowed. Laura stepped forward with an embarrassed but ready

smile, intending to shake hands with her new relation and be amiably effusive after the approved fashion; but Ernestine had suddenly taken up her iciest manner. Laura flushed a little, and then grew paler than before; she remained standing in silence.

Dr. Doldy thought there might be a little embarrassment at first, but he could not understand why these two women should appear to petrify the moment they met. Surely they had not taken an instantaneous and mutual dislike? He did not pause to wonder anymore, however, for the silence had begun to feel awkward. He dexterously interfered, and took the management of the situation: put Laura in one chair, and Ernestine in another, while he himself sat down between them and began to talk.

Laura recovered directly, and gossiped prettily away about a thousand nothings: while Ernestine relaxed from her sudden petrification sufficiently to keep up a general conversation, which was led by Dr. Doldy for some quarter

of an hour. He did not relish his position, however, for his quick sensibilities told him that there was something wrong between the two women which he could not hope to understand. He did not puzzle himself much about it; for like most men who have long remained bachelors, he regarded woman as a species of being which it were simply useless to attempt to understand on all occasions. Men are sometimes strangely reckless in their generalisations; especially about that other sex which they alternately admire and despise; and perhaps the bachelor's mode of generalising is less absurd than that of the married man, who is apt to believe all womankind made on the pattern of his own wife, either for good or ill.

Dr. Doldy, being still a bachelor, took refuge in the bachelor's creed on this particular occasion, and, concluding that it was of no use to try and make out why Ernestine did not respond to Laura rather more warmly, or to attempt to improve matters any further, he

rose to go. Ernestine rose too, as Laura came forward to say good-bye; and standing there in her strong beauty, which paled Laura's languid prettiness to insignificance, turned upon her with a sudden cold graciousness.

“Miss Doldy, they will bring me some tea in a few moments—will you not stay and have a cup with me? We ought to be better acquainted.”

Laura looked her in the face, and meeting the mask of amiable politeness which Ernestine presented to her, acknowledged to herself with a sudden sense of fear, that she had found her match.

Her match, yes; but she was determined to prove that, as she had always held, no woman alive was more than her match.

She answered with the utmost sweetness—

“I shall be so delighted. Uncle, I am sure you will excuse me?”

“Certainly,” said Dr. Doldy; and took his departure, more than ever convinced of the unintelligibility of womankind.

The door closed upon him, and his steps were heard in the hall; the two women stood motionless. The hall-door slammed behind him, and then Ernestine spoke.

“What does this masquerading mean?”

Laura only drew herself up and returned her gaze proudly.

“What does it mean?” repeated Ernestine, angrily, “Are you Mrs. Aylmer or are you Laura Doldy?”

Perhaps Ernestine was allowing herself to be angry a little too soon. But then she was burdened with an innate hatred of deceit.

“I am Laura Doldy,” was the answer, with an imperial intonation. And Laura drew up her little figure and folded her arms with a regal air.

“You mean that?” said Ernestine, slowly, looking at her as if indeed trying to grasp her meaning; “you are not Mrs. Aylmer—not the wife of a poor artist in the country—?”

“Certainly not,” said Laura, with a superior

sort of smile. She altered her position as she spoke, putting one hand on the back of a chair which was close to her, and with the other opening out a large feather-edged fan and proceeding to fan herself languidly. The attitude was one of elegant indifference; it was so well done that even Ernestine's quick experienced eyes did not perceive that Laura had suddenly begun to flush and tremble, and to need some further support than that afforded by her own limbs. Ernestine, looking at her, only saw the indifferent heartlessness of the woman before her.

“What have you done with your child?” she cried, hardly knowing what she said; for suddenly had risen before her the vision of that baby face which had so plaintively appealed to her heart.

“That, at least, is my affair,” said Laura, shutting up her fan with a decisive click. “And now if you have done questioning me, Dr. Vavasour, I will say what I have to say. You have become accidentally possessed of

certain knowledge which must go no further than yourself.”

“I don’t want to talk about your affairs,” said Ernestine, with a sudden horror, “but I shall not bind myself to keep any such secret as this for you.”

“Oh, yes, you will,” said Laura, coolly, looking, as she spoke, out of window at Mrs. Vavasour’s carriage which had just drawn up to the door. “When I tell you that the keeping of this secret is of vital importance to my uncle, I am sure you will keep it.”

“What !” cried Ernestine, with a look that touched even Laura, “do you mean to say he knows of this ?”

“He knows nothing whatever of the whole matter ; the secret is mine—and yours ; for if you do not keep it, both from him as well as from the world, you may bring ruin upon him.”

Laura spoke low, but very clearly, though as she uttered the last words the handle of the drawing-room door was turned, and in an

instant the door had opened, and Mrs. Vava-sour and her daughters entered, chattering and laughing. Laura quickly saw that to be seen standing thus like two animals at bay would look very odd, so she advanced at once and held out her hand to Ernestine, as though she had just risen to go.

Ernestine introduced her to her aunt and cousins, who looked at her with keen interest, and Laura, after a moment or two of small talk, took her departure. Ernestine followed her into the hall; and there, though a servant stood holding open the front door for Laura, she spoke again:—

“When is this enigma to be explained?—remember I make no promises.”

“I ask you to make none; but by keeping silence you at least run no risks; and I warn you that the risks are greater than you suppose. You can have no reason for wishing to bring an unnecessary and very great distress upon my uncle.”

And so saying Laura gathered up her skirts

and with a smiling farewell for the benefit of the servant, tripped down the steps as if she carried a light heart within her.

Perhaps she did: the causes which make some people happy being inscrutable to others. But not so Ernestine. She went straight to her own little room, and there shut herself up. "To-morrow," said she to herself, as she sank into her chair with a deeper weariness of limb than that ever induced by hard work. "To-morrow I put on that wedding-ring; what burden shall I have taken on myself thereby besides that of love?"

CHAPTER XIX.

MARRIED AND DONE FOR.

ERNESTINE sat alone until the dinner bell rang, trying to understand the unpleasant mystery connected with Laura, and her enigmatical speeches about the man who was so soon to be inextricably united with herself. She went down, obedient to the summons, and mechanically took part in the dinner; but her mind was fixed upon this unexpected revelation. In spite of her own determined attempts to probe the matter to the bottom, Laura had left her so completely in the dark that she felt baffled and alarmed. Several times she took refuge in the thought of going that very evening to Dr. Doldy with the story; and for

a few moments found immense relief in the idea. But immediately Laura's words would recur to her, "an unnecessary and very great distress," "secret of vital importance," "risks," "ruin." She suspected Laura of exaggerating with the purpose of extorting silence, but at the same time her common sense told her that while she was so absolutely ignorant of the real facts she might produce mischief by any impulsive action. Besides, she considered that after all she had no right to interfere with Laura; and because the thing was a sore trouble to her own mind, was that any reason to throw the trouble upon Dr. Doldy, unless she knew that it would be both necessary and right to do so?

Continually she argued herself into quietude thus; and then, after a momentary mental pause, a horror would come over her and she would begin again. What depths of deceit might she not become a party to by retaining the miserable secret she held? Again and again she pondered over the various circum-

stances of which she had knowledge. She wondered why Laura should have come into that very hospital, under her very care! That was, of course, an accident, and she guessed easily enough, when she seriously thought it out, that Laura's manifest character would lead her to have the best care taken of herself, and to run no risks with her health through ignorance. Although Ernestine shuddered at the thought of the tissue of lies which were necessary to convert Laura Doldy temporarily into Mrs. Aylmer, yet she could just understand that such a woman would willingly take them all upon her soul in order to secure safety for her body. And as it was easy to ascertain the names of the physicians at the hospital, and as the entire privacy of each patient from the others was preserved if wished, there was no reason for Laura to fear any awkward meeting. Ernestine gave her full credit for taking every precaution; and as one of the first precautions would be to ascertain whether the names of all the doctors

on the prospectus of the hospital were unknown to her, Ernestine concluded that either Laura, before her entrance, had never heard the name of her uncle's future wife, or—as was the case—that Dr. Doldy had suppressed the fact that she was a doctor. On that occasion when he let fall upon Laura the thunderbolt of his impending marriage, if he had let slip, as he very nearly did, the “Dr.” Vavasour, Laura would have been forewarned.

But, as it happened, she had never dreamed of connecting the Dr. Vavasour of the hospital with the Miss Vavasour of her uncle's choice. Laura had always regarded the lady doctor as a working woman—an unfortunate person compelled to earn her own living. And to a mind of such calibre as hers, so impassable a gulf is fixed between the lady of social position and the woman—of whatever sort—who works for her bread, that the name Vavasour, uncommon though it may be, would not have seemed to her as the same name, in the two connections. The Miss Vavasour of Dr. Doldy's choice had a

certain interest for her, the Dr. Vavasour of the hospital prospectus, none whatever. When first Mrs. Marland brought Ernestine to her, to see an unmistakable lady had given her a sort of nervous shock, which she attributed to her sensitive state ; and subsequent happenings were not of a nature to lead her to speculate upon names. Ernestine did not know her well enough to understand all this, but she could guess something of how she had been unknowingly brought into such immediate contact with her.

But, as she remembered how Mrs. Aylmer's home troubles and privations had been delicately pictured to her in the course of her intimate attendance upon her patient, she felt that no statement of Laura's was to be trusted.

Were Dr. Doldy's happiness and prosperity in Laura's hands, and dependent upon the retaining of her disgraceful secret? No, she said boldly to herself, she did not believe it. Laura had but created a nightmare to terrify

and silence her ; she would not be silenced by it. She would not be rash in action, but she resolved to extract the real truth from Laura, by dint of threatening her with immediate exposure.

Should she go to her that very night? She paused in her walk up and down her little room and looked at her watch. It was already late. Laura was staying with her aunt ; would it be possible to see her alone without exciting suspicions? She was fearful of taking any unusual steps in the darkness ; Laura's warnings might not have been wholly baseless. Besides, said she to herself, proudly—“ Why to-night? No secret of that woman's can make any difference in my relations with Dr. Doldy. I am pledged to him, not to his connections.” She felt that it would be like an insult to him to act as though any deed of Laura's could make a difference in the fulfilment of her marriage ; and this idea did much to quiet her. She pacified herself by a resolution that as on the morrow, at the wedding,

they must meet, on the morrow she would prevent Laura's again evading her; she would make an opportunity to obtain from her the truth of her assertions.

Having come to this resolve she was able to sleep; but she awoke in the gray early morning, cold and trembling. Wonderingly her spirit became conscious of a weight upon it, and in the first instant of recall seemed to take up the burden with difficulty, unable all at once to realise what it was. But, that instant over, all the memory of the events of the previous day returned to her.

She lay, still, pale, and thoughtful, until the dawn had merged into broad light and the house was astir. Then she arose, with a look upon her face that would rather have been suitable to an Amazon called to battle than to the heroine of a wedding day.

The consequence was that she was told at breakfast that she "positively must not look as if she were going to be executed." Her cousins had long ago arrogated the right to

tease her; they belonged to that gay, good-humoured, generous type of girlhood with which it is as difficult to be angry as it is to resent the frolics of a kitten.

They succeeded in making Ernestine laugh at herself and her stern looks, but they could not wholly chase away the mood. It is common talk that a wedding is more tearful than a funeral. She relapsed whenever she was left alone. Certainly she would never have been dressed in time for church had not all the other women in the house taken a greater interest in her wedding-robe than she did herself. As might be expected, however, their interest in it was absorbing. Not one of them besides herself had discovered anything much more important in life than successful dressing.

Ernestine thus gained time for her thoughts, for she had only to be patient under the ministrations of many willing hands.

“*There,*” said Mrs. Vavasour, triumphantly, as they all stood ready to enter the carriages, “*my party is in time, and I know Dr. Doldy*

will be in time, but somebody always *must* be late, and I *expect* it will be Mr. Silburn."

Mrs. Vavasour not only used italics freely in her letters but in her speech. Ernestine smiled as she entered the carriage with her bridesmaids. She wondered much what unusual thing Coventry Silburn would do before the morning was over. She feared that he could scarcely remain so long in Mrs. Vavasour's presence without shocking her. For he filled an important post—he was to give away the bride.

She glanced round the church as they entered, to see who was there; Dr. Doldy she saw at once, without seeing him, so to speak, or seeming to use her eyes, and immediately discovered also that positively Coventry Silburn was before them: dressed with the utmost propriety and looking deeply dejected. He was evidently conscious that Dorothy, though she was very quiet in a secluded corner, had her eye upon him.

Common-place people can generally carry

through a ceremony successfully, but the unhappy folk who are gifted with genius, or even but tinged with it, seem overpowered by the responsibilities of such an occasion, and as a rule make themselves conspicuous by some unintentional absurdity. Dorothy was well aware of this, and had lectured her husband so thoroughly on the need of keeping himself awake to the small proprieties that he was quite crushed by the sense of his position.

Ernestine, after her first glance, which had only assured her of Coventry's presence, had done her best to abstract her mind from everything but the matter in hand. She would not look round again lest she should see Laura: as indeed she would have done, for Laura and Mrs. Honiton were very near her. She resolutely put away the thought of Laura for the moment, and held herself in her own dream-land. It was not difficult to do so, with Coventry Silburn on one side of her and Dr. Doldy on the other—the two men who had done the most, in such different ways, to show her the

realities of dreamland. Coventry succeeded, by dint of keeping his mind fixed upon his duty, in giving the bride away correctly, and the more strictly official persons, being accustomed to their work, accomplished it with less difficulty.

“You good boy,” said Dorothy, when they were finding their way out to the carriages, “it did my heart good to see you behaving so well.”

“Thank the gods it is over—not for myself only, but for their sakes. My spirits are rising now—I am beginning to feel exuberant! I shall scarcely require champagne.”

“Well, don’t horrify our hostess, that’s all,” whispered Dorothy, sagely.

CHAPTER XX.

IS IT PEACE ?

IT was all over—the wedding, and the breakfast. A man is never more nearly extinguished than on his wedding day, but Dr. Doldy had risen to a dainty speech tinged with some of the finer humour of his favourites the old dramatists; and now Mrs. Vavasour, her responsibilities nearly at an end, smiled amiably upon the groups scattered about her drawing-room.

Ernestine sat in a low chair, the silent centre of a very merry group. Not far off was Laura, who looked as bright and happy as a pretty woman ought to look.

But a pause came at last in her gay gossip

and laughter. She stood for a moment alone, languidly fanning herself.

Ernestine rose at once and joined her.

“Come with me into the fernery,” she said, “it is quiet there, and cool.”

Laura followed her without a word. She drew back a curtain which half hid an alcove at the side of the room and led the way into a very pleasant little fernery, where ever-dropping water made the air seem cool. The curtain fell behind them and again concealed the alcove. Ernestine moved to the farther side, and drew a couple of chairs into a quiet corner.

They sat down. Laura went on fanning herself, and for a moment there was silence.

Laura was quite collected and prepared for the encounter; and while Ernestine paused, she leaned back in her chair and said to herself that the scene was very effective.

“Her style is good,” she thought, looking at Ernestine. “She has brought us face to

face very neatly and without any fuss. She understands generalship so well that I shall certainly try to win her over rather than make an open enemy of her. She will be my ally in any case; but I would rather she were a friendly one. She is abominably handsome, especially in that white drapery. And she has some charm about her which makes her beauty so royal. I wonder what that charm is?—Surely I can find out?”

Laura set herself so intently to observing Ernestine's face, and was so absorbed in her particular interest in it, that she seemed not to hear when Ernestine suddenly looked up and addressed her.

“I cannot undertake to keep your secret from Dr. Doldy; at the same time, I do not wish to prevent your telling the story in your own fashion. Will you do it now, or will you write to him?”

The words took a long time in penetrating to Laura's intelligence; indeed, they seemed at first to have fallen on a deaf ear. For, as

Ernestine looked up and spoke, Laura, whose shrewd eyes were still intently bent upon her, thought she saw in the expression of the face as it was uplifted to hers something of the mystery of that charm which had perplexed her. She had some glimmer of an understanding that the especial momentary beauty of the moving face was its unconsciousness.

“It is not to be supposed,” thought Laura, “that she doesn’t know she is handsome, but she is not thinking of it at this moment evidently. Dear me, how singular—it would be a difficult art to attain, I’m afraid.”

All this, and more, passed through Laura’s versatile brain before Ernestine’s words reached it. Ernestine’s eyes were fixed upon her now, and she saw Laura’s change of expression when the words made themselves heard to her internal ear. It was but a slight change—yet it helped to make Ernestine’s disbelief in her deeper.

“You will not betray me?” said Laura

very low, with fluttering, down-drooping eyelids.

Ernestine made no reply, but only drew back a little—a very little.

“Surely you will not use this accidental knowledge against me? I have a hard battle to fight, and I am quite alone in it—quite alone,”—Laura’s lip trembled a little as she repeated these words,—“but I am not fighting it for myself only. I want to prevent the distress which would come upon others as well as upon myself. And why,” she went on, with a suddenly impassioned gesture, “why should you betray me? Look at my position—look at the society I am surrounded by, and think of the intolerableness of an exposure. You know, as well as I, how bitterly a woman is punished for her sins—you know, as well as I, what your betrayal must subject me to. No; look into your own heart, think what must be suffered by a woman in my position even if she is allowed to keep her misery in the silence of her own soul. You are entering upon a union

of love and happiness; you see me a being stranded alone, after enduring the torture of love and of loss. Have some pity for me—do not, strong in your own promise of a happy future, condemn unpityingly one who has left happiness behind. Have some pity—and give me but a little of that sympathy which has as yet been utterly denied me—let me tell you all my history. You can scarcely refuse me a little sympathy if you hear all.”

Ernestine had put her hand over her eyes while Laura spoke; her mind was confused by such an appeal as this. She knew well that justice must hear all: and for a moment she fancied she might have before her one of those women who are driven against their better nature into deceit by the demand made on them by society for the preservation of appearances—and appearances only.

Laura touched her dress slightly, leaning forward as she spoke: and Ernestine looked towards her. She looked in Laura's face: and suddenly there rose before her vision innocent

little Mrs. Aylmer and she remembered the dexterous art with which the doctor's sympathies were evoked. She rose to her feet and moved away a little.

"No," she said, "I have already heard one history of yours. You cannot expect me to listen to another."

"You do not know—you can never guess—how hardly I was driven into all that," said Laura, a little below her breath.

"Perhaps not," said Ernestine, with a sigh, "but you cannot expect me to trust you after the experience. And you forget that I have no wish to expose you to the society you move in. I only ask you to tell the whole matter to Dr. Doldy."

"Last of all," cried Laura, "to him."

"And why?" asked Ernestine, turning on her.

"I could not bear it," said Laura, with downcast eyes and that peculiar change of expression when she spoke which convinced Ernestine that her speech was only a blind to hide her thought.

“Well,” she said, “I will not undertake to hide it from him.”

“But you must,” said Laura, with a resumption of her more cool and collected manner, and as she spoke, again commencing to fan herself—“you must,—you will never betray a medical confidence! Why, I suppose my uncle has dozens of such matters in his knowledge. What would be the use of a doctor who did not understand that silence about his patients’ affairs is a matter of professional etiquette and a most important one! But, of course, this is just the kind of thing which will make it difficult for women to keep a footing in the professions.”

Now this was insolent: and Laura clenched her little teeth with delight as she said it. But it had no apparent effect upon Ernestine, who was standing with knit brow, in deep thought. It had some real effect, however. She knew well enough that she had no right over Laura’s secret. Her only present power over Laura lay in the fact that she had made

no promise to keep it. And now Laura presented to her something which in a sense corresponded to a bond.

She said nothing for a few moments, while her mind reviewed the whole affair, or at least, as much as she knew of it. At last she raised her head with a sudden action which made Laura think of a high-spirited horse fretting under the curb.

“I cannot breathe in this net-work of deceit,” she exclaimed.

“I am sorry for that,” said Laura, “for I am afraid you will have to try. I think you cannot but see the inexpediency of revealing any of my affairs to my uncle. It will, as I said before, only bring a great and unnecessary distress upon him. He would only have the burden of a secret which he need not have, if you are wise.”

“I wish,” said Ernestine, moving to her chair and sitting down wearily, “you could be more open. Why cannot you tell me all the truth?”

Laura shrugged her shoulders.

"You would not listen to my tale just now."

"No," said Ernestine, a little sternly, "but I will listen if you will explain the vague hints which you let fall yesterday. You insinuated that the preservation of this secret would affect Dr. Doldy otherwise than by causing him distress."

"And so it would," replied Laura, "and if you could take my advice you would ask no questions and keep your own counsel."

"That I cannot do," answered Ernestine, "I will venture upon no such quicksand. Tell me the truth, or I will fetch Dr. Doldy and tell him as much of it as I know."

Laura looked at her and saw a resolute face.

"My uncle," she said, very quietly, "is entangled hopelessly in monetary difficulties, which I would be sorry to attempt to explain. He has spent money for me and for himself,

and we are both in debt, and that deeply. Of course we have but forestalled my fortune ; but I daresay you do not know that that fortune is mine only on certain conditions. And the retaining of my secret is of vital importance to me in fulfilling those conditions. If I forfeit my fortune, I shall be penniless and my uncle ruined."

Laura was in earnest now. It was plainly shown in her face that she was speaking the truth.

Ernestine remained silent, lost on a sudden in a ghastly haze, which made speech for the moment impossible to her. In the midst of the silence the curtain was drawn back and Dr. Doldy appeared in the archway.

Laura looked quickly at Ernestine. She saw a cold and immovable face behind which the spirit had retreated into its own fastnesses.

"She'll not tell," said Laura to herself; and she rose as Dr. Doldy advanced.

"I have been monopolising her too long,

I fear," said she, smilingly to him. "We have been trying to make the most of our short time of acquaintance."

"Mrs. Vavasour has been looking for you," said Dr. Doldy to Ernestine; "she says it is time for you to dress for our journey."

Ernestine looked round. Laura had gone. She covered her face with her hands, and from out of her distress came a low, trembling, tearless sob.

"Why, what is the matter?" exclaimed Dr. Doldy. "Look up, Ernestine; let me see your face. You are faint—this place is too hot. Come into the cool air!"

She suffered him to lead her out, and in a few moments went quietly to change her dress.

Soon afterwards they were on their way to the sea; but she had not shaken hands with Laura.

The truce strongly resembled a tacit declaration of war.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WHIP-HAND.

LAURA dined, went to the opera, and danced at a ball that evening as if she were a creature born for enjoyment. And yet the night brought her but little refreshing sleep. She saw but too plainly that she had a game to play in the next few months which would require all her skill.

She could conceal her anxiety in the midst of society, with the interests of her game to occupy her. But the long hours of the night had begun to have a certain terror for her, simply because she could not restrain her active mind from reviewing her position from every point.

And yet, though she had thought over her dangers so thoroughly, the day which followed Ernestine's wedding brought something unexpected to her.

She rose, pale and languid in the morning.

She breakfasted in her own room, and made a first appearance in her aunt's morning-room about noon, wearing her riding-habit.

Her aunt, Mrs. Honiton, was a kindred spirit, and the most intimate friend Laura possessed. By her she had been trained, by her taught what a woman of the world should be, by her brought up—and brought out. Mrs. Honiton had educated her with all the care and affection she would have bestowed on her own daughter, had she had one. Her influence over Laura had been so great that Dr. Doldy, though he much disliked it, found it too powerful to be counteracted by any which he could exercise.

Yet Laura, now that the greater issues of her life were at stake, quietly threw dust in her dear aunt's eyes. She was an acute judge

of shallow character, and instinctively knew that the lady in question was not to be trusted where her own deep interests were not concerned.

“Going to ride, child?” said Mrs. Honiton from out of her arm-chair, where she sat endeavouring to divide her attentions equally between a novel and a lap dog. “Surely it is too great an exertion on such a hot morning? But, perhaps, I should make an effort if I looked as well in a habit as you do.”

“But,” said Laura, with intense earnestness, “this is a new habit. *Do* you think it fits as well as the last?”

“Let me see?—turn round—” Laura slowly revolved in front of the critic; and after some ten minutes’ discussion on the cut and fit of her riding-dress, rode away to the Park, with Mrs. Honiton’s groom behind her, satisfied that that lady had seen no traces of her harassed mind and sleepless night.

Just as she was entering Rotten Row, she saw something which caused her heart to

stand still an instant. Yet it was only the familiar figure of Yriarte, who, in the midst of a group of men, was lounging against the railings.

She looked steadily across to the green grass and trees at the other side of the Row as she passed him; and a moment after, being accosted by an acquaintance of her own set, she had to draw a deep breath before she could answer her.

“This comes of sleepless nights,” said she to herself. “I must take to chloral.”

She went once down the Row with her friend, resolving to ride back with her, and then straightway leave the Park. But she did not succeed in making her escape so easily. Returning, they were riding slowly and close to the railings, when suddenly her friend turned to speak to some one else, and Laura found herself alone. She walked her horse a few paces, thinking her friend would overtake her, when to her horror a familiar voice entered her ear, and there, leaning upon

the railings, his breath upon her horse's neck, was Yriarte. A momentary impulse to urge her horse and escape came over her—but no; she must make the incident wear its right face not only to any acquaintances who might pass—not only to the man-servant behind her—but to Yriarte himself. He would be only too delighted to think she was afraid of him.

He made some ordinary remark upon the weather, and then said in a lower voice, “I wanted to see you. I am very unfortunate in a matter which concerns us both. I am quite unhappy about it, because I fear it may distress you.”

“Hush!” said Laura, looking round with a scared face; “you may be overheard!”

But there was no one very near them, and the groom had reined in his horse at a discreet distance. Yriarte had seen this before he spoke at all.

“It is a most annoying affair,” went on Yriarte, speaking with a half smile, and

gently caressing her horse's neck with the tips of his gloved fingers. "I thought I had destroyed all your letters, but there were some in a jewel-case, which I had overlooked—and, most unfortunately, a man to whom I owed a little matter of money had asked for this case as security. I gave it to him—not knowing that the letters were contained there also—and I am unhappy enough now to be told by him that he will not yield up the letters without more money."

"Give it to him, then," exclaimed Laura, with a sudden look on her face as if she would like to lay the little horsewhip in her hand upon the smiling Spaniard's shoulders.

"Ah!—my dear Mees Laura!—you are so quick. It is of course to be supposed that I should at once give him the money—if I had it!"

Laura said nothing. Yriarte smiled up in her face, with that smile she knew so well—that smile which had become to her most hideous and most ghastly.

“I have lost much lately,” he said; “there has been black luck with me at the cards. I have nothing. He demands six hundred pounds, and will have three hundred immediately.”

“Why do you tell me this?” said Laura, faintly. “I can do nothing.”

“You are an heiress, Mees Laura; you have much money. And these letters—if he keeps them—they may become public property at any time.”

“I cannot do anything without my uncle—I have not twenty pounds in my hands at this moment,” exclaimed Laura. She preserved an appearance of composure, but she could not keep her distress out of her voice.

“You will scarcely tell him, I suppose,” said Yriarte, showing his white teeth.

“We have talked here long enough,” said Laura, hurriedly, for she saw familiar faces in a party approaching her.

“Then I wish you a good morning,” said

Yriarte, raising his hat in a style which he himself greatly admired. He lounged on down the path without another look or word, and presently seated himself in a chair to enjoy the heat and to amuse himself with watching the ladies who passed by. Laura, turning to bow to an acquaintance, caught a glimpse of him as he sat there. She had once believed she loved this man; probably she had given him more real affection than she would ever again bestow on anything but herself. Yet now, that glimpse of his figure jaundiced her vision so deeply that there was no more any beauty in the pretty scene for her. His presence changed the colour of the sky and grass—made the soft, flower-scented breeze oppressive and intolerable.

She gave a savage little cut with her whip to her innocent horse, revenging on him her wrongs, and set off home so rapidly that her groom nearly lost sight of her.

“I have now endured every humiliation from him,” she said aloud to herself, as though she must needs speak, to relieve her

panting breast, "but I will repay him—I will find how to punish him, though I wait years to do it."

"Why, child, your ride has done you good!" cried Mrs. Honiton, as Laura came into the shadowy, dimly lit room in which that lady was preserving the delicacy of her complexion. Laura entered like a being out of another and more vigorous life, for there was a flash in her eye and a colour in her cheek such as they had not worn for many a day.

Laura was a true-born Briton. The more spikes there are on a railing the more determined is the English boy to climb over it; when he grows up, the same principle applies to larger things, and we have the stubborn pluck of John Bull.

The additional insult had brought out her stubbornness of spirit.

"I must dress to go out with you after lunch, I suppose, auntie?" she said, standing interrogatively at the door.

“Yes, dear; and mind what colours you wear, with those bright cheeks.”

“All right,” laughed Laura; and went gaily upstairs.

“No, sir,” she said, shaking her small fist at vacancy, when in the seclusion of her own room, “it takes more than an ugly little Spaniard to get the whip-hand of me.”

END OF VOL. I.

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IN THIS WORLD

A Novel.

BY

MABEL COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "AN INNOCENT SINNER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.		PAGE
Thalatta		1
CHAPTER II.		
Laura Temporises		13
CHAPTER III.		
The Doctors Doldy		23
CHAPTER IV.		
In Practice		32
CHAPTER V.		
Glaucoma		49
CHAPTER VI.		
Lewis Lingen's Office		58
CHAPTER VII.		
"The Sun was Darkened."		72
CHAPTER VIII.		
Yriarte and his Friends		95
CHAPTER IX.		
A Bird Escaped		106

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
The Police Court	116
CHAPTER XI.	
Angels' Visits	187
CHAPTER XII.	
A Practical Man	152
CHAPTER XIII.	
The Course of True <i>Law</i> never did Run Smooth."	160
CHAPTER XIV.	
A Consultation	175
CHAPTER XV.	
The Shadow in the Moonlight	191
CHAPTER XVI.	
White Blossoms	203
CHAPTER XVII.	
Some Callers	212
CHAPTER XVIII.	
A Windy Night	227
CHAPTER XIX.	
A Face in the Street	239
CHAPTER XX.	
"Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot?"	256
CHAPTER XXI.	
A Drawing-room Chapter	272

IN THIS WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THALATTA.

“I AM getting tired of London without Minerva Medica. She was like a bit of real blue sky. I shall begin to cry Thalatta soon.”

“I’ll start for the sea to-night if you like,” replied Mrs. Silburn, looking up from her scribbling table. “This weather is enough to make one throw up the life of a hack journalist altogether. I am beginning to think seriously of your old idea of turning all our property into passage money to some savage

island where we could dispense with bathing-machines and a banking account."

"We haven't much of the latter at present," remarked Coventry, who was languidly puffing a cigarette in his hammock.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Dorothy, pushing her chair back from her writing table, "I expect the *Morning Mail* will be in for a libel case soon; it's really too hot to write anything but scandal. By the way, you spoke of our dear old Ernestine: that reminds me of Laura. If Ernestine is like a bit of blue sky—and, truly, I think she is, in the refreshingness of her innocent heart—that minx Laura is like a pool of muddy water. She overshot her mark somehow or other in making that extraordinary confession to me about marrying Yriarte for love; she denies the very engagement now, I hear; and she has avoided me ever since."

"I never believed in that confession," said Coventry, "though I daresay she thought she meant it when she made it."

"Aha! I have it," he cried, with sudden

irrelevancy, and springing out of his hammock in one of those transitions from utter physical idleness to the most alert activity which were peculiar to him. "I have smoked my way through that article on the 'Higher Consciousness of the Poets' at last. I see where to begin now—I'll show some of them that their high-flown sentimentalities are no more inspired than the hollow image of an oracle."

"Alas!" said Dorothy, drawing her chair mechanically back towards her table, "there will be no more crying for Thalatta at present."

"Nay, you mistake me!" answered Coventry; "my soul is bound for the shore of that 'immortal sea which brought us hither.' Wordsworth, the moral and monotonous, inevitably attracts the mind when thinking of the singers of nature. When inspiration lifted him out of himself he saw the inner spirit of things. He is the poet of our English school who has had most consciousness of the spirit in nature."

“Why, Coventry, what about Tennyson?” cried his wife, putting down the pen which she had just taken up, and opening her eyes very wide.

“Tennyson!” exclaimed Coventry, who was walking up and down the room in the excitement of thought-gestation; “why, he treats nature as if she were a pretty woman only—he scarcely acknowledges that she has a soul! He goes into raptures over her general appearance—he describes her dress—he condescends to note her small quaint ways. Her presence adorns his verse as an elegant woman adorns a beautiful house. This use of nature strikes unobservant people with amazement, and they say—How this poet loves nature!—Yes, as a man may love his mistress. But in Wordsworth’s ‘Nutting,’ for instance, is struck a different key-note; here we find ourselves on a plane of appreciation of Nature where personal descriptions of her charms are out of harmony with the deeper feeling. What man in the rapturous

or inspired moments of real love would pause to describe his lady's eyebrow? He is conscious of her soul then. I will show this when I come to the 'Consciousness of the Spirit in Man.'"

"Your audience is enlarging, Coventry, as well as your theme!" said Mrs. Silburn, rising as she spoke, and advancing towards the door. Coventry turned and saw Miss Armine.

"I am so glad you interrupted him," said Dorothy; "he would have wasted his ideas on me for the next hour. Now go and write, Coventry, there's a good boy, and leave Miss Armine to me."

"Oh, I am very tired," said Miss Armine, as she sat down. "I have been into the City to Mr. Lingen's office, and it is so hot and disagreeable in the City streets."

"What!—are you one of Mr. Lingen's clients?" said Dorothy, laughing; "doesn't he lend money on the sly?"

"Not to me, at all events," said Miss Armine.

“I can’t afford to borrow money. But he pays me some dividends every now and then, which are small enough, certainly, but still, to a struggling art-student, well worth fetching.”

“You are a fortunate girl to have anything of the sort to fetch,” said Mrs. Silburn. “I can’t imagine getting a guinea without earning it!”

“I might have a very luxurious home without earning it, if I chose,” said Miss Armine. “My elder sister married a rich cotton-spinner up in the North, and they have offered me a home in their house. But I think it is preferable to live alone in lodgings and be independent.”

“Well, *I* should think so, I know.”

“Especially,” went on Miss Armine, “as my brother-in-law has an utter unbelief in a woman’s capacity for anything but a life of dependence. He is bringing up a family of girls to elegant ignorance; and as he is a man of quick, cutting wit I have resolved he shall not have another woman dependent on him—

one, too, who has made an ineffectual struggle."

"Miss Armine, you are not well," exclaimed Dorothy. "I believe, from the way you talk, that you have debated lately whether to give up the struggle and become dependent."

"Mrs. Silburn, you are a witch," said Miss Armine, after a moment's silence.

"Oh, no," answered Dorothy, "but I think I have some of the feminine qualities which Ernestine says are wanted in the medical profession—I can read faces, and feel a mental pulse. Now don't give up, Miss Armine—you will ruin your mental and physical health if you do. You are only temporarily ailing, and so you feel the struggle more."

"Perhaps that is it," said Miss Armine, despondingly, "but art is such a mountain to climb, and I get lonely and despairing; and then it is so horrid living alone in lodgings!"

"Better than being a sort of humble companion in a grand house, I assure you," said Mrs. Silburn, firmly.

“Perhaps it is, after all,” said Miss Armine, brightening up. “I wish you would come and look at a picture I am trying to finish, Mrs. Silburn; I do so want the criticism of a fresh eye. Dr. Vavasour’s admiration of the sketch induced me to attempt the picture, and now I am getting disheartened about it. I shall ask her to come and encourage me as soon as she is back.”

“It won’t be very long before she is behind that door-plate of hers which so distressed Dr. Doldy; in the meantime I will come to your rooms—this very afternoon, if you like—to look at the picture.”

“Thank you much, but don’t come there, for I am painting at a friend’s rooms. We have gone shares at the model. I really couldn’t afford to pay him all myself, and so she is doing a study of him at the same time.”

“I will come with you there, then,” said Dorothy, “and in the meantime I will ring for some tea. We have heard nothing of Ernestine; she may have been drowned for all

we know. But she hates writing letters, so I am compelled to think no news is good news whenever she is away."

"Now," said Dorothy, when they had made themselves hotter by drinking several cups of hot tea, "I will come with you. Let me just look into Coventry's room first."

She soon came back.

"He is lost to mortal ken," she said, with a sort of little sigh, half full of pleasure, half of pain. "He has an additional power to those which most of us have. To me Thalatta means Margate and shrimps, or Brighton and new dresses ; but there is another Thalatta for him, an ocean-shore where his spirit finds strength and health. And when he goes there, he leaves me at home ! Come, Miss Armine, I am ready."

While thus Coventry had retired into his writing-room, in search of an intangible sea-breeze, Ernestine was inhaling one sufficiently tangible to toss her loose curls and bring a new colour to her cheeks.

Who that has ever seen the magical blue waters of L'Anresse Bay can forget them? they shine like the gleam of a

“ blue eye
So soft and dewy,”

in the memory—so deep and loving a colour do they wear.

This little bay, this gem upon the sea-shore, delighted Ernestine's romantic heart. She was content to idle many a day away within its limits, for it seemed to her a kind of ante-chamber to seas and shores less real. They made a pilgrimage across the little island to look at the deserted house which Victor Hugo has made immortal; they visited the Gouffre, and shuddered at its ghastly depths. But none of the precipitous rocks, or dreary shores, or grass-clad slopes, which seem like an attempt of Mother Nature to make up to the island for its smallness by compressing within it as many natural aspects as possible, exerted any fascination over Ernestine in com-

parison with that of the charmed bay of L'Ancrese. Here the lovers passed long days of delight, and for many years afterwards a glimpse of deep blue sky or blue water would bring upon their faces a smile of recollection.

The fetters of the world had slipped from their spirits; they had left their troubles outside L'Ancrese Bay. Dr. Doldy had forgotten everything but Ernestine; and she had quite put all burdens besides love from out her mind.

They had only quarrelled once as yet; and that was about the medicinal value of alcohol.

But a fortnight of bliss beside blue waters is a longer spell of undisturbed peace than is often vouchsafed to mortal.

One day, on their return from a long ramble, they found upon the table in their room a letter which had arrived in their absence.

“From Laura!” said Dr. Doldy, looking at the writing. “I did not expect she would write again so soon.”

He took it up and opened it. He read it through, and then glanced it over again, while a shadow of annoyance came over his face. Then he folded it up and put it in his pocket without making any remark. Laura's former letter had been common property.

Ernestine stepped out of the open window of the room into the little garden, where vines were trained over shady seats.

"He knows more about her affairs than I do," she said to herself, "and I know more than he does! It is not as it should be."

She sat down alone in a shady corner: and the colour which the sea had brought to her face grew fainter.

Dr. Doldy did not join her for some time. He wrote, and posted, an answer to Laura's letter before he came to her.

CHAPTER II.

LAURA TEMPORISES.

THE following morning Laura sat in her room, dressed ready to descend and join her aunt at breakfast. She was waiting to receive her letters before she went down.

She had risen early. Her mind was too full to allow of morning beauty-sleep; and besides, she had an appointment directly after breakfast—an appointment which would require a little piece of acting for the benefit of her beloved aunt: And she did not want to have to do the acting before she opened her letters.

At last her suspense was relieved. From a

bundle of letters most of which wore a feminine air, Laura selected one which was directed in her uncle's handwriting. She opened it hastily, and seeing a note enclosed, heaved a sigh of relief. She then read the letter and smiled at a gentle hint that she "had better not buy any more jewelry at present."

"Not of this sort, at all events," said Laura to herself. She put the note away and then ran gaily downstairs with her other unopened letters in her hand.

At breakfast she enacted the part of a merry young woman, who had learnt by dint of a long stay in the country almost to like it; and who positively was pining for a brisk walk and a quiet hour's enjoyment of the fresh air. And so on. It was not easy for her associates to estimate Laura's likes and dislikes, for she was always ready to assume or doff them as it seemed best to her.

The result of it all was that by eleven o'clock Laura was walking alone in a certain quiet corner of the Park.

“So you are punctual?” said a familiar voice. She started and saw that Yriarte was sitting near her, with an air of placid and complete enjoyment. He rose and took his hat off to her with a gallantry that made Laura wince.

“Here is all the money I can give you,” she said, holding out the note to him; “you must get those letters and burn them.”

“Ah—fif-ty pounds,” said Yriarte, inspecting the note deliberately as it fluttered in the breeze. “I will try what I can do; perhaps Anton will return me some few for this; but he is a hard man to deal with.”

“You *must* get the letters,” said Laura. “I can give you no more money than this. You should have burned them before; it is your business to get them now.”

Yriarte shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

“Mees Laura, I kept those few for my pleasure a little while; and then when you wrote me that you were willing to mend our

quarrel, and to be married to me, I did not think there was need to destroy. Remember, you it was that first broke the engagement—and after my willingness to renew it, you it was that refused marriage.”

While he spoke he was quietly securing the note in his pocket-book.

“On your terms!—Fool, to remind me of that insolent letter of yours! Ah! but I will repay you!”

There were people approaching them, and Laura felt so unable to control her rage that she turned on her heel without another word, and walked away. Yriarte resumed his seat and looked smilingly after her: and the passers-by saw only a very nice-looking lady walking in the sunshine, and a not very nice-looking foreigner, who appeared, from his expression, to think Hyde Park a delightful place.

Laura went home with knitted brow. She was trying to conquer her passion against Yriarte. She had something important to do

before she could afford the luxury of thinking out any plan of revenge.

She had a new suitor on hand, not only eligible, but elegant enough to console her for Yriarte's ugliness. She was to meet him this very day at a garden-party, and the first thing to be done was to quiet her mind and forget Yriarte's insults.

"I shall ruin my complexion if I get so angry," she said anxiously to herself. "I have heard people say it spoils the digestion."

She succeeded in her self-imposed task, and met Mrs. Honiton at luncheon with a serene brow, an even pulse and a good appetite.

"You look charmingly to-day, Laura," was one of Mrs. Honiton's few remarks during the meal; "you can afford to wear cream-colour. It becomes you better to have less colour in your cheeks than you have had lately. You are pale enough to-day to wear that cream-coloured hat and feathers that match your skin."

Laura reviewed herself in an opposite mirror. True, she was pale, and that was a good sign. She had conquered a certain feverishness by sheer force of will. Since her meeting with Yriarte in Rotten Row a dark flush of suppressed anger had been too ready to burn in her face.

After a long day of varied dissipations Laura laid her head on the pillow with a sigh of satisfaction, and soon fell into a sounder sleep than had visited her eyes for many a night. She had made progress with her new and handsome admirer, and he was a man of position, with plenty of money; no wooer of her wealth was he.

“I have done a good day’s work altogether,” thought Laura; and was rewarded by some long hours of that dreamless slumber which is connected in the popular superstitions with a good conscience.

The post in the morning brought her a scrawl from Yriarte, which did much to undo the effects of this peaceful night.

“Anton demands the full repayment,” he wrote, “and that at once. He will not return anything for the fifty pounds. If you wish these letters kept private you must obtain more money for me. He threatens to make all public, and I do not know how to silence him, for unfortunately I am in his power.”

“Now,” thought Laura, “what am I to do? I cannot ask my uncle for more money so soon without some explanation—and moreover I much doubt whether he can give it me. His own expenses have been heavy lately. I wish I dare face Mr. Lingen’s eyeglass! I expect I shall have to, if I am driven to bay like this. I believe, with his help, I might compass my revenge!—But not yet: not yet. I dare not yet, until my marriage is made certain.”

The result of her reflections was—temporising; she pawned some of her jewels, partially appeasing the terrible Anton with the results thereof, and went on briskly with her love-making.

And while, with smiling face, and a heart that sometimes grew big with courage and sometimes stopped beating with fear, she drove, danced, dressed, and made love, in the midst of the whirl of a hot London season—the two holiday-making doctors were greedily trying to make the utmost of every last moment in Guernsey.

Neither of them looked forward with delight to the return into civilisation. Ernestine had not had such a holiday for years; it made her feel like a child again. Everything looked beautiful and true viewed from the sands of L'Ancrese Bay.

And Dr. Doldy more or less doubted the reception of his lovely, but, alas, too useful bride, in his social circle. Yet he was more proud of her than ever, although he was fain to confess that she was terribly fresh from the schools, and that she could beat him in argument, if not in experience.

“Ah, my dear,” he would say, when he had been admirably confuted, “wait till

you have practised for some twenty years yourself!"

For he was led, by some strange delusion imposed on him by her own earnestness, to address her sometimes rather as if she were his partner than his wife. But he always tried to undo these slips of the memory by some after speech in which she was clearly addressed as a young and beautiful bride.

The day for their return to London approached. They had idly spent a whole month in Guernsey, caring not for any further rambles. The somnolent countenances of the majority of the islanders, and the apparent absence of any intellectual life amongst them, refreshed the souls of these dwellers in London, that terrible gatherer and exacter of brain power.

As the hour for their return approached, Dr. Doldy squared his shoulders and summoned up an amount of resolution for his plunge back into civilisation which struck Ernestine as quite funny.

“I believe,” she said, “you are even less in harmony with the world than I am.”

“No,” he answered, after a moment’s thought, “it is not that; I am quite at home in the world; but I have never been so far out of it as during this month, and the sensation of return is strange. You have led me out of it, Ernestine—will you help me back?”

“I will try,” she answered; and, like a practical woman, began to pack up.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTORS DOLDY.

“POSITIVELY I must indulge in a luxury and be ill soon,” cried Dorothy, tempestuously entering her husband’s writing-room one morning. “Ernestine Vavasour Doldy, M.D., is at home.”

“Will she come and see such miserable scribblers as ourselves,” inquired Coventry, “now that her name is so long?”

“I can’t say: but I know that I am going to call on her this very afternoon.”

“Why, Dorothy—and you refused those tickets this morning because you would have no time to spare to-day.

“Ah,”—said Dorothy, in an eloquent voice

—"but that was different. I must welcome my dear Ernestine in her new home, and show her that the old friends are the same. You know that a return home is not exactly the same as a honeymoon."

"Little woman," said Coventry, laying down his pen to look at her, "that loving heart of yours makes you live as a poet should—while I—I only write like one!"

Coventry had not wanted, before this, in lady admirers, who had contemptuously regarded Dorothy as a "horrid practical woman who writes for newspapers," and a creature quite incapable of appreciating her husband. But Dorothy's generous soul and capacity for love had enabled her not only to appreciate, but to sympathise with him. And her active, independent life which daily gave her more experience of the world, mellowed and ripened her character. Her practical ability and power over details might have made her, had she been nothing but a housewife, one of those brawling women who have been continually

making wide houses too narrow for men of letters from the days of Solomon till now. As it was, however, her quick impulses and ready wit found ample occupation, and the tender heart, which is often a characteristic of these active women, made its revelation of itself at home.

“Well,” said Coventry, “I’ll do my part: I’ll write her an anagram while you dress.”

He immediately deserted the table where his serious work was carried on, and flung himself into his hammock, to revel in one of those moments of happy rhyming which are so full of delight.

Dorothy was soon off, with a dainty little poem as a sort of card from Coventry. He was too versatile a genius to need the manifold printing of his name on fragments of pasteboard; he would write his name himself and add a rhyme thereto.

Ernestine was sitting alone in the drawing-room when Dorothy entered: that drawing-room which had as yet been presided over

only by Laura. She started with delight at Dorothy's advent. That true little woman had hit the right nail on the head, as usual.

Dr. Doldy had gone on his rounds; he was occupied in solacing the various old ladies who had been mismanaged during his absence. Ernestine, whose consulting-room was clean swept, garnished, and very empty, had been receiving various elegant and uncongenial callers. She had been gradually freezing more and more, and it is hard to guess what might have become of her had not Mrs. Silburn's kindly face made its appearance just then and inaugurated a thaw. Coventry's poem completed the thaw altogether.

"I am so thankful," exclaimed Ernestine. "There is still some romance in the world for me, though our holiday is over."

"You will soon find that out, my dear," remarked Mrs. Silburn, very sagely; "it is only in the newness of things that you doubt it."

"Perhaps so," said Ernestine, combining a

sigh and a smile, as a clear reach of pure water will be dimpled with raindrops yet reflect the fickle sunshine instantaneously.

“Let me see your consulting-room, now you have finished furnishing it,” said Dorothy.

“Come,” said Ernestine, laughing, “I am half inclined to think it the skeleton cupboard of this house, just now; but I cannot help its existence.”

When Dorothy got home she found her husband still in the hammock.

“What,” cried she, “in the verse-writing humour?”

“Yes,” he said. “It was your fault; you started me off writing verses to *Minerva Medica*. Now tell me all about her.”

“Oh, she is more delightful than ever, if possible. I shall say no more about her; she is coming round this evening, and Dr. Doldy too, I expect. I have been very much interested in the house, and the odd combinations of character in it. I see Laura at one point,

Dr. Doldy at another, Ernestine at a third. The funniest place of all is the little ante-chamber which joins the two consulting-rooms, where they keep some of their uncomfortable-looking belongings. I'm sure the most uncomfortable looking of these belong to Ernestine, who seems much attached to a skeleton which adorns her end of this little den, and which I fancy Dr. Doldy thinks rather ugly and unnecessary."

"Ah," said Coventry, "I always thought the dear Doctor preferred the ornamental part of the profession."

"He does—there's no doubt of that," said Dorothy, "but then people get so spoiled by popularity. Ernestine is all fresh to it, and has her way to make. I am afraid she may have a hard time of it, even with Dr. Doldy's name at her back; for people *don't* like plain truth and practical remedies. Still, I'm very glad they're married; there's no doubt that Ernestine is far too handsome to have had a chance by herself. Now read me your verses;

if they seem likely to do, I'll send them off to the *Monthly* directly. Oh, Coventry, with your happy vein of thought and real poetic gift, you might be a gold mine if you chose!"

"But, Dorothy, if I *were* a gold mine, I shouldn't have sense to know how to work myself. And gold isn't the only result to work for, dear; there are a few other things worth having."

"Yes! there are poetic souls that don't care a pin for it. Well, after all, I like them the better; though I am a practical woman and a hack journalist, I can forgive you, Coventry!"

Dorothy's lofty "forgiveness" seemed something much softer, by the look in her eyes as she turned away. Coventry caught her hand and kissed it; the love and sympathy of this little woman was a sort of gold he worked for.

Dorothy sat down to listen to the verses; and, approving them, she did that very neces-

sary part of the business, if bread and butter were ever to come out of them—she sent them off to the *Monthly*.

While this little scene was being enacted, a somewhat different one was taking place in the house Dorothy had so recently visited.

It was Doctor Doldy's consulting-hour. It was Doctor Vavasour Doldy's consulting-hour also for the matter of that; but the lady's patients did not oppress her by their number yet-a-while. Dr. Doldy was on too fashionable a professional eminence for even those many people who said "How very odd of the dear Doctor to marry a lady M.D., and let her put her name on his door," to think of deserting him. Some of them came devoutly hoping that Dr. Ernestine was kept very well out of sight; and would have been horrified indeed had they known that that lady, in her leisure, was fond of frequenting the little ante-chamber, partly because her skeleton and other pet belongings were there, and partly to catch the orthodox manner from Dr.

Doldy. She was very determined to be a successful physician, by dint of hard work, and genuine interest in that work, and she did not much desire to make "manner" any specialty in her practice; but at the same time, she very well knew that a certain power of authority dwelt in the presence and words of a man long accustomed to managing his patients discreetly.

CHAPTER IV.

IN PRACTICE.

ERNESTINE had now a two-fold purpose in pursuing the labours of her profession with all her native ardour.

First came her grand enthusiasm for healing—that love of the art itself by which the true artist is known.

And then came a second motive which grew stronger day by day.

Laura's revelation of the network of money difficulties in which she and her uncle stood, and her statement—vague indeed, but none the less alarming because so vague—that certain conditions had to be fulfilled before her fortune could bring them freedom, filled

Ernestine's soul with a personal horror. When Laura told her these things, she had already put on her wedding-ring; and she realised, as she sat in the fernery in her wedding-robe, that, unless she speedily obtained some profitable practice of her own, she too would be dependent upon Laura's inheritance.

"Doubtless," she had said to herself, "Laura calculates upon this; she expects me to become her tool because she holds the key to my husband's ruin or success in her hands."

This thought had figuratively taken Ernestine's breath away; she had allowed Laura to leave her, and had said no further word.

But now, strengthened by her sojourn by the sea, she had returned with a burning resolution in her heart. She did not understand what conditions Laura had to fulfil. She turned her mind from the subject, for she could see no course of action which she could adopt with regard to it. But a resolve burned strongly within her that she would not personally add to Dr. Doldy's expenses—that she

would not be dependent on him. The thought stung too deeply that, by allowing herself to be maintained in his household, she would make herself one of those whose hopes and fears hung upon the obtaining of Laura's fortune.

So she set herself vigorously to work. She took Dr. Doldy's household in hand, and applied her intellectual abilities to the curtailing of unnecessary expenses: she visited some few patients who had already attached themselves to her; she obtained permission to attend at certain operations performed by eminent surgeons, in order to carry on her observations; and between whiles she was fond of frequenting the little ante-chamber which divided her husband's consulting room from her own. At first this pleased him very much; it was so charmingly new. It was so deliciously unlike the solitariness of his past life to rise from his chair whenever his room was empty, and have the chance, by just looking through a door, of seeing a face which,

as he believed, was the most lovely that had ever come from the Creator's hand. Sometimes he would find it difficult to convince himself that this chance really existed; and then, if he called her, and there was no answer—or if he rose and looked into her room, and found it empty—he was deeply disappointed; so that Ernestine's hoverings on the margin of his room were very welcome, and he was merely amused when she assured him, out of the simplicity of her heart, that she only came there to try and catch his manner—not for the pleasure of being near him. He did not believe her, of course—what man would?

Often when he looked into her room—that room which he had so carefully furnished and filled with his love—if she sat there, as he sometimes found her, alone, he would pause and marvel at the picture; for to him the commencement of their home-life was more filled with romance than any other part of their connection. The atmosphere of his existence received a different colour when he

found that this woman, whose intelligence he admired and whose beauty he worshipped, really took up a peaceful and domesticated life by his side. It was so delightful a surprise to him to find Ernestine giving orders to the cook and looking after the household, that he began to think his idea that she would speedily surrender any ambition in her profession and settle down as his wife, was being already proved true.

And it brought an additional tinge of rose-colour to his existence to find Ernestine so little assertive and so truly womanly in her daily life: his wildest hopes of happiness were being realised.

His professional duties had become so easy to him by long habit that, though he returned to take up the routine of work, yet, with Ernestine performing so admirably all the part he desired her to, his dreamland was unbroken.

But Ernestine's nature was kept alive by stings of which he knew nothing. The desire

to obtain some foothold in her profession was deeper than he supposed, because she had more reasons than he knew of to aim at a success of her own. She lived from day to day in a certain dread of her first meeting with Laura alone; her practical efforts in the household were prompted by something very different from that desire to please him to which he attributed them. And the feeling that her actions must often be misunderstood by him made her sensitive to the last degree. There was but little dreamland for her. Her mind, indeed, was unnaturally wakeful; and it was only when quite alone with him that, in realising how completely he was still enwrapped in the glamour of their love, she herself became conscious of the refreshment she found in it.

But, when she sat in her consulting-room, or haunted the little ante-chamber, it was not to realise the near presence of one she loved. To him that nearness was a continual delight, and the least sound which reached his ears

would call his mind from the most difficult and absorbing diagnosis ; and the patient, if chancing to gaze into his face, would wonder at the faint smile that passed over it. His mind had momentarily turned aside from its work to realise the happiness which filled his heart.

Ernestine in her present state was incapable of any such temporary oblivion of work. She followed out his cases with an intense keenness, throwing upon each the light of her recent studies and the experience gained from observations which she was daily making under the guidance of the most skilful operators and physicians.

She hardly ever mentioned medical or professional matters to him ; very occasionally she would ask him for an explanation of some symptom in one of her own patients, but she never made any remark upon his. Only once had she broken this rule. A lady of title had just left his consulting-room, and Ernestine had been partly amused and partly disgusted

with the interview. The lady told him how ill, how very ill she was; she hinted at domestic troubles which had overwhelmed her delicate organisation. Dr. Doldy with some difficulty extracted her symptoms from her, and made rapid notes of them; and while actually engaged in writing these, and mentally reviewing the case, he, by a double brain-action which Ernestine marvelled at, was able to lean a little forward towards the afflicted lady and say in delicately respectful tones, "Madam, your nerves are shattered—absolutely shattered—absolutely shattered."

"Ah!" was the reply, in a deep-drawn voice of self-admiration, "I knew it. Oh, Doctor, is it possible to restore me to anything like health?"

"If you take the greatest care of yourself, I believe it will be possible. But you must remember, Madam, that your constitution is extremely delicate. You must treat yourself as you would a rare Venetian vase;

you must be preserved from any contact too rough or sudden."

Ernestine had overheard many consultations not unlike this, and had made no remark; but to-day Dr. Doldy had come straight into her room as the patient left his.

He found her sitting on a low chair in the window, through which the sunlight streamed upon her bright hair and face so full of strong life. The contrast between her and the woman who had just left him struck him strangely at the moment.

"I am often in wonder," he said, standing and looking down upon her, "what makes you so different from other women; is it intellectual activity which gives you such a vividness of life, or is it the natural possession of that life which enables you to sustain the intellectual activity?"

"You know," she answered, "which I believe in. 'To think is to live' once said a man who was almost wise. But don't talk of that now; my intellectual activity demands to

know, just at present, why you, an honest man, should tell that lady that her nerves are shattered?"

"Because it was medicinally good for her: it pleased and soothed her."

His tone had changed. Ernestine looked questioningly up at him. She said nothing further for a moment, and then put an inquiry in a voice from which she had extracted all the brightness.

"What is the matter with her?"

"Nothing!" replied Dr. Doldy; and, walking to another window, looked out.

"I thought, at least, she must have had heart disease," she said.

For about a minute there was silence, and then Dr. Doldy came and sat down by her side and began to talk of something else. He was much too deeply in love to be driven from the sunshine of her society by unspoken disapproval.

Ernestine said no more; but she treasured these things up in her heart. She began to

understand how great a work it is to become a popular doctor.

But in their leisure hours Ernestine put these perplexities aside, and revelled in the broad stream of sunshine that lay upon their lives, and was yet scarce chequered with shade. She allowed a child-like capacity for enjoyment which she possessed to appear and to be gratified. Dr. Doldy's strong maturity of manhood seemed suddenly to have taken a step back into hilarious youthfulness; and with his beautiful wife by his side he entered upon all manner of foolish excursions, and heartily delighted in small pleasures; and continually he would look at her, as, with true good-comradeship, she followed him into any amusement or enterprise which pleased him at the moment; and at such times he felt that any social position was worth sacrificing for the possession of such a comrade.

But, as yet, society had looked kindly upon them. Ernestine being very quiet and emi-

nently unmasculine, the grand old ladies had not taken much offence at her door-plate.

Life was so englamoured with rose-colour, and so rich in sweetness to Dr. Doldy, that when one day Ernestine spoke to him with a knitted brow and a very serious voice, he stood aghast.

She had just returned from Mrs. Silburn's house; and, strangely enough, her visit there had brought a deep line upon her forehead—a straight one, downwards, between her eyes. When that appeared on Ernestine's brow it meant sore perplexity within. It was a signal of distress.

But the signal was not one to be understood by Dr. Doldy. He had studied her face narrowly, but he had not known her long enough to know the meaning of that line of care.

Dorothy knew it; but she was quite in the dark as to what it meant in this case, although it was her own words that had produced it.

It was Dorothy's nature and Dorothy's business to know everything. She was not a

scandalmonger; but she certainly was a purveyor of choice bits of gossip. Ernestine learned more of the ways and doings of the world around her in a few minutes' chatter with Dorothy than in a week of her own observations. She passed through life absorbed in the contemplation of certain aspects of it. She was not able, at the same time, to grasp all the petty incidents which befell her fellow-passengers.

But Dorothy was all eyes and ears; she heard and saw and retailed all manner of small spicy things.

This afternoon, when Ernestine had spent a brief tranquil half-hour in her drawing-room, she had chattered thus about all sorts of people whom they both knew; and she innocently enough made the following remark:

“I hear Sir Percy Flaxen is paying great attention to Laura Doldy. I suppose she will soon be engaged again. Sir Percy is considered rather a catch; but so is Laura. If they do become engaged they will be an excel-

lent match ; both are very attractive to the opposite sex, both are rich, and I should think at the outside they can't have more than one idea between them."

Dorothy's talk, like a wandering rivulet, had branched far away from Laura and Sir Percy Flaxen when Ernestine interrupted her.

"Engaged again, I think you said? Has Laura Doldy, then, been already once engaged?"

"Didn't you know it?" exclaimed Dorothy. "She has been talked about with half-a-dozen men, and once definitely engaged. She herself announced it to me; but it was immediately contradicted."

"To whom was she engaged?" asked Ernestine.

"A horrid little Spaniard, whom I believe Dr. Doldy hated. Probably that is why he has never mentioned the affair to you. He never could mention Yriarte's name with a cheerful expression of countenance."

"And she is being talked about again?"

said Ernestine, with an effort at an ordinary tone of voice; but the deep line had come upon her forehead.

“Yes; that is only to be expected. She will marry soon, of course.”

Ernestine did not like to ask any more. She knew so much and so little of Laura's affairs, that she was afraid lest in speaking she might either show her ignorance or suggest her knowledge. She soon went home, leaving Dorothy debating within herself what there could be distressing in the probability of Laura's engagement. And Ernestine had walked home deep in thought, and entered her own room. She sat down near the door, and, from where she sat, could hear something of what passed in Dr. Doldy's consulting-room. A patient had just come in, and, after a little while, his words seemed to enter her mind, and awaken its interest; for she arose, and stepped into the little ante-chamber.

In the midst of a long interview, Dr. Doldy rose and came to the ante-chamber where she

stood, to fetch something which he required ; and there he found her. She generally retreated under such circumstances, for she held a thinking man sacred ; but now she stayed where she was.

Seeing that she remained, he turned towards her, expecting that she had some bright remark to make, or some piece of news which was too good to keep. He was only too glad to refresh himself now and again in her sunny atmosphere.

But when he turned, he saw her absorbed and frowning : a cloud on her brow, and no smile on her lips.

He stood aghast.

“ Why, Ernestine,” he exclaimed, “ what is it ? ”

“ Glaucoma,” was her reply.

At first he thought her mind was wandering ; but a second after, he laughed.

“ Nonsense ! ” he said, “ the man’s bilious. I meant, what is the matter with you ? ”

“ Is it not Mr. Richy, the artist, who is with

you?" was Ernestine's apparently irrelevant answer. "I should like to see him."

"Very well," said Dr. Doldy cheerfully, speaking from the level of a shelf, where he was looking for something. "I will bring him to the drawing-room. But I didn't know he was any favourite of yours."

CHAPTER V.

GLAUCOMA.

ERNESTINE approached her husband, and laid her hand on his arm.

“Arthur,” she said, “I don’t want to see him in the drawing-room; I want to see him professionally.”

Dr. Doldy paused an instant before he replied; but his answer had a little irritation in its tone for all that.

“Now, Ernestine, don’t talk nonsense.”

“I am not talking nonsense,” she said, the straight downward line in her brow growing more definite as she spoke. “I cannot help

thinking you are making a mistake in this case. There is every symptom of glaucoma."

"Bah!" said Dr. Doldy, almost impatiently; "seeing so many eye-operations has turned your head. The man has dined out too frequently, and has not taken enough exercise. That is all."

"Let me see him," said Ernestine.

"Very well; if you will be in the drawing-room, in about ten minutes I will bring him there. As he is a lover of beauty by profession, I am sure he will be delighted to come. I have yet to meet with the man who would refuse your invitation."

This was said with a smile of mingled meanings, but Ernestine did not respond but by a little sigh of regret.

"Well," she said, "I suppose I must submit to that, if you wish it; but I should like to have used the ophthalmoscope myself to-day."

Dr Doldy made no reply, but left her,

and returned to his patient without even another look in her direction.

The truth was that he scarcely knew what his eyes would express if he did look at her, for his mind was for the moment much confused by a new aspect of their relations to each other. As yet Ernestine had been to him a beautiful woman with a foible. He had no mind to see in her an actual practitioner of a new school.

Ernestine, meanwhile, went upstairs, the straight downward line remaining unmoved upon her brow. She went into the drawing-room without removing her out-door dress. Her mind was profoundly abstracted after the fashion of a new and earnest worker.

Dr. Doldy would probably have laughed at her if she had taken him into her confidence at this moment. He had long passed the stage when a patient's life or death, or a new discovery in medicine or physics, could cause him to forget small conventions. But

Ernestine was yet young enough to be thorough. She sat down and took from her pocket a note-book which had been very recently filled, as might be easily seen by the freshness of its leaves. Dr. Doldy and Mr. Richy found her still absorbed in studying this.

Mr. Richy knew her. He had met her once in society, and had not forgotten her; for, as Dr. Doldy had said, he was a professed admirer of beauty. He saw in her the charming and beautiful wife of an old friend, and he bowed low over her hand with the politeness of the old school to which he belonged, little aware of the meaning of the keen glance which met his eyes.

Mr. Richy had but a brief time to stay, for he had already prolonged his consultation with Dr. Doldy; and, after a few moments of small talk and some polite phrases of congratulation, he departed.

Dr. Doldy, after bowing him out, returned to Ernestine's side to find her face of

perplexity resolved into one of smiles and brightness.

His was now the perplexed countenance, for he did not understand the secret of this change.

She looked up at him with a smile of enthusiasm.

“We can save his sight,” she said, “but it must be done at once.”

“What are you talking of?” said Dr. Doldy.

“I am talking,” said Ernestine, recalling herself to the reality of the position, “of Mr. Richy’s eyes. I feel some interest in them, for I like his pictures; and imagine,” she added, “the horror to an artist whose sight is infinitely more sensitive than ours, of total blindness.”

“But there is no such danger for Richy,” said Dr. Doldy; “you are talking nonsense. There is a haze over his eyes from biliousness; he will be all right in a week or two with careful diet.”

“No,” said Ernestine; “I saw that the pupil is dilated to a degree that shows only a mere ring of iris; and the iris is discoloured.”

Dr. Doldy laughed aloud. “That is all very well,” said he; “but the man has constant nausea.”

“So I heard him say,” said Ernestine composedly. “You forget that I heard him detail his sufferings; and, perhaps, you don’t remember either that recurrent vomiting is now ascertained to be one of the symptoms in an acute case of glaucoma.”

“You are falling into the snare which besets young doctors who study a specialty,” said Dr. Doldy, with a rather ineffectual effort to retain his coolness. “You think every patient is afflicted in the organ which you have studied. Modern discoverers appear to discover what they want to find. Richy would think I was mad if I told him he was made sick by a local disease of the eye. If new doctors avow such theories, I hope it is in

the medical journals only, and not to their patients."

Ernestine had shut up her note-book, and was moving towards the door.

"We need not discuss that," said she, without any of the heat in her voice which had begun to be apparent in Dr. Doldy's. She was much too interested in the matter in hand to think of quarrelling about it. "We need not discuss that," she said, "for we need not tell him anything until we are quite certain that iridectomy must be performed at once. And to be certain of that, we ought, of course, to use the ophthalmoscope in a good light. Don't think me pragmatical," she added, pausing at the door, and turning to him with a winning smile. "I am really interested in the case; it is not all the vaingloriousness of a young doctor. I am not craving to perform the operation: I would not dare to attempt it. And I don't at all sympathise with the surgeons who delight in the operation of iridectomy, because it is so interesting to give health to an

eye by taking out the very part ordinarily considered necessary for health. I am not afflicted with the passion for operations; iridectomy does not fascinate me because it is asserted that the larger the piece of the iris cut out, the more complete the cure; and I am quite aware that, in some cases where it has been performed on one eye, it is the other that has got well. Indeed, Arthur, I can quite understand your laughing at the absurdities committed by young doctors with specialties; and I am only anxious that Mr. Richy should have the benefit of further examination."

She went away full of her thoughts, leaving Dr. Doldy to his own. These did not seem to be very tranquil ones, for he walked the drawing-room in a manner unusual to him.

This was the first sign of interference with his patients—the first breach which Ernestine had committed on the unwritten laws. Dr. Doldy would have been furiously angry with anybody but Ernestine. With her it was different. It was a new sensation, even think-

ing himself justified in being angry with her. But still, he was intensely annoyed.

After some little time, he followed Ernestine, intending to talk the matter over with her, and dissuade her from doing anything to break the harmony of their life. He determined to point out to her that it was simple madness for her to interfere between himself and a patient such as Mr. Richy.

He could not find her; and, on asking the servants, found that she had gone out.

In the evening, when they met again, the incident had almost been forgotten by both.

CHAPTER VI.

LEWIS LINGEN'S OFFICE.

LAURA had temporised; she had pawned as many jewels as she dared, to gain a temporary reprieve from Yriarte's claims. She wanted to postpone her revenge on him—to put him out of her thoughts while she carried on the more immediately interesting operation of catching a new lover.

But he had no idea of being satisfied or even temporarily pacified with the small sums she was able to give him. He wrote to her again, telling her that Anton absolutely refused to give up any of the letters unless the whole debt were paid; and that he much feared Anton had read some of the letters and was

likely himself to go to her uncle and demand money.

This letter—an ill-written, misspelt scrawl—kept Laura in a fever for an hour, shut in her room.

Sir Percy Flaxen had proposed marriage to her only the night before, under the helpful influence of a good deal of champagne. The announcement of her engagement would be made whenever she gave him permission to go to Dr. Doldy.

And now she dared not give this permission until she had taken some step with regard to Yriarte. If Dr. Doldy were in new possession of her secret, when Sir Percy Flaxen went to him—especially with Ernestine's influence upon him—she knew not what catastrophe might not result. She was unable to grasp her uncle's mind; she could not calculate on his probable actions. The combination of worldliness with a certain chivalrous purity of character which was visible in him, puzzled her entirely. She distrusted him with a different

distrust from that which she bestowed on Mrs. Honiton. The lady was wholly absorbed in self-interest; and Laura knew that beyond a certain point her sympathies were not to be expected. Dr. Doldy she mistrusted simply because she never quite understood when he might turn upon her with horror and denounce her as having gone too far. And, when he did condemn her, she feared him; his judgment descended upon her from a platform nearer her own than Ernestine's; one less ideal and more intelligible to her.

Yriarte's threat could not have come to her at a more alarming moment. She dreaded the destruction of all her hopes. She had determined to marry Sir Percy; he was perfectly eligible himself according to her taste, and his family was one she would wish to enter. But how dare she advance another step in the matter with Yriarte and his creditor in possession of her letters—prepared at any moment to reveal her secret to her uncle—perhaps to Sir Percy himself?

Her spirit rose with the exigency of her position ; she determined to take a step which she very much dreaded. She did not know the real legal view of the position ; what she might do and what she might not do with safety. She must have good advice. She must go to Mr. Lingen and give him a half-confidence. And it took all the necessity of her position to drive her to this ; for, with a secret to keep, there was nothing she dreaded so much as the blank gaze through Lewis Lingen's eye-glass.

She thought she knew this man well. She believed him heartless, keen as a knife all through. She supposed him wholly incapable of being affected by such an appeal as she had made to Ernestine, even if genuine. She prepared herself simply to reserve from him all that he must not know. And this had to be done, not only in her words, but in every expression of her face while in his presence.

She dressed carefully, took Yriarte's letters,

and drove alone, in Mrs. Honiton's carriage, to Mr. Lingen's office.

He was disengaged : he could see Miss Doldy at once. . Laura left her carriage, and, gathering her dainty skirts together, passed in, much to the gratification of the clerks in the outer office, who looked admiringly after her as she vanished within Mr. Lingen's sanctum.

He sat in the dingy room, as usual, behind the table piled with dusty-looking papers, looking himself as fresh and spotless as the summer morning. He wore an abstracted air, and, holding the guard of his eye-glass in one hand, waved it gently to and fro, as though it were out of service just then, and were having a little play-time.

Laura was delighted to see that when the ordinary greetings were over, and she had taken a seat which brought her face as little under the light as possible, he fell into the same attitude and action again.

Her courage rose when she found that he did not even look at her when she began to speak ;

and she proceeded to give a cleverly incomplete account of the affair upon which she had come.

Lewis Lingen was well accustomed to such confidences. Many a fashionable lady had sat in that chair before Laura, and had endeavoured to tell her wrongs while concealing her wrong-doings. Many a beautiful woman had been compelled to sit there and herself reveal the weak places in the armour of her reputation—which, if once made visible to the arch enemy who makes scandal, would have enabled the whole coat of mail to be shattered, and have left the frail and defenceless being underneath to the mercy of all the winds of malice. And if Laura had had experience of her confessor's aspect in such interviews, she would have been alarmed. He had never used his keen eyes so little, and had never listened to a recital with so marked a lack of interest. He wore the air of a novel reader who, on opening the first volume, is filled with a wearied sense that it is hardly

worth while to ask for the next—the plot is so easily understood. Laura's actual words were the first volume of this story. To discover the whole history and amuse oneself with the intricacies of the plot, it would have been necessary to study her face, and there find the real interest of the story. But perhaps her hearer had heard too many similar ones. At all events, he did not seem to care to penetrate beyond the sketch which she vouchsafed to him.

Laura did not know enough of him to be alarmed at this; on the contrary, it relieved her immensely, and she was just pluming herself on having relieved herself of her confidences in a most creditable way, when Lingen roused himself from his abstraction, and turned to her with the languid air of a man who makes a remark which is void of interest.

“Of course the first thing, at all costs, is to regain the letters. We must not run any risk of their being published.”

Laura almost gasped for breath. What did he mean? She reviewed her words hastily. She had certainly said nothing about the letters except that they had been written during her engagement. She looked at him. His face was perfectly expressionless; his eyes had fallen upon a pile of papers in front of him, and he seemed to be reading the uppermost one. She was reassured; he meant nothing. She moved her lips with some difficulty and spoke hesitatingly.

“Certainly; any such publication would be very unpleasant.”

“Humph!” said Mr. Lingen. He put his hand across the table and took up a little bundle, which Laura had put on it. They were Yriarte’s letters asking for money. Mr. Lingen glanced them through, and then put up his eye-glass and turned it upon Laura.

“Mr. Yriarte is a shrewd man,” he said, reflectively. “He would scarcely have threatened you with the publication of these letters unless he were fully aware that the

weakness of your position lay in your dreading their publication. You must have forgotten what you said in them."

Laura was at a loss for words.

"But," she said, at last, "what should I have said in them!"

Mr. Lingen raised his eyebrows, and there was a curious flash in his eyes; but he was perfectly grave.

"That," he said, "I must leave to you."

Laura was dumb for a moment, paralysed with surprise and anger. She rose with dignity after a little pause; her face was flushing darkly.

"I don't understand your meaning," she said; "I will wish you a good morning."

Mr. Lingen rose languidly.

"Excuse me, Miss Doldy, a moment. When I undertake an affair like this I can only be of any use if I know the whole story. When a client chooses to tell me only a part of the facts, I am obliged to make up the rest from my experience and knowledge."

"I—don't understand," said Laura, standing doubtfully beside her chair.

"Unless," he went on, "you not only wish to punish Mr. Yriarte for his impertinent conduct, but also to suppress the actual facts of your connection with him, you will gain little by consulting me about it; the case, as you have put it, is a very easily managed one."

Laura sat down again. The flush died out of her face beneath that terrible eye-glass. She trembled beneath it. After a struggle she recalled a little of her customary presence of mind.

"I can understand now," she said, smiling faintly, "why you are so dreaded by witnesses."

"Forgive me, Miss Doldy," he said, courteously; "I am not trying to extract anything from you. I only wish you to see that it is useless to come to me with half confidences. Perhaps, as Mr. Yriarte is no longer your lover, you will allow me to call him a scoundrel. A few months ago he was

borrowing money on the assertion that he was engaged to an heiress who dared not risk her reputation by throwing him over. If you choose to allow that you were that heiress, I will arrange the matter for you and get him the punishment he so richly deserves ; but if you are not that heiress, my clerk can easily manage it for you."

Laura had not heard the last words. She leaned forward in her chair with the flush rising again in her face, and one hand clenched itself fiercely as it lay in her lap.

"Dared not!" she said. "Dared not!—But I did! I threw him over when I found he was a mere fortune hunter!—and he thinks to intimidate me now!"

Mr. Lingen's brow cleared—he dropped his eye-glass and smiled.

"Go straight to Dr. Doldy," he said, "and tell him as much as you told me at first. If you tell it to him as cleverly, he will not suspect anything further. You cannot well

act in such a matter as this without his sanction."

"I *must* tell him?"

"Certainly, and at once. The case will appear in the papers, unless the defendant should be frightened into reason; so that you cannot keep it secret. Besides, you must have your uncle's support."

"I will go—I will do what you tell me," said Laura, her voice trembling a little with the effort to calm herself. "I will do anything if you are sure"—she put her hand in its cream-coloured glove upon the dusty table and leaned towards him, "if you are sure I shall get my revenge. I am thirsting for it."

Mr. Lingen looked up in a cool business-like way into her face.

"Will five years' penal servitude do?"

Laura sprang back—her face lit suddenly with smiles of delight—she clasped her hands with effusion.

"Oh, glorious!" she ejaculated. "Oh, glorious!" she repeated musingly to herself,

as, with alacrity, she gathered up her dress and stepped towards the door. Then she paused thoughtfully :

“ Am I to tell my uncle I have already been here ? ”

“ Oh, yes, don't make small concealments. You can say you came to me for advice, not wishing to distress him till you knew you must take public steps. ”

“ Good-bye, ” she said, and went out, closing the door softly ; but just as it was shut she opened it again, and came softly and swiftly in.

“ Could we not get penal servitude for life ? ” she asked with anxiety.

Mr. Lingen looked seriously at her. “ I am afraid not, ” he said, “ if it were not necessary to make some bargain with the defence in order to keep your secrets, doubtless we could obtain a little more than five. But you don't wish to ruin yourself in order to ruin him ? ”

“ No, ” answered Laura, “ that would be

foolish ;” and turned again towards the door. This time she really went ; he heard the wheels of her carriage.

He threw himself back in his chair and waved his eye-glass languidly about in one hand.

“ If I hadn't a considerable interest myself in that girl's fortune—and if I hadn't some respect for her family,” he said, smilingly, to himself, “ I would let her precipitate herself upon her revenge. The little demon—thirsty for it ;—and the man has been her lover !”

“ I must sell up Yriarte's house at once,” he added, more thoughtfully, after a little pause, “ and see what is to be got out of his relations.”

He rose, adjusted his buttonhole flower, took his hat, and went out.

CHAPTER VII.

“THE SUN WAS DARKENED.”

DR. DOLDY was in the drawing-room with Ernestine, when a servant announced that Mr. Richy was in his consulting-room.

They had said nothing further about the case, for both had had other things to think of. Dr. Doldy rose now, without a word, to go to his patient. Ernestine's voice arrested him, and he paused half-way to the door.

“Will you examine Mr. Richy's eyes to-day? I am so sure that you will find it a decided case of glaucoma.”

“Indeed, I shall not,” replied Dr. Doldy, a little hotly; “I have already satisfied myself that I have the case well in hand.”

“Mr. Richy,” said Ernestine, “is not the man to suffer as you suppose he is suffering. He is abstemious, and he works hard. But he is of a feeble constitution, and it is intelligible that such a disease as glaucoma should attack him. I entreat you, if you will not examine yourself, and will not let me see him, to send him to an oculist. It is terrible to think that a brief delay may make it too late to save his sight.”

“Young doctors are often afflicted with a mania for operations, and iridectomy is a taking one. But you must find victims for yourself.”

Dr. Doldy felt his temper deserting him so rapidly that he went straightway to the door after making this little speech. Ernestine followed him.

“I will not say another word if you will examine the eye,” she said entreatingly; “but if you will not, I must see Mr. Richy myself.”

“That you cannot do; he is in my consulting-room.”

“ I will go to him there.”

“ Then you may go alone,” cried Dr. Doldy, in a sudden uprisal of temper ; and he turned back into the drawing-room.

Ernestine ran downstairs, but surely she would not go in. He did not in the least believe that she would really do this which was so distinctly against his wish.

Each second he expected to hear her returning foot upon the stairs ; and, indeed, he half-pictured to himself her laughing face when her lack of courage and her inability to be disobedient should have brought her back into the drawing-room. But as the seconds passed over, his heart sank and his temper rose, for there was no sound until he heard the door of his consulting-room shut. He stood still, awe-struck ; and awe-struck probably for the first time in his life. Nothing less than the genius of Shakespeare had ever inspired him with reverence : awe he certainly had not experienced. But that a woman—a young inexperienced doctor, and a woman !—should over-

step the double boundary line existing between them—should disobey him as a wife, dispute his knowledge as an elder doctor, and disregard the etiquettes of both relations, struck him with an utter amazement.

For a moment he was entirely taken aback by her audacity. But when that wave of feeling had passed, he was left only very angry. Anger pure and simple, however, occupied him but for a moment. In the next, curiosity was rampant. There was something entirely new to be seen and to be heard—he must know how Ernestine would play her difficult part — and besides, had he not a duty with regard to his patient? As soon as this occurred to him, without the briefest hesitation he took his way downstairs, and entered Ernestine’s consulting-room, which was fortunately empty. He passed straight in, entering with deliberate stealthiness the little ante-chamber which divided the two sanctums. If he had been a trifle less in earnest, he might have paused to laugh at himself for

having been so easily put into his wife's position. Ernestine had many a time, and with his approval, listened at his door, to find out how he did things. Their relations were now changed. But he was quite incapable at the time of seeing the humorous side of the situation.

Anger was only kept at bay by sheer curiosity. "Dr. Doldy will be down directly," Ernestine's voice was saying at the instant. "He wished me to apologise for his delay, and he asked me in the meantime to look at your eye. I am sure you will allow me, Mr. Richy; for you know I am a doctor, too."

"Does he fear anything local, then?" said Mr. Richy, in an alarmed voice.

"No," said Ernestine; "but as you suffer so much pain in it, he thought I might as well examine it; for I have been studying the eye of late under special advantages."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Richy; "of course I cannot but be delighted at the honour you are doing me. And, indeed," he added, with

rather awkward jocoseness, “under such hands as yours I am sure I must soon be healed of any complaint.”

Dr. Doldy groaned, and a cold dew stood out upon his forehead. This was just about as much as he could bear; and he felt strongly disposed to go in and shake the unfortunate Richy, or do something equally ridiculous. But he controlled himself with an effort, and remained motionless.

He followed the interview now partly by his own knowledge of what must be passing. He heard Ernestine ask Mr. Richy to approach the window; he pictured her beautiful face with its frown of thought, as she moved about, adjusting her patient.

“I will not dilate the pupil,” he heard her say, gently, “as it causes some inconvenience; but I must ask you to turn the eye towards the nose, in order that the light may be first received by the insensitive part of the optic disc, as, if the light is received straight, it immediately contracts the pupil. Excuse me—I

will not hurt you ; I only wish to restrain the upper lid a little. Will you kindly move the eye up and down——?”

The pauses in Ernestine's speech Dr. Doldy filled in pictorially. He beheld her, in his inner vision—her dark eyes removed but a few inches from Mr. Richey's, which, though partially disabled, yet belonged to “a professed admirer of beauty.” It was all very well while they talked ; but he could endure the position no longer when they became silent ; and after some two or three immensely long seconds, he walked into the room.

Ernestine had just moved back, and was looking very grave. She turned to him instantly.

“The light is excellent,” she said ; “you had better examine the eye at once ; the ophthalmoscope reveals very characteristic conditions.”

She rose from her place, and handed him the little instrument—that simple, subtle little instrument which Charles Babbage evolved

out of his wonderful mind, and presented to the craft before the craft was intelligent or developed enough to know how to use it.

Dr. Doldy adopted the only possible course open to him if appearances were to be preserved. He sat down in silence, and examined the eye himself.

That done, in silence, he put down the ophthalmoscope, pushed back his chair, and rose in silence.

Ernestine looked up at him hesitatingly, and then spoke; for Mr. Richy was looking in much trepidation from one doctor to the other.

“It is as I feared, is it not?”

“Yes,” was Dr. Doldy’s monosyllabic reply.

“What is it?” exclaimed Mr. Richy, in considerable alarm.

“It is a case of sub-acute glaucoma,” replied Dr. Doldy.

“Glaucoma!” exclaimed Mr. Richy.
“Why, that’s a disease of the eye. You

are chaffing me ; there is no green in my eye, Dr. Doldy ; that I am positive of ! ”

“ No,” answered Dr. Doldy, gravely, “ the colour in this disease is more often a whitey-brown than a grey-green. Glaucoma is rather a misnomer.”

“ But are you serious, then ? ” cried Mr. Richy, his face falling. “ How about my biliousness ? You said that was enough to account for the haziness of my sight.”

“ Nausea,” replied Dr. Doldy, in a tone of subdued fury, “ may be described as a new symptom of glaucoma.”

“ A new symptom ! ” cried Mr. Richy, “ what on earth do you mean ? ”

“ A symptom,” said Ernestine, gently, “ which has only quite newly been understood to be in connection with a glaucomatous state of the eye ; when, as with you, both eyes are affected, but in different degrees, there can be no doubt that the seat of the disorder is in the eye ; and in this case the examination with the ophthalmoscope is con-

clusive; and you will find,” she added to Dr. Doldy, “that the globe is perceptibly hard on palpation. You have not touched the globe, have you?”

“No,” answered Dr. Doldy, “but I am satisfied without that.”

Mr. Richy glared at her.

“Just what I feared, just what I feared; a local disorder of the eye! Good heavens, it will be my ruin!”

“But,” said Ernestine, “if iridectomy is performed without delay, your sight will almost certainly be saved.”

“Iridectomy,” cried Mr. Richy, “cutting out of the iris! Why, what on earth am I to see with if I have my iris cut out? I thought it was necessary to sight.”

“Nature meant it to be,” interposed Dr. Doldy, drily; “but disease and surgery have ordered it otherwise. Mr. Richy, allow me to suggest that you go at once to an eminent surgeon. Your sight must be too valuable for you to hesitate about an operation.”

“Of course, if it is really necessary,” said Mr. Richy.

“It is certainly necessary,” replied Dr. Doldy, seriously; “I will refer you to a first-rate specialist.”

After a little further talk and arrangement about this, Mr. Richy departed in a very ill-humour, giving, as he rose to go, a farewell glance to Ernestine, which was so full of mortified vanity and disgust that she could have felt amused, in spite of her earnest sympathy for his real trouble.

The door closed upon him, and left the two doctors alone in the consulting-room. Ernestine was busied in putting aside the instruments which they had been using. Dr. Doldy stood motionless, observing her.

Silent rage consumed him within. It was only unexpressed because it scarcely knew how to find a vent.

But when she had finished her task, she turned to him and said, smilingly, “I fancy Mr. Richy thinks that I have given him disease of the eye.”

Dr. Doldy made no reply for a moment ; and then he said, in a voice which startled her by its unusual vibration, “It is more than even your powers can compass, Ernestine, to carry off such a matter as this lightly.”

“I don’t understand,” she answered, doubtfully.

“I suppose,” he went on in a bitter voice, “I am being justly punished for marrying a woman who is determined to be something besides a woman. I did not object to your being something else, so long as you preserved the appearance of being only a woman in my presence ; but when you enter my consulting-room as a doctor, and a doctor who is not invited, it appears to me that you change our relations ; that we are no longer husband and wife, but simply professional rivals ! ”

“It is a pity,” said Ernestine, her face flushing with the sudden emotion of realising for the first time that he was in earnest, “if you think that our double relations cannot

exist, for I do not know how we can destroy either."

She walked away into her own consulting-room with a rather less dignified air than usual, for, in spite of her superficial coldness, she was too emotional to be capable of quarrelling with her husband.

Dr. Doldy almost immediately followed her.

"It is of no use," he said, "attempting to put this matter aside in silence. It will be impossible for us to live under the same roof unless you can pay that amount of respect to my position which I have a right to expect from my wife. If such scenes as this are to be repeated, I shall not only be made ridiculous in the eyes of the profession, but what will be far worse, my practice will be ruined. And, until your practice is sufficiently successful to take its place, you must see that it is madness to interfere with mine."

"But," said Ernestine, with a little tremble in her voice, "what harm have I done?"

You yourself allow that I have detected Mr. Richy's real malady.”

“That may be,” said Dr. Doldy; “and pray what do you think Mr. Richy's club friends will say about the way in which his malady was discovered. It is possible that for about a fortnight we may have an influx of gentlemen, with nothing much the matter with them, who have heard that in my consulting-room there is the probability that a beautiful woman will interfere and take their case in hand. But whether we are likely to build a substantial practice upon such a report or such popularity, my experience would incline me to doubt.”

Dr. Doldy had been walking up and down while he spoke, and had avoided looking at Ernestine; indeed, he was too angry to look at her. If he had looked he would probably have been a little startled by the vivid colour in her cheek and the flash in her eye. She was smarting beneath the sense of accumulated humiliations. As she listened to his

words, which seemed to her, and not without reason, to be full of insult, her mind returned to the treatment which she had already experienced at Laura's hands. Money, which Ernestine perhaps despised more than she had any right to, seemed to her to have degraded the nature of both uncle and niece. Her tongue itched to speak of what she knew, and to reproach her husband with what she had taught herself to look upon as the one spot in his character.

But she restrained herself by a violent effort, and only said, with so much emotion that speech brought the tears into her eyes, "It seems to me that your profession is money-making, not medicine. As I have educated myself to follow medicine, I had better take your advice and leave your house before any further difficulties arise."

They had been so absorbed by the intensity of their own feelings that neither of them had been aware that a visitor had arrived, or had noticed Laura's voice as she spoke to the

servants and looked in the other rooms of the house for its inmates.

And so it was that just as Ernestine had uttered these words, which seemed to herself in the intensity of her mode of feeling to have ended for ever the dream of happiness which had existed in her connection with Dr. Doldy, Laura knocked lightly at the door, and without any further announcement entered.

She had heard nothing; but it was not likely that such a quick-witted young woman as Laura could come upon such a scene as that, and not read a good deal of it written upon the faces before her.

“I thought I should find you in this room,” she said, sweetly; “what a lovely room it is. I die with envy of it whenever I come in.” Laura said this, unfortunately losing the pleasure of knowing that she stabbed Ernestine to the heart. For Ernestine, to whom to think a thing right was to do it, had already endured the first pang of saying farewell to this room, which was, as it

were, the physical embodiment of the dream-land she had entered into.

“ You don’t look well,” went on the quick tongue of Laura. “ It’s the weather, I suppose. It is very unbecoming weather ; I have had to put on a spotted veil to-day, which makes my eyes ache and makes me cross.”

Her remarks did not seem likely to elicit any very enthusiastic response, so she plunged into her business.

“ Uncle,” she said, fluttering her fan and her feathers, as she turned to Dr. Doldy, who was still walking up and down, “ I hope you have time to receive a visitor to-day, as a friend of mine wishes to call upon you.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Dr. Doldy, not in a very encouraging tone.

“ Sir Percy Flaxen,” said Laura ; “ you know him, do you not ? He wants to see you at once, and I hope you will have no objection to make, but will instead give me your congratulations.”

“Does he want to marry you?” said Dr. Doldy, gloomily.

“He says so,” said Laura, in her archest manner.

“And so,” said Dr. Doldy, drily, “you have found an eligible partner at last?”

“I think,” returned Laura, with great demureness, “no objection can be made to him or his family.”

Silence followed, in the midst of which Ernestine rose, and, without a word or a look towards uncle or niece, left the room.

She could not at the moment pause to speculate what Dr. Doldy would think of her conduct.

Laura laughed to herself. She had wished to get rid of Ernestine before she went on with another part of her business; and she thought she had succeeded very well, although she was a little disturbed as to what Dr. Doldy might think. It was her principal dread with regard to Ernestine, lest that lady’s inability to conceal her feelings should

rouse Dr. Doldy's suspicions. But she might have been easy in her mind to-day had she known all. Dr. Doldy would scarcely have been astonished at anything which Ernestine might have done. And indeed he himself felt in anything but a favourable frame of mind to offer congratulations even upon a marriage which so much concerned him as Laura's.

"I want to tell you—to ask your advice," said Laura, as soon as the door had closed upon Ernestine, "about another matter which is as distressing as it well can be. In what I have to tell, you will see one whom you always disliked in a less favourable light than ever."

Dr. Doldy stopped in his promenade and stared at her. He could not conjecture what was coming.

Laura found it much more difficult to tell her uncle than to tell Lewis Lingen; and before she had said many more words she took refuge in handing him some of Yriarte's

letters, trusting to them to tell their own tale discreetly.

Dr. Doldy read them with a rising fury written on his face. Having finished them he flung them down on the table, and began to walk the room again.

“This comes of connecting yourself with a monkey-man like that, worthy of nothing but to be regarded as a possible specimen of the missing link,—” then, suddenly looking at her, “but what is there in these letters which you are ashamed of?”

“Nothing,” said Laura, “what should there be?”

“Then, why have you already given him money?”

“What woman,” she replied, with a quick droop of those clever eyelids, “would not pay money rather than run the risk of her love letters being made public?”

This seemed true enough to Dr. Doldy, on whose high ideal of her sex Laura was partly calculating in making her impression on him.

She went on to tell him that she had been to Mr. Lingen for advice, and that he recommended her to prosecute Yriarte for obtaining money from her on false pretences.

“What do you think, uncle?” she asked pathetically. “It will be very, very painful.”

“Punish him, Laura,” exclaimed Dr. Doldy angrily; “punish him even at the expense of your own feelings. It will not really be painful, because you are so plainly in the right; you will have the sympathies of all who know you. And he must be punished. I should like to horsewhip him myself!”

Laura had no idea her uncle could be so angry—could so depart from his usual manner, and lose himself in passion. Two great veins had swollen out upon his forehead; she had never seen them before. She did not know that she had but added the match to a well-laid fire. His mind was already inflamed when she began to irritate it, and it was a vast relief to him to have a subject upon which it might safely explode.

“Let us go down to Lingen at once,” went on Dr. Doldy, with suppressed excitement; “will you come, Laura?—we will punish him; the little cur! he shall learn what it is to insult a lady.”

He hurried out of the room to fetch his hat. Laura, preparing in a more leisurely manner to follow him, saw that Ernestine had returned, and stood near. She was startled, although certainly it was natural enough that Ernestine should be in her own room. But something in the look that came upon her from out those deep-set eyes affected her strangely, almost as if an uncanny presence were beside her. Ernestine made her feel, by her intensity, that she came from another world of thought.

“Who is to be punished?” asked Ernestine.

“Do you wish to know?—I did not think you cared for gossip. I don’t mind telling you, as you must soon know unless you shut your eyes and ears. Mr. José Yriarte is the cur my uncle is so anxious to correct.”

“The man you were engaged to?” exclaimed Ernestine, “your lover?”

“Don’t jump to conclusions,” said Laura, “it is unprofessional. Good morning.”

And so saying, she hurried out—for Dr. Doldy was impatiently calling her—and left Ernestine half-blinded by the mental cloud which had arisen before her eyes. On all sides the world was dark.

CHAPTER VIII.

YRIARTE AND HIS FRIENDS.

THAT evening Mr. Lingen called upon Yriarte personally, for the amount he had at stake in the matter was considerable. The interview was a peculiar one, each giving the other a sort of semi-confidence, and treating him half as a friend and half as an enemy. If Ernestine could have overheard what took place, Mr. Lingen would have seemed to her almost a creature of a diabolic realm; and, had Laura overheard it, she, on the contrary, would probably have entertained a higher opinion of both men than before, for both exhibited those peculiar talents which had made each remarkable in his own line.

Yriarte was distinguished for the breadth and depth of his scoundrelism and the extreme smallness of his character in every other direction. Lingen was remarkable for tact, audacity, and a knowledge of human nature, so easy and large as to appear instinctive.

The result of the meeting was moderately satisfactory. Yriarte was abjectly horrified at the idea, cautiously suggested by Lingen, of his danger under the law; he was aghast when he found that Dr. Doldy and Laura were quite determined to prosecute him. He had never supposed Laura's spirit to be so indomitable, while his knowledge was somewhat hazy on that wide province of crime, the obtaining of money through conspiracy. It was rather a new experience for him. He had never driven an Englishwoman quite so hard as he had driven this one; and his horror of physical discomfort was so intense that no revenge on Laura, by revealing her secrets, would afford him any consolation if it brought upon him positive

punishment. So that when Lingen suggested that if he could bring forward a defence which would be likely to lighten his sentence, it should be accepted by the prosecution on condition that he kept his tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slander with regard to Laura, he was delighted, and very speedily agreed to the arrangement. He was immediately afterwards arrested by a man in plain clothes, who had been quietly sitting in the hall until Mr. Lingen had done his business. Another man was also, with equal unobtrusiveness, taking an inventory of the contents of the house for Mr. Lingen. That gentleman himself, leaving Yriarte to the society of the officer, started off to have a hurried search for Laura's letters. He entirely believed them to be in Yriarte's own possession, notwithstanding the assertion that his creditor "Anton" had seized them. Taking the opportunity of a few undisturbed moments which lay before him, he went straight to Yriarte's bed-room, and looked around him.

There was a writing-table with a half-open drawer full of notes and letters—some not opened—that was not the place. Turning from that, his eye fell upon the old black cabinet, where Yriarte kept his religion. He smiled a peculiar subdued smile of intense amusement as he crossed the room to look at it. He opened the doors of the shrine—yes, there was a light burning before the Virgin and Child. He wondered to himself how long the slender taper would last, for, thought he, when that candle is exhausted, the shrine will be left desolate; and, doubtless, its desolation will be less of an insult and a mockery to the Catholic Church than its perpetual illumination has been.

This thought passed quickly through his mind, and almost simultaneously he was engaged in examining the cleverly contrived drawers and recesses of the quaint old cabinet. Secret springs—whether of human character or of mechanism—offered little perplexity to him. But there was a difference in his mode of approach. When he met a human being

whom he wished to look through, his eye-glass was used to hide the keenness of his own gaze. To closely examine the secret springs of mechanism he dropped his eye-glass, and directed the unveiled glance of those penetrating eyes upon them. He was not so imaginative as to be afraid of scaring into reticence the spirit of matter.

In this case he conquered—the cabinet yielded its secrets to him. He left the room—after a parting glance at the shrine which had a strange psychological attraction for him as the visible outcome of a part of the Spaniard's character—with a box containing Laura's letters. There were quantities of letters written by other infatuated women. Most of these he threw back into the cabinet: Laura's were in a bundle by themselves; their preservation was evidently due to some special value set upon them.

Mr. Lingen went triumphantly home with his spoil, satisfied that so far he had done the utmost to further Laura's plans.

Yriarte meanwhile was busily engaged in despatching messengers to his friends.

The result of this was that the next day—when the case was almost due to be called on at Bow-street; when the defendant was taking his ease in a cell at Newgate, and the prosecutrix was growing handsomer than ever in the sunshine of Sir Percy Flaxen's attentions—Dr. Doldy received a caller. His acquaintance was a wide one; but he was surprised when he looked at the card handed to him:

“Why, this is a grandee in the Spanish diplomatic service!” he exclaimed. “What on earth can he want with me? I have no Spanish connection.”

Laura was in the drawing-room, as it happened. She was still staying with Mrs. Honiton, but her visits to her uncle had become much more frequent. The necessity for joint action with regard to Yriarte had suddenly reawakened the distinctness of their long-standing partnership of interest. Dr.

Doldy was relieved, also, to find Laura making a reasonable marriage; he was far too genuine a lover of comfortable living to feel anything but genuine anxiety that Laura's fortune should follow its proper course, and avert the ruin which must otherwise fall upon him. Circumstances thus brought Laura into much more intimate and sympathetic relations with him than she had held since his marriage—or, indeed, since his engagement.

Ernestine meanwhile had become almost invisible. He scarcely ever saw her, and, as nothing further had passed between them since the interview which Laura had interrupted, he scarcely knew how to approach her. It was one of those temporary dumbnesses of the heart which most lovers experience at some period or other of their histories. In Dr. Doldy's present state the emotions had neither changed nor lost their innate vigour; but they were paralysed by the perplexities of the mind. He needed time to think his way through the difficulties which presented themselves to his

intellect; and he entered the more warmly into Laura's affairs because they occupied him and granted him an excuse for taking this time.

Thus it happened that Laura found him a more ready counsellor and support than she had anticipated.

And so it was Laura who was sitting beside him in the drawing-room when the name of the Spanish dignitary was announced.

"I can't imagine what he can want of me, if he does not come for physic. Shall I receive him here, Laura?"

"If I didn't know you of old, I should hardly understand that to mean 'go away,'" replied Laura. She rose, and passed through into the small drawing-room, which opened out of the one in which they had been sitting. Dr. Doldy shut the door behind her;—which, as it seemed to her, unnecessary act of politeness, made her close her fan with a sudden snap of vexation. She had an idea that the visit of this Spaniard must have some con-

nection with her affairs; but how, was the puzzle.

She could hear a little—enough to excite her curiosity powerfully; and the moment the visitor had gone, she opened the door and came in, flushed and eager. At the same moment Ernestine, who had just entered the house, and had met the portly Spaniard on the stairs, paused at the open drawing-room door as if hesitating whether to enter or pass on. A thirst for loneliness had come upon her as it comes upon a wounded animal; but she doubted whether she were wise in yielding to it. She paused, and then went in and sat down quietly. The others hardly noticed her presence; they were absorbed in their own affairs. Laura was excited—Dr. Doldy grave and angry.

“*Was* it really Don Gonzales himself?” exclaimed Laura, in a low eager voice.

“Yes,” said her uncle.

“And was it about that little wretch that he came?” she went on, her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed intently upon Dr. Doldy’s face.

“He came to entreat me not to prosecute,” said Dr. Doldy, angrily. “He talks about the cur’s connections—I don’t believe they care about his punishment; but it seems they have been putting pressure on this old fool to come to me about it because they want to avoid the scandal.”

He began to walk irritably up and down, evidently full of annoyance; and he was arrested by simple surprise when Laura burst out laughing.

“I had no idea little José was such an important person,” she exclaimed, gleefully. “Oh! this is grand, uncle, really grand! Fancy the whole Spanish Embassy trying to beg him off!”

“I would not withdraw from the prosecution,” exclaimed Dr. Doldy, pursuing his own vein of thought, “if the Queen herself came to ask me.”

Ernestine, finding herself unnoticed, went quietly away to her own room, and left

them to finish their conversation. These things disturbed her less to-day, for she had planned her own course of action, and had but to carry it out.

CHAPTER IX.

A BIRD ESCAPED.

“COVENTRY, I must be dreaming, or else I am mad,” said Mrs. Silburn, very soberly. She was interrupting her husband in the throes of composition. At first he looked up at her blankly; but, after a moment’s vacant contemplation of her face, he became aware of its un-unwonted seriousness.

“My dear little woman, what is the matter?” he exclaimed, throwing down his pen so suddenly as to startle one of his pet kittens who had curled herself among his papers.

“I have been round to see Ernestine—the servants told me she was not at home; I was

coming away when the man ran after me :—
Dr. Doldy had heard my voice, and would like
to speak to me.”

She paused. “Do go on!” cried Coventry,
full of consternation at her manner.

“Well, he said he thought I ought to be told
at once——”

“My dear little woman, I never knew you
so slow over a piece of news before.”

“Ernestine has left him; she went away
last night: there, now you’ve got it.” And
Dorothy flung herself simultaneously into a
chair and a passion of tears.

Coventry went round to console her, with
rather a bewildered expression on his face; it
was not often that Dorothy was overcome like
this by the feminine weakness of tears.

“Did she leave no letter for you?” he
asked.

“No,” sobbed Dorothy; “that’s the worst
of it.”

“Oh, she’ll come to us,” said Coventry;
“I daresay we shall see her to-day.”

Dorothy swallowed a sob, wiped her eyes, and answered irrelevantly :

“I am quite sure Nature is a woman : I always thought so, because she is cruel and sulky, as well as beautiful. Now I know it ; because after a good cry I feel so exactly like the sky when it’s done raining—cleared and ready for action. Miss Armine is ill, I hear ; Ernestine will not neglect her patient, you may be sure. I’ll just go and see if I can hear anything of her there.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Coventry ; “you’ve chased all the productive power out of my brain. Why has she done this ?”

“Dr. Doldy wishes us to understand that their disagreement was solely upon medical matters : they have clashed professionally.”

Coventry burst out laughing, and continued to laugh for some moments, notwithstanding the scared and horrified gaze which Dorothy fixed upon him.

“We’re in for a comedy,” he said at last ; “I thought it was a tragedy.”

“And so it is,” said Dorothy. “I wish you could have seen Dr. Doldy’s face. It would have cured you of laughing for a while.”

“My dear little woman, whoever heard of husband and wife separating for such a cause? The thing is absurd, viewed as a tragedy; as a comedy, it is lovely.”

“Well,” said Dorothy indignantly, “you’ll not find much of comedy about either of the principals in this case. You can stop at home and laugh; I am going to Miss Armine’s.”

Coventry took her advice, and stayed at home to laugh: he could not regard the matter seriously. With a face of amusement, he walked about his study, full of conjecture. He could not take up the disturbed track of thought; he must speculate about this quaint affair.

A hesitating knock came to his door while he was thus perambulating. His writing-room was held sacred; when the door was closed none but Dorothy dared approach it. There-

fore he much wondered what the new interruption might be.

He went to the door—and there stood Ernestine.

“They told me Dorothy had gone out, and you were not to be disturbed,” she said timidly; “and I have been waiting in the drawing-room. But I ventured to knock. If you are busy, I will come in this evening.”

He had never seen Ernestine like this. She was pale, trembling, with dark lines beneath her eyes. He took her hand, and drew her into the room. This was not comedy to him now. Looking into her face, he saw that not only were there these dark lines under her eyes, but the lower lids were twice their wonted size. She had been crying all night — that was very plain to him. And this was the cold Ernestine, whom people called hard, stern, unapproachable.

“Don’t let me disturb you,” she repeated; “I only wanted to leave a message for Doro-

thy, which I could not quite leave with the servant."

For answer he drew her to a low chair, and made her sit down.

"What does it all mean?" he said.

"Has Dorothy heard, then?" said she, putting her hand to her side. The long hours of the past night had made havoc of her strength. "I thought I should tell her first."

"She went round to you this morning and saw Dr. Doldy," said Coventry quietly.

"Did he tell her," said Ernestine, with attempted calmness, "that I had left the house yesterday, not to return?"

"Yes; and he also told her he wished us to know that the cause of the disagreement between you was a professional one."

Coventry got up, walked round the room, and came back to her side. She watched him in silence.

"Surely," he said, "you don't love medicine more than your husband?"

Ernestine's hand, which lay on the arm of her chair, began to tremble violently.

"No," she answered, "but I have annoyed him by following the course which seemed to me right. I am sorry for that—I am indeed; but we could never carry on our double practice under one roof. I should sin again, I fear."

"It seems strange," said Coventry, in a perplexed voice, "that such a union as yours should be affected by mere professional jealousy."

The words stung Ernestine.

"That is not all," she cried passionately; "I have not left my home and my husband because I am an interfering woman, and cannot leave his patients alone. Don't think that of me!"

Coventry looked at her with surprise.

"*He* thinks it is all," she went on; "but it is not, though I must let him think so. I must bear that; only don't you think so."

She had buried her face in her hands, and

Coventry only just heard these words. He left her side and sat down in his writing-chair, looking at her in wonder. What did all this mean? He tried to look at the matter from each side, and all manner of fancies passed through his brain. He at once rejected the idea that Ernestine had left her husband from any cause in her own heart; no one could hear her speak of him and look in her face without knowing that her love was still absolutely his. Was it, then, the old story of a high-spirited woman's jealousy?

Ernestine looked up into his face, and her quick intuitions told her something of his thoughts.

“Now you are drawing conclusions in your own mind,” she exclaimed; “don't do that! You will be wrong. You will think I am jealous, or some such thing; and you will be wrong. No! my tongue is tied—to him, to everyone—but my soul revolted against the position I was placed in. I could not endure it, and so I left it; that is all.”

At this moment the door was opened unceremoniously, and a second after Dorothy was on her knees at Ernestine's side, crying again. Coventry got up and shut the door, and then turned and looked at the two women. It was a sight fit for a poet's eyes.

Dorothy's first articulate utterance was a very decided one.

"You must come and live here—you must and you shall. You shall not go into lodgings all alone."

"I have got lodgings close by," said Ernestine; "I could not go far away from you. But I should worry you out of your two dear lives if I came here. Why, I mean to set up a night bell!"

"It should ring into your room," persisted Dorothy. But Ernestine only smiled and shook her head, and thanked her.

"My lodgings are taken," she said; "I shall be very near you."

Dorothy rose slowly to her feet, and stood by Ernestine's side, looking very seriously at her.

“Don’t make yourself ill,” she said.

“No, I shall not do that,” answered Ernestine, confidently. “I am nervous this morning, I know, but I have work before me which will not allow of nervousness; so I am sure to be all right before the day is out. I shall have my hands full with little Miss Armine soon, I fear.”

“Miss Armine!” cried Dorothy; “I saw her just now; surely she is not going to be seriously ill again?”

“I hope not; but her eyes are too bright, and she looks as if she had rouged inartistically. I have persuaded her to leave the rooms she is in. The landlord has no respect for sanitary laws. I want her to leave at once.”

“Do you?” cried Dorothy. “Has she anywhere to go? Shall I look for some rooms for her? Poor child, she can’t afford to be ill so often.”

CHAPTER X.

THE POLICE COURT.

WHEN Laura found that she would have to appear in the police court and give her evidence against Yriarte, she had immediately paid a private visit to Mr. Lingen, and asked him to advise her as to how much and how little she was to say. He made her mind easy as to the task before her, and she arose as fresh as a daisy on the morning of the day which was to see Yriarte in the prisoners' dock.

She dressed herself with skill, and put on a veil which seemed intended to conceal her face, but really only set off its especial charms ; and then, accompanied by her maid—Mrs. Honiton being altogether unable to endure the

sights and odours of a police court—drove to Bow-street.

She had never been there before; the horrible aspect of that thoroughfare was new to her, and she looked around with some consternation at the ugly crowd which gathered about her carriage.

Dr. Doldy was waiting for her just inside the gloomy passage to the court. He came out and helped her from the carriage. He did not speak to her, and, without any word passing between them, uncle and niece passively submitted to the guidance of a burly policeman, who ushered them through a dingy passage, and then, opening a door, led them into the murky little court. Laura was requested to sit down upon a narrow bench. She glanced around, and was at first taken aback by the mass of ugly, interested faces which gazed on her from the partitioned space devoted to the public. But her eye, travelling on, immediately fell upon Lewis Lingen, who sat just below her. The sight refreshed her

beyond measure. The coolness and elegant languor of his bearing gave her a sense of confident strength. She observed his delicate-coloured gloves, which no dusty papers ever seemed to soil. She drew auguries of triumph from the rich-hearted rose in his buttonhole. And a sense of amusement came over her as she watched him; for she saw that in one hand he held a scent bottle, which, in the intervals of looking over his papers or of speaking to those around him, he used delicately. Laura smiled to herself; she had not thought of bringing her own vinaigrette, but, she supposed, Mr. Lingen's experience of police-court odours had taught him more forethought. Certainly the atmosphere was abominable, she realised, now that her attention was attracted to it, and the excitement of her first entrance was wearing off. Surely the magistrate must get a headache, she thought; and can a man judge impartially with a headache?

She caught, just then, a rustling of dresses,

and, looking round, saw that near to her was a group of ladies and a few gentlemen, whose faces were full of curiosity. But they were not looking at her; and, following their eyes, she saw in a moment by the stir at the door that the prisoners must be coming in. She closed her eyes an instant and drew a long breath, and then looked to see the first scene of her triumph—Yriarte entering the dock.

Yes, he was mounting the steps which led to that lofty position. He was the same José Yriarte that Laura had once assured herself she loved; extravagantly well-dressed, a small cane in his gloved hand, a smile on his thinly-mustachioed lips. Laura's little boot-heel ground the board beneath her foot. This moment had an ecstasy of its own for her.

He was followed by the other prisoner, Anton, whose supremely handsome face elicited a subdued murmur of admiration from the ladies of the "people," who struggled forward, reckless of the physical sufferings of others, to catch a better view of him.

When he first appeared, a low exclamation of surprise in a familiar voice started Laura. She looked, and saw that Dorothy Silburn stood close beside her. She must have just come in ; but she took no notice of Laura—her eyes were fixed upon Anton.

Laura also looked again at the prisoners ; but hurriedly dropped her eyes, for Yriarte, leaning jauntily upon the edge of the dock, was smiling at her and trying to attract her attention, as if they were at the opera instead of in a police-court. Laura was intensely indignant—did he expect to carry off his humiliation so insolently ? She looked covertly up through her eyelashes after a second, to see whether he was still watching her. No ; he had turned, and, with that sickly peculiar leer which distinguishes the man of low and selfish amours, was scrutinising the faces of the ladies who stood near—looking either for the recognition of an acquaintance, or for some response to his general admiration.

Dorothy had been watching him. She

suddenly turned and looked at Laura; and then took out her handkerchief and put it to her lips, as if to hide their expression. Laura now dropped her eyes and sat motionless, for she had become aware that Mr. Lingen was speaking; that he was giving an outline of the case; that he was mentioning her name. He was then just introducing her, as it were, and expressing his confidence that the public sympathies would be given to a young lady who had the courage to come forward in such a painful case. She heard him describe José Yriarte as a Spaniard of good birth and high connections.

“And his accomplice in this disgraceful case,” said the magistrate with dignity and contempt, “who and what is he?”

“He is said to be a merchant, by himself and the other defendant,” answered Mr. Lingen, turning his eye-glass upon the handsome gentleman referred to; “but no traces of any such occupation can be discovered.”

“Is he a Spaniard also?”

“He appears to be Italian,” replied Mr. Lingen, “and professes to be only able to speak English with difficulty. But we have an interpreter in court.”

At this moment there was a little stir among the well-dressed spectators, and a little consultation among the authorities of the court. And then, to Laura’s great surprise, Dorothy Silburn, journalist, was announced, and stepped into the witness-box and was sworn by the clerk of the court. She kissed the Bible with a little shudder, caused by its greasiness, and an involuntary thought of all the lips which had pressed it before hers. The element of the ridiculous had an annoying way of presenting itself before Dorothy’s mental eye at the most inopportune moment.

“I had no intention of acting as witness in this case,” said she; “but, as you seem in doubt with regard to this Italian gentleman’s employment, may I be allowed to state that I have seen him recently acting in the capacity of model at the Akropolitan School of Art, and also in a private studio.”

“What an extraordinary occupation for a merchant!” remarked the magistrate. “Can you tell us anything further?” to Dorothy.

“Nothing,” she said, “except this, that the models at the Akropolitan School are paid half-a-crown an hour, and, by private students, even less; so that, as it seems to me, this gentleman can hardly have been in a position to act as a merchant, or to lend money in the manner named:” with which Dorothy withdrew, followed by a buzz of applause, while curious glances were turned upon Anton.

“A very shrewd conclusion,” said the magistrate to himself as he made a note of her evidence.

Dorothy, her mind relieved, sat down on the bench in Laura’s place; for that young lady was now called into the witness-box. Her appearance there arrested a conversation which had been going on between Yriarte and Anton since Dorothy’s statement. Yriarte had been leaning towards him, and had apparently been questioning him in an under-tone; but he

turned at once on hearing Laura's voice, and fixed his eyes on her with his habitual bold stare. This did not appear to disconcert Laura, who made her statements with great composure, and quietly met his gaze several times when referring to him. She drew the line so clearly, representing herself as an innocent and injured being, and with such apparent unconsciousness, that Lingen smiled within himself, and, looking up from his abstracted gaze upon his papers, he met Yriarte's eyes, so full of evident admiration of the lady's cleverness, that the lawyer himself hastily put up his eye-glass, in order to conceal his own expression.

"I first met Mr. Yriarte," said Laura, "at a ball given by some Spaniards of distinction in London. He afterwards obtained introductions to my aunt, Mrs. Honiton, and to my uncle, Dr. Doldy, and called frequently at both houses. He proposed marriage to me, and, as he was highly connected, my uncle made no objection, and we became engaged. Afterwards we met frequently, and, on more inti-

mate acquaintance, decided to break off the engagement. We had frequently corresponded during the engagement; and when it was broken off I returned the letters which I had of his, and asked for my own. At first he said he had burned them; afterwards he told me he had kept a few. A short time ago I met him in Rotten Row, and he told me that he owed a man some money; and that, my letters having been in a box which contained jewelry, his creditor had seized the box, and, discovering the contents, refused to return them until the debt was paid."

She then went into some particulars of the different interviews with Yriarte, stating that he attempted to get money from her by threats and menaces. Mr. Lingen also read aloud some of Yriarte's letters, asking for money, and saying that Anton would wait no longer, and that her letters would either be published or handed over to certain persons whom he would not name.

"And these letters of Miss Doldy's," said

the magistrate; "have they been inspected? These threats are of course groundless?"

Mr. Lingen dropped his eye-glass, and turned a perfectly blank and expressionless countenance upon the magistrate.

"I have looked at them," he said, "and they are such as any engaged lady might write—such as any engaged lady might write," he repeated with emphasis.

Yriarte pulled his mustachios, and looked across at Laura. She was as imperturbable as if carved out of stone.

"That makes it a very serious case," said the magistrate gravely.

The prisoners' advocate now spoke. He said that the prisoners allowed themselves to have acted wrongly; but he represented that their punishment should be something nominal. The principal defendant's circumstances had altered for the worse. Moreover, he had no doubt expended large sums of money during his connection with the plaintiff; and, in fine, neither of the defendants could fairly be ex-

pected to manifest the same high order of morality as an Englishman. Anton was unable to speak English, and knew nothing of the laws of the country. He had adopted a simple if rough expedient for obtaining money owed to him, and which he much needed. Yriarte was young, had not been long in England, and knew little of the social customs of the English. He had considered himself seriously ill-used by Miss Doldy, and, as some of his relations had refused to believe that the lady—who was known to be beautiful and an heiress—had accepted him in marriage, he had retained some letters as a protection against their insinuations. The fate of these letters was a natural though very unfortunate one. The learned gentleman spoke at considerable length, and drew a most touching picture of Yriarte as a forlorn and ill-used foreigner. The hero of the story preserved his composure admirably, and the prosecution maintained the silence which they had bound themselves to.

But the magistrate, who much mistrusted

the appearance of the prisoners, asked so many questions that the fabric so carefully built by their counsel soon vanished. It was impossible to conceal Yriarte's character, and Anton was too plainly his tool.

The result was that the prisoners were committed for trial by jury, as the magistrate considered the case too serious, and the necessary punishment too heavy, for it to be decided in a police-court. As soon as this was known, Dorothy went straight away to her home and hurried to her drawing-room. There she found Ernestine walking up and down in a state of suppressed excitement, her face pale, her hands clasped tight together.

"Is it over?" she exclaimed, as Dorothy entered.

"Yes," said Dorothy, sinking into a chair, quite exhausted with her rapid walk.

"Is he found guilty?"

"He is to be tried by jury; and it is expected, I heard, that he will get penal servitude for life."

“What!” cried Ernestine, in a tone of voice that electrified Dorothy; “No—surely you don’t mean it?”

“Indeed I do.”

“Penal servitude for life!” repeated Ernestine. “Oh, how shocking—how shocking! How wicked she is—how cruel! when she—oh, it is too terrible to think of.” And, quite overcome with agitation, Ernestine covered her face with trembling hands. Dorothy looked at her keenly, then rose, and brought her a glass of wine.

“Drink it,” she said; “you will make yourself ill, and you cannot afford to do so. These people can take care of themselves.”

“Yes, I suppose so; I don’t understand them. But, Dorothy, think of it—a man whom she has loved! Thank Heaven, I am not in that house now.”

“But she did not love him,” replied Dorothy contemptuously.

“Oh, yes, she did,” said Ernestine; “with her sort of love she did. But I never dreamed

till now how near a neighbour such love is to hate."

"Have you met him?" asked Dorothy, with a look of suppressed curiosity. She was intensely puzzled by the depth of Ernestine's agitation, and the knowledge she seemed to possess of Laura's relations with Yriarte.

"Never," answered Ernestine.

"Well, I recognised him, and his accomplice too; oddly enough, I had seen them both before without being aware of it. I have a tenacious memory for faces. Do you remember one evening long ago, when you were coming here with me from Mrs. Vavasour's, we met a little dandy who you said had followed you from the hospital? He admired your personal appearance, and you did not return the compliment; I remember you said he ought to be put under sanitary regimen. He remarked that you were a deuced fine woman, as we passed him in the street. Do you recall the man I mean?"

"I think so," said Ernestine. "Yes; I

remember the man who said that as we passed, just under a lamp-post. And that was Yriarte! I wish I had not seen him! I wish I had never heard of him! Oh, Dorothy, it is making a weak fool of me, this helpless position in the midst of such a hateful tragedy."

"Dear Ernestine, I think you are nervous, and exaggerate the horrors of the affair. Yriarte richly deserves his punishment, and Laura is quite proud of having accomplished the duty of punishing him."

"But she—how dare she take up such a task? I wonder the heavens did not fall on her. Dorothy, don't talk to me; I am provoked into saying foolish things. I begin to see that this world is a mystery to me."

"You are in it, but not of it," said Dorothy; "you are the most unworldly person I know, and I am quite glad you recognise the fact at last. Don't put on your hat in such a hurry—you are not fit to run away to your work

yet. And you have not heard about my recognising Yriarte's fellow-prisoner !”

“ Well ? ” said Ernestine, wearily.

“ I knew him at once ; I have seen him sitting as a model at half-a-crown an hour many a time. A splendidly handsome fellow ; all body, and no brains—regularly run to beauty as a plant runs to seed. A mere tool in Yriarte's hands, evidently—he had never had any money to lend Yriarte, it was perfectly plain on the face of it. The whole thing was so easily seen to have been got up to frighten Laura, that I don't at all wonder at the talk I heard about a heavy sentence.”

“ Dorothy, don't tell me any more ; I am sated with horrors.”

Dorothy opened her eyes very wide indeed. “ Horrors ? ” she repeated ; “ why, this is not so dreadful.”

“ Oh, it is, it is,” said Ernestine, passionately ; “ why, the world is heartless—cold, cruel—yes, heartless.”

She dropped her face upon her hands,

which were clasped on the table before her.

When, after some moments of a sad silence, she raised her head again, Coventry stood opposite her, his eyes fixed upon her with a strange expression in them which deeply moved her. They were full of love and a yearning desire to help her.

Dorothy was not in the room.

There is something priestly in the poetic character. Poets are truly the elder brothers of the race, and the younger members of that great family are both penetrated by their insight and aided by their spiritual experience. The true ghostly father is he who can breathe the rarified air of those heights of the spirit where poetry finds her home.

Ernestine, looking up into his eyes, recognised in Coventry the ideal father confessor. This unworldly being would read rightly an opened heart, and was incapable of any of the pettinesses of ordinary human nature which make confession unsafe.

“He ought not to be so heavily punished,” she said, full of excitement, and seeming not to remember that Coventry had only just come into the room, and had not been present during her talk with Dorothy. “He does not deserve it, and it is wicked that she should be able to crush him merely for her own selfish ends—that his whole life should be sacrificed so cruelly in order that she may be rich. Now I can believe in the accusations of cruelty which are made against women—I never could before. But what can be more hideous than for a woman to condemn a man to the life of a convict because he is in her way? Why could she not stab him, or pay an assassin? Such a deed would have been angelic by the side of this, which civilisation permits and justice shields. I understand now how vivisection can exist; there are natures to whom the occupation is natural and easy. It is the injustice of the thing that hurts me.”

“I have often thought,” remarked Coventry reflectively, “that I ought rather to have

christened you Themis than Minerva, you have such an instinctive love of justice in your character."

"But," said Ernestine, "there is such a crying lack of justice here, that one who knew all the circumstances must perceive it."

"You know too much for your peace of mind," said Coventry, looking at her with that expression in his eyes which seemed to draw out her soul.

"And too little to be of any real use," she answered; "but I am so thankful I had the courage to come away before this was done. If I were with Arthur now, I think I could not hold my tongue, and let Laura get all she wishes by just putting her foot upon her lover. The cold and bloodless cruelty of this is to me intolerable. I could not have borne to see him sink into this degradation of selfishness with her—I should have betrayed her."

She was talking to herself all this while, only feeling an intense relief in the sense that there was someone in the same room with her

whom she could trust utterly. Coventry asked no questions ; he let her talk on and ease her heart, and when she paused he turned to her and said, " Laura has come between you two, and spoiled the harmony of your lives. But why let her spoil them altogether ? Why not let Dr. Doldy at least understand the motives of your actions ? "

He had touched, as he well knew, upon a tender spot. Ernestine would have given ten years of life to have Dr. Doldy understand her conduct aright.

" No," she said, starting to her feet ; " that may not be. I have tried to see the right, and will try to follow it. I have a secret to keep, and I will keep it ; but I will not be paid for keeping it."

With which enigmatical speech she departed, forgetting to say good-bye. Coventry was too absorbed himself to notice her rudeness.

CHAPTER XI.

ANGELS' VISITS.

ERNESTINE'S unceremonious departure from the quaint confessional scene in which Coventry played the part of father confessor, meant that she was afraid of letting her feelings run away with her, and that she intended to distract her mind by work as quickly as possible.

It was a curious feature in her character, and known to scarcely anyone but herself, that this apparently cold woman was frequently driven to take such means to conquer the intensity of feeling which burned behind the calm exterior, and threatened to break it down.

She went straight from the Silburns' house

to Miss Armine's lodgings. She found that lady sitting dolefully enough in the new rooms which Dorothy had found for her. The blinds were down, and the little parlour looked dim and gloomy.

"Will you excuse this dark room?" said Miss Armine, rising languidly from the corner of the sofa in which she had been curled up; "my head aches so, I cannot bear the light."

Ernestine found her way in the semi-darkness to the side of the sofa.

"And I am all over chills, and I ache from head to foot; and I can't eat anything, and I was doing a little picture on commission, and it isn't finished."

To this pathetic outcry Ernestine made an irrelevant answer.

"Come to the window; you must bear the light for a moment, as I want to see your tongue."

Miss Armine submitted in silence. Ernestine only held the blind back a little.

“Coated with creamy fur—no wonder you can't eat. You must go to bed right off and leave pictures and commissions alone for the present.”

In a quarter of an hour Miss Armine was in bed, to her own intense relief, in the character of a really sick person. She had held up her aching head and worried about her pictures just as long as was possible; and now, when the effort was becoming unbearable, the doctor had come and told her to lie down and give up the responsibilities of life. The release was as nearly pleasant as any sensation could be to her in her present state; and she laid her head upon the pillow in her darkened bedroom with a sigh of thankfulness.

“Don't spend too much of your time here, dear Dr. Ernestine,” she said. “It is not worth your while.”

“You must be well nursed,” said Ernestine gently, as she gave some finishing touches to her arrangements.

Miss Armine raised her head in horror, and

started up on to her elbows in spite of her weariness.

“Nursed—oh no, indeed, I shall want no nursing, I can’t pay a nurse ; and indeed, dear Dr. Ernestine, I will be so good and take so much care of myself, I shall not want a nurse.”

“Very well,” said Earnestine, quietly, “you shall not have one if you don’t wish it.”

The promise pacified the girl, for she had little idea of how ill she really was, or what skilled nursing she would require.

Ernestine had little time to think of her own affairs after this.

She had Miss Armine’s life in her hands, as she well knew, and she was determined to save it.

“Ernestine,” said Dorothy, one day when she found her by Miss Armine’s bedside ; “it is not right for you to spend half your time here. You are not attending to your own interests.”

“Typhoid,” was Ernestine’s somewhat ora-

cular reply, "depends more than any known disease on good nursing. I think I am attending to my own interests in properly looking after a case like this. I dare not trust any but a very good nurse with her now; but I find it will be necessary for some one to stay with her while I am obliged to be away, as I sometimes am."

"I will do that," said Dorothy; "I shall just enjoy it. I was born to be a nurse; I only want a little training, and this will just be an opportunity for me."

And so these two women (neither of whom, by the way, could rightly afford to do it) gave their time and their brains and their hearts to Miss Armine; watching her night and day, and nursing her through the fever and delirium.

Ernestine was indeed glad, so far as was possible, to lose thought of her own life and troubles in Miss Armine's. Her struggles were harder, her future was more doubtful, than she let even Dorothy know. She was

heavily handicapped at the beginning of her solitary career. She was a woman, to begin with—a fact which, in England, places a worker at a great disadvantage. She was compelled by sheer lack of money to take obscure lodgings, instead of a house in Wimpole-street; and her paying connection was so small that she began to feel her daily bread and butter a matter of great concern. Indeed she knew that, unless some fresh opening came for her before long, she would be in actual want.

One day she heard that a house-surgeon was wanted at the hospital where she had so long worked. She debated much whether to apply for the post, which would avert her immediate distress, as she would have rooms in the hospital and a small salary. It required some courage to go back among her old colleagues and brave all the gossip which her applying for such a post would cause. She put the idea aside for a day or two, and gave unremitting attention to her few patients. But

they were so few, and her connection showed so little sign of increasing, that she could not let the opportunity slip altogether. So one day she left Dorothy to take charge of Miss Armine, whose course of fever had not yet run out, and walked to the hospital.

She was welcomed with great courtesy by her old friends. Dr. Vavasour Doldy was something more than Dr. Vavasour had been. She had entered the aristocracy of medicine, and was respected accordingly; and her proposal was evidently looked on with favour, though with some surprise, until she made it known that she would expect to receive the same salary as the former house-surgeon had received.

“Ah!” said the secretary, coldly, “that makes a difference. We have one or two excellent candidates who are ready to fill the post unpaid, for the sake of the experience. Of course your name and position would have influenced us to give the preference to you; but we really cannot afford a salary.”

Ernestine went back to Miss Armine's sick-room, and told her story to the sympathetic Dorothy, who carried it home to Coventry at dinner time, now almost the only hour in the day when she saw him. Indeed, that gentleman was left so much to his own devices now that Dorothy had turned nurse, that it was pretty nearly certain he must get into mischief before long. And the very next morning after Ernestine's call at the hospital, he set about it. Soon after Dorothy had gone out, he sallied forth himself, and walked straight into the city to Mr. Lingen's office.

Lewis Lingen was sitting alone in his dust-coloured room when a clerk brought in a card and handed it to him.

"The gentleman does not wish to come in unless you are quite disengaged; otherwise he will call again."

"Coventry Silburn!—ah, I know," said Lingen, smiling to himself; "a verse-maker." "Yes, show him in at once," he added aloud to the clerk.

When Coventry entered, Lingen looked up, eye-glass on eye, from his papers. He had never had to do with this verse-maker personally. After a second's scrutiny, while Coventry advanced, he rose to welcome him—dropping the eye-glass as he did so, and putting it inside his waistcoat. The man before him was pellucid—his soul shone out of his eyes instead of being concealed behind them. Lingen looked the incarnation of bright friendliness, welcoming the poet who had strayed into his office, much as he might have greeted a wandering butterfly.

“I have come,” said Coventry, “on a very impertinent errand. I don't want to be really impertinent; I have only one question to ask you, and you will betray no secrets in answering it.”

“Sit down, if you please,” said Mr. Lingen, “I am not busy just now; and I have often desired to meet you, though I never anticipated seeing you here. You are about the

last man in London whom I should expect to find in my office.”

“You are right; I should not be likely to come here on my own affairs. I am putting my fingers into other people’s pies, and I shall probably make a mess of it.”

“Well! and how am I to help you in this cookery?”

“I have come to you,” said Coventry, “because you know everybody’s secrets, and can tell me what is possible and what is not. There are two splendid people whom both you and I know, whose lives are being made miserable. They have separated on a flimsy pretext, and are living apart and breaking their hearts over it. Now I for one don’t believe in their pretext: I think there is a secret between them, which you probably know. So I want you to tell me whether there is anything to be done to bring these people together again.”

“And these people are—?”

“Dr. Doldy and Mrs. Dr. Doldy.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Lingen, abstractedly, wearing the look which came upon him when he turned his vision inwards to review all the points of a case, “I heard there was some professional quarrel between them; you don’t believe that?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Coventry. “Indeed I know it is true. And it is just what might have been expected with two people of strong character, of differing views, and separated by half a generation in technical education. But they are not the people to actually break up a life which they had just formed together because of such a quarrel. Something besides that has come between them.”

“And how can I know anything about it?”

“Because I think it relates to Miss Doldy’s affairs.”

“And, if I may ask another question, what should make you expect me to help you if I do know anything?”

“Only the shape of your head,” answered

Coventry. "I am sure you will do what you can to avert misfortune from two such people as these are."

"I don't know Mrs. Doldy," said Mr. Lingen; "I have heard that she is a handsome woman."

"She is a glorious woman," exclaimed Coventry, "a woman whose greatest personal charm is that, though of course she knows she is handsome, she does not think about it, for she has other things in her mind."

"I should like to see her," said Mr. Lingen; "like most intensely practical men, I delight in fast horses and fine women."

"But you are not naturally intensely practical; you have turned the powers of a mind created to deal with abstractions, upon facts. But as to Dr. Ernestine, you will not meet her in society now; you will have to enter Bohemia and come to my house if you are to see her. But even that I can't promise you at present; she is very busy."

“And you think it is Miss Doldy who has come between these two?”

“Not knowingly, I fancy; it appears to me as if Dr. Ernestine had, by some accident, come to know more of Miss Doldy's affairs than she liked, and whatever has come between her and Dr. Doldy, has come, I feel sure, by silence and the keeping of secrets.”

“Yes; that is possible. But I can do nothing until Miss Doldy is married. When she is Lady Flaxen, and Mr. Yriarte is a convict, I think I may help you.”

“Does he really deserve such a punishment?” asked Coventry, thinking of Ernestine's distress when she spoke of it.

“Certainly,” exclaimed Mr. Lingen, with unusual heat of manner; “for the matter of that, he ought to be hung. But at present,” he added more coolly, “my lips are sealed. When those two events have taken place of which I spoke, I believe I can help you to bring the doctors together again. But you

musn't forget your promise to introduce me to the lady."

They talked for awhile about other things—literature principally. And then Coventry went home, and told Mrs. Silburn in enigmatical fashion that "he had been to make a call, and had seen a man of imagination who had wasted himself upon facts."

"And who is this wonderful man?" asked Dorothy.

"Lewis Lingen."

"Now," exclaimed Dorothy, "you have done something useful for once in your life. You have reminded me, by mentioning that man's name, of how it is that poor little Ruth Armine hasn't got any money. She gets her dividends from him; and like the clever, practical people we are, we never left her new address at the old lodgings. And, of course, being ill, she has not been at the Art School, or any of her haunts. I expect he has lost her; I will write him a note at once."

Which she did; and, in the delight of her

discovery, forgot to question Coventry any further about his interview with the great lawyer.

As it happened, Dorothy's note was very welcome to Mr. Lingen; for it arrived just as Ruth's brother-in-law, fresh out of the train from the north, had entered his office to demand of him what he meant by such nonsense as telegraphing to him that his sister had disappeared?

CHAPTER XII.

A PRACTICAL MAN.

RUTH ARMINE's brother-in-law was a man who generally met with respect. He was eminently respectable in appearance, always cool, well dressed, well brushed, quiet in manner; yet in disposition he was a species of incarnate whirlwind. The moment Mr. Lingen met his quick restless eyes, he was aware of the fact that he had encountered one of those men who seem created to fill something of the office of a human tornado. Such men cannot live unless they both move themselves and stir the world around them. If they are not born into a position where they are utilised as conquerors, soldiers, or politicians, they enter the

easier arena of finance, and become gigantic speculators, and make of themselves a sort of centre to a perpetual stir and change of money.

Mr. Nugent was supposed to be a cotton-spinner. His real affairs in life were only understood by a few men like himself well known in the great money exchanges of Europe.

He had come to London now, not on business, but to see what had become of his little sister-in-law. She had worried him for some years by persistently refusing to give up her independence and add herself to the wife and nine daughters, who made a comparatively colourless party round his dinner-table, and now she had put the cap to her absurdities by losing herself in some extraordinary fashion; and when Mr. Lingen, who was very busy, looked up from his papers and met the quick eyes of his visitor, he felt very glad that Dorothy's note had just come, and that he could perhaps divert the fury of the whirl-

wind by supplying some news of the lost relation.

Mr. Nugent had a peculiarity which was quite a part of himself. He always understood—or supposed he understood—what people had to say before they had half said it. He never heard a sentence to the end.

“Ruth ill?—just what might be expected—delirious?—brain fever, of course. The foolish girl will work. Women can’t stand it—all nonsense to suppose they can. They weren’t created for it, and it’s no good trying to make them over again. Just give me her address—thanks,”—jotting it down in his note-book while he spoke. “I must be off directly, as I’ve only got about an hour to look her up in.—Oh, by the way, I expect I shall have to send for a physician for the child. She is sure to have called in some little local nobody. Whom should you recommend? My friend Dr. Bull is out of town to-day, I know.”

“Dr. Doldy, certainly,” said Mr. Lingen.

“ I will give you his address in case you need it, but I quite hope you will find Miss Armine better, as Mrs. Silburn speaks of the crisis being over now.”

“ Good ! ” said his visitor. “ Good-bye, Lingen,” and was gone without waiting any answer.

In less than half-an-hour he was at the door of Miss Armine’s new lodgings in confidential talk with her landlady, who informed him that the poor lady was raving mad with brain-fever and certain to die. The good woman was so delighted with the substantial appearance of this relation of her sick lodger that she tried to pour volumes of eloquence on him; but he would hear only an answer to one question, “ Is a doctor attending her ? ”

“ Yes, sir, a lady doctor ” Any further information was drowned in Mr. Nugent’s exclamation of horror. “ A lady ! ” Without any further pause he went up the stairs to look for the invalid—the landlady following as quickly as she could.

At the bedroom door they paused. There was a faint sound of talking.

“Ah! poor soul, she’s wandering again,” said the landlady.

“Is there any one there?” asked Mr. Nugent.

“Yes, sir, the doctor is there now.” Mr. Nugent made a grimace. “A lady!—well, let me go in.”

He entered; Ernestine was standing by the window; when she saw him she advanced.

“By Jove!” said Mr. Nugent to himself, “this is the style of thing, is it? A splendid woman. I declare I feel ill. I wonder hadn’t I better ask her advice?”

These reflections only took a second, and were expressed in the merriest imaginable twinkle of Mr. Nugent’s bright eyes as they looked at Ernestine.

“You are the doctor?” he said, aloud, very gravely. Ernestine only bowed.

“Miss Armine is my wife’s sister,” said

Mr. Nugent; "we have been anxious about her. She is very ill?"

"Yes," replied Ernestine, "it is a bad case of typhoid fever. The incubation has lasted unusually long; but by cooling baths and packs we have carried her through the worst of the fever; she will soon be better now."

"Cooling baths?" said Mr. Nugent, with that slight shudder which the idea of hydro-pathic treatment generally produces in a full-blooded man, "reducing things, aren't they? Hope you've given her plenty of brandy. The right thing in fever, isn't it?"

"It is useful if the powers of life begin to fail; it has scarcely been needed as yet, in this case."

"Egad, I think I wouldn't wait for the powers of life to fail before I began dosing. I am sure, Madam," turning to Ernestine with infinite gravity of countenance, and the most absurdly merry eyes, "you will allow me to call in a physician to consult with you; little Ruth is my wife's only sister, and I feel my

wife would expect me to call in a dozen doctors at least.”

He was gone without waiting for an answer, after his usual fashion.

“Cooling baths!” said he to himself as he got into a hansom, and told the man to “drive—if he knew how—” to Dr. Doldy’s address.

“Cooling baths! and no brandy! Poor little Ruth!”

Ernestine sat down very quietly by the side of her patient to await the arrival of the physician. She knew, by having followed every symptom, that she understood her case thoroughly. She knew that she had treated it correctly, and further, she knew that by incessant personal devotion she had saved her patient’s life over and over again, when, in the hands of an incompetent or careless nurse, it would have been sacrificed. She had little fear of the bigwigs of the profession, except with regard to their ignorance. So she had no trepidation about the coming consultation,

and amused herself by wondering with which of the great men it would be.

Never, for a single instant, did she think of the very man whom Mr. Nugent was at that moment bringing in triumph. Had she dreamed who was to enter that room and stand beside her, would she have run away? Probably.

Mr. Nugent had a troublesome task to catch his doctor; for he had not only to follow him into a police-court, but to wait patiently (a more difficult task to him than pushing or hurrying) until Dr. Doldy had given evidence.

For it was the day on which Yriarte's case was before the court.

CHAPTER XIII.

“THE COURSE OF TRUE *LAW* NEVER DID RUN
SMOOTH.”

EVERY preparation had now been made by both sides ; and, provided with every appliance of the law for offence and defence, Yriarte and Laura—these sometime lovers—found themselves to-day before a judge and jury.

Sir Percy Flaxen drove down to the court with Laura, and there left her in Dr. Doldy's care. He was a little proud of accompanying her, for he was one of that numerous class of persons who are unable to perceive the difference between fame and notoriety. Laura's affair had been talked about in his set, and he felt himself eminent in being connected with

the Miss Doldy. Moreover, he was intensely lazy, and Laura's energy in the matter excited his admiration greatly. “You're an awfully plucky girl,” he said, as he handed her out of the carriage; and so, encouraged by his admiration, Laura entered the court.

And only to meet with more admiration. Her name and her case had run the round of the newspapers; the public sympathies which Mr. Lingen had asked for her were aroused. Curiosity led quite a number of persons of all classes into the court; and when Laura went in she soon found that she was a sort of heroine.

There was an array of counsel on both sides. Now, Mr. Lingen had secured for Laura the biggest man of the day, so Yriarte had to content himself with next best. Everything was exceedingly solemn; and when the two prisoners were ushered in, there was a certain awed silence. For these men were prospective convicts, and the frequenters of criminal courts feel a certain interest in convicts. They are people

whose names go once at least into the newspaper, at all events; and a great many times upon the tongue of that even more ubiquitous scandal-monger, the public.

Yriarte, however, looked round with his invariable jauntiness. But then he had been out on bail, and had lived as usual during the interval. Moreover, he had just refreshed himself with a tall glass of brandy and soda. But Anton looked dejected. He had been in gaol all the while, and had not relished it. He did not understand the language sufficiently to know what passed in court; but he was quite awake now to the fact that Yriarte had made a mess of the speculation, and that he (Anton) was likely to suffer for it.

The court assembled, the names of the jury were called over, the judge entered in the usual hush and rising of all, and the case was fully gone into with the usual formalities; counsel on both sides having been well instructed as to the line which they were to take. These instructions naturally emanated from

Lingen, who, though the defendants' instructions went through other solicitors, occupied the peculiar position of representative of both the parties, and had arranged the terms of compromise. Dr. Doldy's examination led of course only to formal statements of his niece's position, and of the circumstances of her engagement; but the peculiarity of this part of the trial consisted in the contrast between the emotion of suppressed rage that almost prevented him from giving his evidence, and the imperturbable and dainty tranquillity of his ward.

The special circumstance that had led to this distress of his was the reading in court of the more insulting letters from the defendants, which Lewis Lingen had not previously placed before him.

These of course were not new to Laura, but upon the chivalrous doctor their effect was prodigious. He felt as if he had been no protection at all to his ward, and in his excited state his conscience even reproached him for

his devotion to Ernestine, while Laura was left to the mercy of a scoundrel.

A man of tender sensibilities might well be pardoned for being overpowered with horror at his entrance into a world of rascality which had drawn so very near to the romantic world (in this respect now, alas! so ruined) of his own life.

And the letters were indeed masterpieces of diabolic subtlety and showed a strange experience of woman, and one which suggested that the writer's career had lain in dark walks of life. Here is a passage read from a letter from Anton to Laura, received after Yriarte had begun to feel that she was becoming too strong for him, and that a subtler kind of intimidation must be resorted to.

The judge, the counsel, and the jury, all apparently accepted the fact that Anton had written it, and the poor fellow himself, owing to his foreign ignorance, scarcely knew what to do, and if he had thought of protesting was not sure it would be of any avail, as the

letter was in his handwriting and bore his signature.

But indeed it had been written from beginning to end by Yriarte, and Anton's share in it had been that of copyist merely. Here is the precious effusion :

“Madam,—It has become my duty, in the interests of what is due to myself, and owing to my knowledge of the affairs of my debtor, Mr. Yriarte, and of his relations to yourself, to write you concerning the box in my possession containing your letters. For some weeks I rested in ignorance of the value of its contents, and the box remained with seal unbroken, owing to the pressing representations of Mr. Yriarte. Now that I have grown so anxious about my money as to violate his confidence, I understand the reasons for his delicacy. Such a correspondence is of an importance too vast for the intrusion of third people into its sanctity. It is indeed surprising, Madam, that you do not press yourself immediately to withdraw this most valuable box

from my hands. Having read but a portion of your letters, I am bound to confess that surprise reaches me when I contemplate your negligence. Mr. Yriarte had led me to believe that the box contained besides the letters some securities which, if not intrinsically valuable at the moment, had at least a reversionary value. The securities in my possession I find to meet that description definitively; they are indeed not such as your banker would accept, but I think your solicitor would but too well recognise their excellence. I can now rest tranquil about the debt that presses so heavily to be repaid, for I feel sure that no one would longer than necessary make delay in the getting back of letters so confidential. Your memory, Madam, will surely not fail you when you look back to the time when these letters passed to Mr. Yriarte from yourself. The poor gentleman cannot himself make the liquidation due to me, but it is with a certain confidence that I address myself, Miss, to you, before the enforcement of my

affairs should lead to my disturbing your amiable relatives. Perhaps I shall only send a copy of one or two letters to your guardian. The circumstances being in my power, I shall consider well, and can admit of no further trifling. Anticipating a speedy and satisfactory enclosure from yourself, Miss, when I shall be delighted to transfer to you the burden of these epistles, I have the honour to be, my dear Miss Doldy, yours most humbly,

“ANTON.”

The other most important letter bore a date one day subsequent to the last, and was ostensibly, as well as actually, the composition of Yriarte himself.

“My dear Miss Laura,—My most oppressive creditor, Anton, informs me that he has violated my confidence, and has read a portion of the private correspondence, and that he has been communicating with you. Much as I regret this new and disagreeable development of affairs, you will see how powerless I am

in my present distressing circumstances to prevent it.

“I have endeavoured my utmost to save your susceptible feelings, but it is now too late. Anton has opened the box, and is becoming more domineering and threatening to me. He has got some of the most dreadful to be seen in his hands, I find, and evidently expects that his affairs will now be put right without procrastination by your excellent guardian and yourself. I know not what to do. Please to inform me what reply you make to the dreaded Anton. What can be arranged now for a few hundred pounds without the enlargement of publicity, who knows to what it may not extend itself by delay? The few letters that are in my possession are readily at your service, so soon as the others are got by you from the hands of our oppressor. Please think of yourself even more than of me. “JOSÉ.”

After everything had been gone through,

and the enormity of Yriarte's crime dwelt upon by Laura's counsel, Yriarte's counsel created quite a diversion by bringing forward the view that, as Miss Doldy had distinctly stated that there was nothing in the letters she was ashamed of, Yriarte's threats were harmless, and amounted to nothing but empty words. Yriarte had done the lady no harm; he had merely proposed to make public certain innocent epistles of hers. His attempt to obtain money from her evidently was of the nature of an appeal rather than a threat. Counsel was manifestly pleased with this line of argument, and was pursuing it with some ardour; for, having only glanced over the case hurriedly, he was not aware of all its weak points. The idea of the harmlessness of Yriarte's conduct was plainly producing some effect upon the jury, and counsel was becoming quite flowery in his ponderous eloquence, when he was suddenly arrested by an indescribable look from Lingen, which puzzled him so much, that he sat down precipitately,

leaving the learned gentleman who had espoused Laura's cause to descend upon the court with a beautiful speech upon the subject of the natural delicacy of a young girl's feelings. He painted an imaginary Laura, robbing herself of pocket-money and jewels in order to silence the heartless man who would expose to a cold world her innocent expressions of affection.

Laura was very glad that she had her fan with her to-day. She pretended to use it, and hid behind its friendly shelter while this was going on. Even her wonderful facial control could scarcely be relied on. She dared not meet Lingen's eye; she was quite afraid she would laugh if she did.

The judge proceeded to sum up, and the jury, after a very short consultation, found both prisoners guilty. This announcement produced no effect in court, as it was quite expected. Laura lowered her eyes more carefully than before, for she knew that her counsel would now, on her behalf, recommend

Yriarte to mercy. This he did, saying that Miss Doldy was anxious the prisoner should be lightly punished, on account of the eminent position of his family. But the judge shook his head, and remarked that such a case as this must be punished duly, for the protection of the public. He proceeded to say that he considered Mr. Yriarte a far worse character than a highwayman; and that crime such as he had committed ought to be strongly repressed. Unless this were done, the peace of mind which an ordinary member of society is entitled to would be continually endangered; and he, the judge, had the interests of society to protect. Therefore he felt himself compelled, notwithstanding Miss Doldy's feelings, and those of Mr. Yriarte's connections, to administer justice in this case with a strong hand. “I consider it my unavoidable duty,” he concluded, “to sentence the prisoner Anton to two years' penal servitude with hard labour; and the prisoner Yriarte to penal servitude for life. And I may remark that I think the

public owes a debt of gratitude to Miss Doldy for her courage in prosecuting in so painful a case."

When the sentence fell on his ears, Yriarte looked astounded for a moment, then, quickly recovering himself, he leaned over the dock and touched Lingen with his cane.

"How's this?" he whispered angrily, "I was to be let off easy if I kept my mouth shut."

"I'm as much surprised as yourself," answered Lingen. "It's a very heavy sentence, a most extreme sentence. But it's your own fault—we have done our best. If you had only looked a little more innocent, the case need never have come into this court."

"And have I kept quiet about that little minx for nothing?" exclaimed Yriarte, darting a look of fury at Laura. But at this moment a little stir was caused in court by a bright-eyed gentleman who, seeing that the case was practically concluded, pushed his

way to Dr. Doldy. A few words were spoken between them, Dr. Doldy sent a message to Laura, and went out with Mr. Nugent, the bright-eyed gentleman in question.

At the same moment the prisoners were hurried away; Yriarte gathered himself up and left the dock with the same smile and airy step that he entered it.

Poor Anton he found outside, so overwhelmed with emotion that the policeman in charge of him had propped him, like an awkward parcel, against the wall. The poor fellow was really overcome by the extent of his misfortune. But Yriarte soon rendered him a little less gelatinous; he hissed out some fierce Spanish oaths at him. Anton feared this irritable treacherous little Spaniard as a beaten cur fears his master, for he was intensely conscious that he himself was devoid of the brain power which Yriarte possessed. So he tried to straighten himself

under the burden of his fate, when Yriarte swore at him.

In the meantime Mr. Nugent had called a hansom and carried off his doctor in triumph to Miss Armine's lodgings.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONSULTATION.

“I FOUND my sister-in-law in the hands of a lady doctor,” said Mr. Nugent, as they drove along, “and though I have a great respect for the sex, I have my doubts as to the ability of a woman to pull through such a serious case as this. Have you seen much of the lady doctors?”

“Yes,” said Dr. Doldy, rather quietly, “I have.” Knowing the limited number of feminine practitioners, he began to wonder whom he was to meet.

“Well, what do you think of their practice? Isn't it just a piece of ridiculous nonsense, like my little sister's painting, ending in brain fever and an exhausted physique?”

One of Mr. Nugent's characteristics was to retain his own opinion until it was altered by a rival opinion from someone as influential as himself in another line. Ernestine's words had already passed out of his volatile mind, and he returned to his own theory—supported as it was by the voluble landlady—that Miss Armine was ill with brain fever. The opinion of an unknown doctor—a lady too!—had absolutely no weight with him.

“In some cases it is perhaps too exhausting a career,” was all Dr. Doldy could be persuaded to say.

Mr. Nugent found he could not be brought out upon this subject, so he began to speak of Yriarte's case, of which he had seen just enough to excite his interest and curiosity. Dr. Doldy very willingly spoke of this, as his mind was full of it.

Ernestine, sitting beside her patient's bed, with the room door ajar, heard the two gentlemen come in. Mr. Nugent was speaking.

in his quick bright voice, as they came up stairs.

“A scandalous affair. I should have suggested hanging the man, had I been on the jury; really I think the sentence a lenient one.”

They were at the door of the bedroom. Mr. Nugent pushed it open, and entering first, spoke in a lower tone:

“I have been a long time, madam; but I had to follow this gentleman into a court of justice, and wait there until he was at liberty to accompany me.”

So saying, he drew back and made way for Dr. Doldy, who, with a general professional bow entering the room, advanced to the side of the bed and drew the curtain which screened the patient from his view. At the instant Ernestine rose from her seat, and faced him on the other side. She was pale as a ghost, and had she indeed been a revisiter of the glimpses of the moon, she could not have startled Dr. Doldy more effectually.

He stood motionless for a couple of seconds, the curtain held back as if to throw light upon Miss Armine's face; but his eyes were fixed upon Ernestine. How long he might have stood thus lost and rapt in wonder at sight of the face which had but such a little while ago been a familiar daily vision, it is impossible to guess: a faint moan from Miss Armine recalled him to a sense of the position. He immediately dropped his eyes upon the pale face which looked out from the pillows. And, after a pause of another second, in which to draw a deep breath, he was able with some appearance of self-possession to examine the patient. This did not take him long; but he protracted it as long as possible, for he scarcely knew how to act.

"I should like to know how you have been treating the case," he said at last to Ernestine—but with a look at Mr. Nugent. That gentlemen took the hint, closed the door, and retired to a little sitting-room which adjoined, leaving the doctors in consultation.

For a moment after he left them, neither moved nor spoke. Only Ruth Armine's faint delirious moans broke the silence.

Ernestine spoke first.

"Will you tell me what the sentence was?"

Dr. Doldy had passed through so many unusual emotions since entering the room that he really did not know what she referred to. He looked vacantly at her for a moment; and then he recalled the scene he had left in coming to this sick-room.

"The sentence passed on Mr. Yriarte, do you mean? Penal servitude for life."

"Is that sentence actually passed upon him?" cried Ernestine, leaning towards him across the bed in her eagerness.

"And Laura can bring this living death on him, and sit by while he is condemned. Laura hides her falseness and treachery under a demure face, and lets him go into the hell of a convict life that she—and *you* — may be *rich!*"

Dr. Doldy had come round the bed while she spoke, and now stood close to her.

“Are you mad?” he said, in a strange voice. The words sounded like the words of madness to his ear; yet they were uttered in that intense manner which was peculiar to Ernestine when agitated, and the tones of her voice swayed him as the wind sways the trees.

“Only mad,” she said, “in speaking to you. For you are the slave of the society in which you live, and of the compromise which it demands. You have been sapping the life blood of your conscience in all these years that you have been pandering to the miserable weaknesses of society, and now you are being paid for it. You have made yourself believe that Laura’s marriage for money was justifiable, just because it would not disgust the people you lived among, and because you wanted her money in order to live like those people; and now you are being rewarded by being dragged into a deeper degradation that even you would

relish—though you have cultivated your taste for worldliness. Don't touch me—don't stop me—I shall say too much if you do.”

“Ernestine,” he said, almost violently catching her arm (for she was endeavouring to pass him), “you must and shall explain these words !”

“No !” she answered, “I shall not. You will forget them — you will want to forget them. You will sink back into the ease and luxury of your life when all is arranged. Arthur ! if I could have saved you —if I had had influence enough with you to sting you into independence and straightforward living, I would have risked everything. But, no—your nature is essentially ease-loving—you must have ease ; well, you will have it now. Let me go, Arthur ; I will not stay here any longer, or I shall say too much.”

She broke from him by a sudden gesture, and moved quickly away to escape from the room. The sudden action—or, perhaps, her over-excited state—made her stagger, and for

a moment she leaned, breathless and white, against the wall.

Dr. Doldy, looking at her in amazement (for this outburst of excitement was something he had never seen the like of in her), suddenly started and ejaculated involuntarily, "Good heavens!" Looking at her, as she stood there, an idea flashed into his mind; at the same instant he rushed to her side, and put his arm to support her.

"You are ill," he said; and then, in an infinitely tender, eloquent voice, full of subtle meaning, yet not so subtle but that she understood it—"Ernestine."

She raised her hands to ward him off. "Don't touch me!" she said, in a tone almost of entreaty, and raised her eyes to his for a second; but she dropped them quickly, and the intense pallor of her face gave sudden place to a vivid, beautiful blush.

She turned, with a rapid movement snatched her hat from a table close by, and was gone from the room.

He rushed after her, but her nimble feet had carried her down the stairs and out of the house before he had reached the landing.

For an instant he thought of following her, but he heard Mr. Nugent approaching the sitting-room door. The situation in which he found himself was rather ridiculous than sublime.

He quickly composed his face and turned, making as if he had intended to enter the sitting-room.

“Well,” said Mr. Nugent, “what do you think? There is no danger, is there?” he asked, more anxiously, scanning Dr. Doldy’s face, which bore marks of excitement.

In the midst of his emotion a sense of the absurd came upon Dr. Doldy, as he recalled the fact that no word had been uttered about the unfortunate patient between these doctors in consultation.

He could hardly confess the fact to such a man as Mr. Nugent. With a violent mental

effort he recalled the patient to his mind, and something of the symptoms.

“Oh! no, no danger, with careful nursing; a tiresome attack of brain fever, that is all,” he went on, repeating, with a qualm of conscience, Mr. Nugent’s own words, in order to cover his own complete oblivion of the case.

“Has the case been correctly treated?” asked Mr. Nugent.

“Oh! quite, quite; admirably treated, in fact,” said Dr. Doldy, with a sudden recollection that Ernestine’s medical reputation was concerned.

“Then you would have the case left in the lady’s hands—or perhaps another doctor had better attend also?”

“Really, I think that would be altogether unnecessary; but of course, if you would feel more fully satisfied—”

“I should at all events feel more satisfied if you would yourself find time to see the patient again,” said Mr. Nugent, “as I am obliged to leave town myself.” And, as he

spoke, he handed Dr. Doldy a cheque for his fee, which he had got ready during the consultation. Dr. Doldy took it mechanically, shook hands, and went downstairs, coming into violent collision in the hall with a piece of quicksilver — Dorothy Silburn in a great hurry.

Ernestine had rushed in upon her at her writing-table, and had implored her to go to Miss Armine at once, “for,” she said, “she ought not to be a moment alone, and I cannot go back just now.”

“What is the matter, Ernestine?” Dorothy had cried out, in amazement at the face before her.

“Don’t ask me—only go, or something may happen.”

And Dorothy, thus urged, had run off, calling to Coventry, as she passed his room, to go to Ernestine. And thus it happened that, running to the rescue of the poor neglected fever patient she encountered Dr. Doldy, to the equal astonishment of both parties.

“*You here!*” was Mrs. Silburn’s first exclamation, and then her quick little brain put two and two together. “*Oh!*” she added, “then it’s you that have been upsetting Ernestine—you ought to have more sense than to worry a woman in her state.” And then, remembering her errand, she ran off upstairs, leaving Dr. Doldy rather more bewildered than before.

Mr. Nugent had been doing business meantime with the landlady, arranging with her for poor Ruth’s comfort. Having done that, and extricated himself from the good lady’s eloquence, he went to have a last look at the unconscious centre of all this confusion, and, to his no small surprise, found another strange lady in charge of the sick-room. Dorothy, who knew nothing of what had been going on, was rather more surprised than he when he made his assured entrance into the room. But two such quick wits could not but strike fire at meeting; and Mr. Nugent immediately rose to the situation, and inquired with vast polite-

ness whether it was another member of the medical profession whom he found in authority in his sister's sick-room.

"Oh! no," said Dorothy; "I am only an amateur nurse. And so you are Ruth's brother-in-law?" looking at him with some curiosity.

It did not take many minutes to make Mr. Nugent and Mrs. Silburn fast friends; and before they had each said a dozen words the situation become more intelligible to them both.

"Oh! then it was *you* called in Dr. Doldy," said Dorothy, and then stopped; it was evident to her that Mr. Nugent had been kept outside the real excitement of the meeting, and she was afraid she might tell him what he was not intended to know.

"Dr. Doldy says it is a bad case of brain fever," said Mr. Nugent; "but that there is no danger now, with good nursing. We

must have a nurse in at once to relieve you. . . .”

“He didn’t say that,” interrupted Dorothy, sharply.

“Say what?”

“That it was brain fever.”

“Certainly,” replied Mr. Nugent.

“Oh! dear,” said Dorothy; “why, it’s typhoid fever.”

“Typhoid!” ejaculated Mr. Nugent; “nonsense, that’s infectious!”

“Oh! no,” replied Dorothy; “at least, the nurse catches it sometimes, I believe.”

“But,” said Mr. Nugent, incredulously, “who considers it typhoid?”

“Dr Ernestine,” replied Dorothy.

“Is that the lady doctor?” Dorothy nodded. “I remember she said something about typhoid,” went on Mr. Nugent, in increasing perplexity, “but Dr. Doldy said that the case had been treated quite correctly, and that I might safely leave it in her hands.”

They looked at each other, and burst out laughing.

“This is always the sort of thing when I go in for doctors,” said Mr. Nugent; “fortunately my little sister seems to have got over the worst of it, in spite of the doctors. But I suppose I must do the thing thoroughly, and get a third opinion, which is sure to be different from the other two. But we must get the three medicos together, and then they will agree. What is the lady’s name?”

Dr. Ernestine Doldy,” answered Dorothy gravely, and looking up into Mr. Nugent’s face.

“What do you mean?” he asked sharply; “the same name—how’s that?”

“Why, this is the how of it—those two are husband and wife.”

“Husband and wife!” exclaimed Mr. Nugent; “but they didn’t seem to know each other.”

“Perhaps,” said Dorothy composedly, “they

had forgotten the look of each other's faces ; they haven't met for a good while."

"What on earth have I been doing?" groaned Mr. Nugent in comical consternation.

"That's a great deal more than I know," answered Dorothy composedly..

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW IN THE MOONLIGHT.

DR. DOLDY was allowed little time for thought when he returned home from this strange meeting with his wife. He had forgotten Laura's existence—for the sight of Ernestine's face had kindled into full passion the fire of love which had but lain dormant during this interval of silence and trouble. He went home intending to shut himself into Ernestine's little room, which was kept sacred to her, and there think out the dilemma of his position and his right course of action.

But he found Sir Percy Flaxen awaiting him, anxious to arrange the day and hour of the wedding, now that there was nothing to

delay it. The indolent young man had some appreciation of character, after a fashion of his own. "You've just got rid of one fellah," he said to Laura; "I think I'd like to marry you right off before you get mixed up with any other fellah." A remark which Laura took as complimentary. And she made no objection to his suggestion. Now that José Yriarte was absolutely carried away to Millbank in that terrible carriage, the 'Black Maria,' she felt herself at liberty to begin life afresh, with a light heart and a clear conscience.

And indeed she might be forgiven for not troubling herself much about her old lover; that gentleman, having during his bail deluged every person of influence with whom his family was connected, with clever appeals for help, now, finding himself powerless, turned his versatile mind to the consideration of the corruptibility of gaolers.

Dr. Doldy did not pity him either, for he could reasonably guess, by his knowledge of

him, that disgrace was a thing unfelt by him, and that physical deprivations would do him little hurt. The little Spaniard was unwholesome; but he was full of a tigrine strength.

At the same time, however, Dr. Doldy was much distressed and puzzled by Ernestine's words. He felt that he was in the dark about some element or secret in the matter; he felt that there must have been some other agent than he had been aware of at work in separating Ernestine from him.

But he saw nothing to be done.

He could not speak to Laura now, when all was over, and drag in Ernestine as a vague accuser of he knew not what. Yriarte was condemned: there was no hope of saving him from any underhand injustice which might have been at work. And as to Laura's marriage—he felt uncomfortable at the remembrance of the way in which Ernestine had spoken of it. But what could he do? Sir Percy Flaxen was very anxious to secure his prize. Why should he take exception at a

match which seemed to promise all the happiness that the pair were capable of?

And so he very quietly let matters take their own way. The marriage was arranged to take place in a fortnight; and, after the exchange of polite compliments, Sir Percy and Laura drove away in Mrs. Honiton's carriage, which was waiting for them, to dine at her house.

And Dr. Doldy remained alone to discuss a solitary meal; and, for the first time probably for many years, failed to do it justice. When Ernestine first left him Laura's affairs were so imminent, and Laura herself was so much with him, that he did not fully realise his position. But now—Laura's case was won; Laura's marriage was as good as completed: in fact, Laura's fortune was secured. There was no further excitement; no further effort to be made. And the young lady herself had driven away with her lover.

Ernestine had passed through the first horror of new solitude, in her little dismal

lodgings, a month ago; but this was Dr. Doldy's first real taste of the return to his old life.

Everything was the same as in the time before he had ever seen Ernestine. Laura had been incessantly with him for about a month; had amused him, interested him, filled him with the excitement of a contest, given him no time for thought. He had been favoured with her society in exactly the same way before, when she wanted anything of him. And when she had got what she wanted she would drive away with the lover of the moment, and leave him in peace to pursue his even path of bachelor life. He knew well enough, from past experience, that she would busy herself now with those interests in which he could not help her. Probably, as she would want Mrs. Honiton's help in her arrangements for the wedding, her affection would be lavished upon that lady.

Dr. Doldy had known himself a coward in his heart for concentrating all his attention

upon Laura's matters in order to shut out the thought of his own. Now he saw no escape—nowhere to hide; he had to face the blank and barren facts, that Ernestine had left him—that he was alone—and that Ernestine, though she still loved, despised him.

The dinner was announced—he went down and looked at it. He drank more wine than usual and ate nothing.

“No fool like an old fool!” he exclaimed at last, rising impatiently from the table. “Ten years ago no woman on earth could have spoiled my appreciation of a good dinner; and certainly I had never seen a woman who could have induced me to risk not dining well every day. And now I believe, if she would let me, I could go to perdition on hashed mutton with Ernestine.”

He wended his way disconsolately to the drawing-room; but, brightly light and pretty as it was, it looked as desolate as the empty coffee-room of an hotel or a waiting-

room at a railway station. He turned precipitately on the threshold and went down to Ernestine's deserted consulting-room. This was not lighted; only a ray of moonlight came in through one of the windows. He quietly sat down in a chair which he had been accustomed to use, and tried to fancy her sitting in her favourite window-seat with the moonray just touching her hair. It was strangely easy to fancy it—he had so often found her there, sitting lost in thought in the twilight or the moonlight. Indeed, he could almost believe her to be there—and the blood began to rush to his heart; but it was checked suddenly as by a touch of ice.

Why was she not there?

“What did she mean by those wild words she spoke to-day?” he said to himself. “She knew my relations with Laura before we were married. She told me then that I was worldly, and I said she must make me less so. Why did she suddenly surrender all her efforts to do this and let me drop back like

this into my old bachelor life? There is something more than I know of in this; there is something hidden from me. It must be so; Ernestine is a woman of sense, though she is so terribly unwordly; she would not have talked as she did to-day without reason. And she would not have left me, for a mere quarrel about a dropsical eye, in her present condition. Ernestine would face privation herself for the sake of an idea; but, if I know her aright, she would not attempt to separate a child from its father because of a mere medical dispute."

He got up now and walked about the room; but quietly, as if he feared disturbing that shadow on the window-seat.

"I had half believed, before to-day," he went on to himself, "that it was a foolish, youthful, professional pride; that she was determined not to stay with me if I did not allow her to be a cleverer doctor than myself, and give her freedom in my consulting-room as well as her own. And I have tried to put

the matter aside and not go to entreat her to return, because I thought a pride like that, which could jar upon such love as ours, ought not to be fostered. And my own pride has held me back—I know it. I am an old fool. Shadow there, that art not Ernestine, listen to me! If you had acquired any more womanly art than medicine—if you had not cut me out in my own line—I should have been so utterly proud of you! But as it was, when you had broken every professional etiquette, and asserted yourself in a position which I hated you to hold, could I have run after you and entreated you to return?

“But now, I am inclined to think, Ernestine, after all, was the impulsive, foolish, unworldly woman I thought her; and not only a proud self-assertive young doctor. She has used this latter character as a cloak to hide something else; *but—what is she hiding?*”

He sat down again, and thought deeply for awhile. But no light came to him. He knew it was no secret of Ernestine's own;

her nature was one of those which sin on the top, and expose themselves to public shame the moment they do anything wrong, because they cannot hide it beneath righteous respectability. It was no secret of his own; Ernestine knew all his life, with its lights and shadows. What then could it be? She had spoken of Laura; but he was unable to see what she should know of Laura's affairs. Certainly Laura could never have been friendly enough with Ernestine to have made confidences to her. Suddenly he remembered their first interview, when he had introduced them; he recalled a look which had come upon Ernestine's face and been instantly banished. Had they met before?

His mind went over the problem much as children at play hunt over a room after a thing which has been hidden; but he had no one to play music loud and soft, and thus guide him to the suspicious place.

And so, as he was naturally indisposed to throw suspicion upon a woman, he rejected

the idea that Ernestine could know anything of Laura, especially as his imagination failed to suggest anything which she could know.

But, as he sat there gazing at the shadowy window-seat in the dim light, the conviction grew strong upon him that some cause had driven Ernestine from his side. There must have been a reason which seemed sufficient to herself—a reason which he, if he knew it, might accept and understand as strong enough to make her break their life and mutilate their love, and separate the growing existence of their child from him. This conviction comforted him inexpressibly. He had been bitterly wounded by the idea of Ernestine which her conduct had presented to him. He had been compelled to regard her as hard, professional, proud, intolerably independent. His love had violently recoiled within him, forced back by this view of her character. But now, with this new thought—the new conviction that, overburdened with the weight of some secret of which he knew nothing, she

had acted as an impulsive woman would—his whole soul reverted to her, and he flung himself upon his knees by the window-seat, and kissed the floor where her feet had so often rested, crying aloud, “Ernestine, come back to me!”

All that night he was awake, marvelling what her secret might be—wondering how to approach her, wondering how to bring her back.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHITE BLOSSOMS.

THE next morning early Coventry Silburn received a small note. He recognised, with some surprise, Dr. Doldy's queer, illegible handwriting.

“Certainly 'tis from him,” he said, turning it over, “or from some other doctor. Why do doctors always write illegibly? Is it for the benefit of the chemists? Probably, the responsibility of the medical man would really be too great if his prescriptions were quite legible; besides, he would have to think so much.”

Having decided that question, he opened

the letter. It was very brief; he read it twice, and then wrote a letter himself. But it was not to Dr. Doldy, it was to Mr. Lingen. This he sent by a messenger, and waited with some restlessness for the answer.

It soon came, and was even shorter than the others.

“Tell him that if he will wait quietly for a fortnight you really expect to be able to do something. But only on that condition.”

Coventry thought for some time before he sent on his answer to Dr. Doldy. He had no clue in the matter—he knew nothing of the time of Laura’s wedding. But, as he wished above all to do no mischief in handling these mysteries, he decided to trust Mr. Lingen, who knew so much more than he did. Moreover, to be able to hold out any hope of a reconciliation was a great deal. So he wrote to Dr. Doldy the answer, which was enigmatical even to himself.

He had no sooner sent it than Dorothy

came into his room, and picking up Dr. Doldy's letter, read it.

"So he wants to find out why she left him, and to make it up, and is rather afraid to go near her. Humph! I thought he'd begin to feel bad soon," she remarked; "and what have you said?"

"I asked Lingen what I had better say; it seemed to me that was the best thing to do, for he seems to be the only person who understands the affair. And here is his answer."

"Oh," said she, drily, putting it down, "he's to wait a fortnight, is he? and in the meantime here's Ernestine working like a horse, and without enough to eat—I'm positive she hasn't. And Dr. Doldy quietly pockets his physician's fee for saying Miss Armine had brain fever when she hadn't! Just like the world—pay the men for doing nothing; starve the women for working!"

"That does seem rather queer," said Coventry lugubriously; but then Minerva will get

her doctor's bill paid by Mr. Nugent. Your epigram is a trifle too sharp."

"Oh, I suppose she may, if she sends in a bill," snapped Dorothy, "but it won't be half as much for all her work as Dr. Doldy got for his making a fool of himself. And besides, he got his right off, because he didn't want it; while she'll have to wait till Miss Armine is well, and get paid just when she has completed her starvation business."

"You are very much put out, Dorothy; you are disturbing the atmosphere of my study with your vehemence. Irritability doesn't become you!"

"Well, it is enough to put anyone out," said Dorothy, more crossly than ever, "to see these two dear, stupid people going on as they are doing. I got to Ernestine's rooms before she was up this morning, and found her crying for that husband of her's, after running away from him, and I know she had been at it all night. She will kill herself at this rate. And

what business has Lingen to want to wait a fortnight, I wonder."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Coventry, rather appalled by the state of things.

"Oh, well, I'll find out to-day," said Dorothy. "Now, forget all about it, and go on with your work, Coventry. I must run down to the *Mail* office, and see what work they have for me. *We* shall be starving next, if we go spending our time on other people's affairs."

"Nursing doesn't agree with you, Dorothy," Coventry called after her, just as she was flying out of the door. She paused an instant, and flung him back one look, full of sauciness and sweetness. He laughed—and she was gone.

Dr. Doldy had remained at home, waiting for Coventry's answer, and had been kept much longer than he expected. The horse in his brougham was pawing impatiently, and he himself was restlessly walking to and fro in his room when the answer came.

“More mysteries!” he said, with an annoyed look. “Well, I am in the dark about it all; perhaps I had better obey.” He put the note in his pocket, and went to his brougham, which drove quickly away, for he was late already for some important engagements.

All day, during his intervals of active thought on other matters, his mind reverted to this letter.

In the afternoon he took a bold step. He stopped at the door of Miss Armine’s lodgings, and inquired if she were better. He was told “Yes.” He then asked whether the doctor, who was attending her, was there. In case she were, he intended to drive on at once; for he did not want to meet her again in that sick-room; he knew such a meeting would only startle her again and distress her.

But she was not there: so he carried out his purpose, and asked for her address.

It was only in the next street. He noted down the number, and drove on with a sigh of

relief. At all events, he knew now where she was.

In the dusk of that afternoon a ragged little boy left a small box for Ernestine at her lodgings. She was out; when she came in she found it on her table.

She opened it without much interest, but was surprised, as she loosened the lid, by a delicate sweet odour which spread itself about the room. She looked quickly within, and saw—only two or three white blossoms.

A moment she looked on them, and then the old message which long ago these white blossoms had brought to her came to her mind. Her head fell upon the table by the side of the flowers, and her face looked as fair and pale as they.

Dorothy, coming in hurriedly on her way home to press Ernestine to go with her to dinner, found her thus. The scene was very pretty. So Dorothy thought, although for a moment she feared that Ernestine had fainted. But, no—she raised her head when she heard

Dorothy : and that shrewd lady eyed the flowers and said nothing.

Ernestine was very weary that day, and was glad to go to Dorothy's bright little home. She only paused an instant to put her flowers in water ; and, as she did so, she selected one, and put it in her dress. Dorothy smiled unseen ; and, urging Ernestine to make haste, led the way out into the rapidly darkening street.

She drew Coventry aside before they went in to dinner. She was a natural born gossip, and it was impossible for her to keep a piece of news to herself for five minutes if there was anyone to tell it to.

" I've found out," she whispered, triumphantly ; " I know what that clever Lingen's after. Laura is to be married in a fortnight."

" Oh !" said Coventry : an indescribable monosyllabic utterance.

" And," added Dorothy, growing slangy in her excitement, " you must look sharp if you don't want a blow-up before then. He's

making love to her again. Look at that white flower in her dress. *He* sent her that: it's nobody else, for no two men make love alike."

"Dinner, please 'm," here ejaculated Dorothy's page, the smartest scrap of humanity alive, and just suited to his mistress. So they went to dinner, and Coventry, less talkative than usual, forgot his plate to eye the white flower covertly.

By the time dinner was over he had come to a resolution.

"I don't care," he said aside to Dorothy when they were in the drawing-room; "I have only joined with Lingen in order to bring them together. If they make it up without our intervention, so much the better."

But he did not calculate on the keenness of his accomplice.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME CALLERS.

THEY had been in the drawing-room about half an hour, and Ernestine, who was looking very quiet in an arm-chair in the corner, was just beginning to talk about being obliged to go, as she had to see Miss Armine and a sick child before bed-time, when a visitor's card was brought to Coventry.

He looked at it in silence, and handed it on to Dorothy. She saw with considerable amazement the name of Lewis Lingen upon it.

"Into my study," said Coventry to the servant.

The visit was so unexpected, and the position was so critical, that he did not know

whether he should be right in having Mr. Lingen shown in upon the small company then assembled.

He quickly went to the study, where he found Mr. Lingen, after his usual fashion in a strange room, walking about looking at everything.

He turned with his bright look as Coventry entered, but it was quickly replaced by another expression.

“I wanted to speak to you,” he said, “about your note of this morning.”

Coventry pricked his ears, but said nothing. In this affair he felt he was walking on thin ice—he might make a mistake at any moment if he were not exceedingly careful.

“I understand,” Mr. Lingen went on, “that Dr. Doldy wants to have an explanation with Mrs. Doldy.”

“Yes,” said Coventry, “that is what I understand.”

“Oh; well, we must prevent that explanation taking place yet.”

Coventry shook his head.

“Without a reason why,” he said, “I can’t help at that : an explanation between them is just what I want.”

“And,” said Mr. Lingen, “do you think Dr. Doldy will push the matter now he has begun ?”

“I do,” said Coventry. “I have more reason to think so this evening than I had when I wrote to you. Knowing him as I do, I believe that, having brought himself to the frame of mind he is now in, he will probably see her and have it out with her in a day or two.”

“Then,” said Mr. Lingen under his breath, “there’ll be the devil to pay, and no pitch hot.”

Coventry smiled and leaned back in his chair with tranquillity.

“I don’t know your game,” he said ; “mine is coming all right. They have met accidentally, which has upset their philosophic calm : they are both discovering the widowed

state to be insupportable; and before two days are over I expect them to meet on purpose."

"A shocking catastrophe that would be!" replied Mr. Lingen, half smiling as he spoke. "But, seriously, an explanation between them might do great mischief just now: I am sure you would help me, if I could tell you my game; but I have no right to do that. Would it be possible to get Mrs. Doldy out of town for a week or two?"

"Quite impossible," said Coventry, — "unless," he went on, as a bright thought flashed upon his mind, "you could invent a paying patient in the country."

"Is Miss Armine fit to be moved yet?"

"I think not—indeed, I am sure not, because I heard them saying it would be some time yet before she could go to her brother's house."

"Then that is no good. Would she be quite unlikely to take a holiday under any circumstances just now?"

“Quite,” said Coventry, adding maliciously, “and if she did I believe Dr. Doldy would find her out, and follow her. We hid her present address from him, at her request; but he has found it out and sent her some flowers.”

“Eh! that’s serious, indeed,” exclaimed Mr. Lingen. “I believe I must see Mrs. Doldy myself. She is a sensible woman, is she not?”

“Sensible, certainly: whether common-sensible, I don’t know.”

“Well, I must risk it. What is her address?”

“If you want to see her,” said Coventry, “she is in this house now.”

“And will she see me for a little while alone, do you think?”

“Oh, yes,” said Coventry, and, rising, left the room.

Mr. Lingen walked about during his absence, the Greek π between his eyebrows very deeply marked.

In a few minutes Coventry returned, bringing with him Ernestine.

Lewis Lingen was a professional student of character. He threw a keen glance upon Ernestine, which showed him that, if dreaminess and depth made her dark eyes beautiful, their gaze was most peculiar for its honesty.

“Miss Laura is not a bad amateur at character sketching,” he said to himself as Ernestine entered: “although it is utterly impossible that she can appreciate such a woman, yet she gave me a very good idea of what to expect.”

Ernestine was almost as pale as the flower she wore. She never dreamed of refusing to do anything Coventry wanted her to do, but he had rather mystified and alarmed her in this sudden and private introduction to the great lawyer.

He introduced them, put Ernestine into his favourite chair, and then left them in order to return to Dorothy, who was almost dancing with suppressed curiosity.

“Nothing to tell me!” she cried, with the deepest contempt, when Coventry had assured her that he had no fresh news. “Oh, dear! if I had been ten minutes alone with that man who knows everything about everybody, wouldn’t I have got some news out of him!”

Meantime, in Coventry’s study, these two people who approached life from two opposite avenues, and viewed it through different-coloured spectacles, were trying to come to an understanding.

“I daresay you are aware, though we have never met,” began Mr. Lingen, “that I am a very old friend of the Doldy family?”

“I have often heard Dr. Doldy speak of you,” said Ernestine with an effort. She found it difficult to speak unconcernedly, for she was in great dread as to what might be coming.

“An old friend—I think I may say a privileged friend,” said Mr. Lingen, “otherwise I should scarcely have ventured to ask to see

you for the first time for the purpose of speaking about a confidential matter."

He paused, but Ernestine relapsed into a familiar habit of hers when anyone was trying to find his way to a difficult subject in a delicate manner: she was silent. The consequence was that Mr. Lingen, like many another before him, was driven to the point with inelegant abruptness. He did not think it worth while to waste words in fencing, with those perplexed, honest eyes fixed on him.

"In order that you may not think me impertinent," he said, "I must tell you that I am in the confidence of both Dr. Doldy and Miss Doldy. I stand in the midst of a very critical situation at this time, and, unless matters are allowed to consummate themselves without hindrance, there will be a great deal of unnecessary suffering. I saw Miss Doldy yesterday, and I imagine, from what she said, that you understand what I mean."

"Why," said Ernestine, "I suppose I do ;

at all events, I may allow that I think I do. But there is no reason for you to speak about this to me. I shall do nothing to hinder matters. Why should you suspect me of it? I left my home principally that I might not be tempted to interfere in things with which I had no concern. I have removed myself from Miss Doldy's connections entirely; then why suspect me?"

"Forgive me," said Mr. Lingen, with rather more hesitation than was usual in his manner, "if I trench upon affairs which I do not pretend to know anything about; but supposing that Dr. Doldy should meet you—should demand a further explanation——"

"I have already met him, and refused any further explanation," said Ernestine, a little ominous red spot appearing in each cheek. She was getting angry. Mr. Lingen saw it and was glad. He had had considerable experience with angry women, and flattered himself that he knew how to manage them.

He was about to speak, when Ernestine interrupted him.

“If this comes from Laura Doldy,” she said — “if Laura Doldy is afraid that I shall betray her intrigues and her falsehoods—tell her that I gave my word not to betray her, and I shall not do so. I suppose she distrusts me because I could not be paid for my silence! because I would not live in a household which derived its luxuries from her wealth! because I could not endure my life under the shadow of her secrets and her benefits!”

“Well, that is likely enough,” said Mr. Lingen quietly. “Doubtless, in your place Miss Doldy would have made capital out of her knowledge. But I do not know that she distrusts you. What she fears is the course of events. If Dr. Doldy’s suspicions are aroused, and he refuses to be kept in the dark any longer, then Miss Doldy naturally has some fears about the consequences. Her position is difficult. Dr. Doldy’s indignation, if he discovered the deceptions practised on him at

the last moment, would be very dangerous. Miss Doldy must marry at once; there is no time to waste now, if she is to avert a ruin the extent of which they themselves hardly guess at, from herself and her uncle. Possibly the marriage might not be broken off. She can do anything with Sir Percy, and I hardly think he knows the difference between truth and falsehood. But it is quite likely that the Flaxen family would refuse to allow the marriage if the whole affair concerning Yriarte should come out. And there is no knowing what Dr. Doldy might not consider it his duty to do if he discovered how that case had been managed. If Yriarte were not such a scoundrel, I should think it rather hard upon him myself: we ought to have got a lighter sentence. And I am unable to calculate what effect the revelation of this might have on Dr. Doldy."

"But," said Ernestine, "why speak of this to me?—I have given my word to be silent."

She was very angry now. She rose from her seat and moved towards the door as she spoke.

“Because,” replied Mr. Lingen, “we have reason to suppose that Dr. Doldy’s suspicions have been aroused, and that he will not submit for long to this separation without making an attempt to end it.”

Ernestine’s eyes fell upon the white flower she wore, and the two red spots of anger developed suddenly into a crimson blush. Mr. Lingen, looking at her, was puzzled. The white blossom (which seemed to her to speak with such shame-faced distinctness) was to him an unintelligible symbol.

“I don’t know what you want,” she said, impatiently and nervously; “I cannot promise anything more than to preserve silence under any circumstances.”

“And that course,” said Mr. Lingen, “will naturally confirm every suspicion he may choose to harbour.”

“You don’t expect me to tell him lies, do

you?" exclaimed Ernestine, turning on him in a sudden blaze.

"No; but your influence over him is boundless: persuade him to silence."

"If," said Ernestine, "my influence were boundless—if I could persuade him to be independent of Laura's money—if he would give all that she has made over to him to Laura's child, then I might see some good in the attempt. Tell me," she said, with a sudden change of manner, "do you know if Laura's child is still alive?"

"Yes; it is alive."

"Poor little orphan, motherless and fatherless! I have nursed that child in my arms, and I have thought of it since many a time, and pitied it from my heart. Has it been taken care of?"

"Yes, after a fashion. The child would have fared ill if it had been left to the mercies of its mother and the nurse she found for it; but Mr. Yriarte seemed to have some strange sort of paternal feeling. He took it to a lady

who is devoted to him and has pawned jewels and plate many a time to help him out of his difficulties. His power over women is usually obtained by making presents. His experience has led him to suppose this plan infallible. I have heard him say that 'much virtue only means many diamonds.' But this friend of his gives instead of taking. She is altogether infatuated by him, and when he took her this baby I hear that she received it with open arms for his sake, and is actually bringing it up under her own supervision."

"And can she do this?" asked Ernestine, wonderingly.

"Not easily" said Mr. Lingen, with a shrug of his shoulders; "she has already sacrificed nearly everything for Yriarte. She is a lady of title and position: only a woman of genius could have retained her position in society and done what she has done: only a born martyr could have sacrificed her personal possessions and given up all her comfort and pride, while

showing nothing but smiles. And this is wasted on Yriarte."

"And ought Laura's natural burdens to be put on her?" said Ernestine, hesitatingly. "Surely something might be done for the child."

Mr. Lingen looked at her with triumph lurking in his eye. He thought he had laid a harmless snare for her.

"I don't know," he said demurely; "anything done must be done quietly. An exposure now would only make matters worse for everybody."

"No exposure can come through me," said Ernestine, annoyed at his returning to this point; "I am quite unlikely to see Dr. Doldy. Do not disturb yourself about it."

The words died on her lips. From outside came the sound of a voice which they both recognised instantly. There was no doubt about it. Dr. Doldy was in the house.

Mr. Lingen said nothing. Luckily for him, there was a fire on the hearth. He covered his amusement by stirring it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WINDY NIGHT.

DR. DOLDY had not been two minutes in the drawing-room before his eyes fell upon something which moved him exceedingly.

Yet it was a very simple thing—only a dark shawl that lay upon a chair.

But he knew it instantly. It was Ernestine's. He did not think he could mistake anything which she had ever worn; but he felt certain in this case, for he had himself given her the shawl. The very sight of it recalled so vividly to him the warmth and sweetness of her presence, that he felt almost as if she were within reach of the clasp of his arms.

And yet—she might have left it there—forgotten it, on some former visit to the house? No: he saw, looking closely, that within its folds, half hidden, lay a little soft-feathered hat which he also remembered very well.

What could this mean but that Ernestine was in the house?

Although it had given her a husband, a few months of marriage had certainly not deprived Ernestine of a lover. Dr. Doldy, having found a clue which gave him a new idea as to Ernestine's desertion of him, looked upon the traces of her near presence with all that keenness and excitement which in respect of most women can only be produced by novelty. Few women, indeed, can twice arouse in any man's breast the thrill which the first romantic contact with her may produce. But Ernestine, by the fact that she had an intense life and a very real sphere of her own, was one of these few women. A man who had once entered her atmosphere, and then been excluded from it, felt that he had really lost something be-

yond the pleasure of gazing upon a pretty face or figure. The sight of a mere shawl which belonged to her brought to Dr. Doldy—almost too intensely for him to bear it in silence—the realisation of her individuality, the desire for her presence.

But he said nothing about those tell-tale garments. He watched his host and hostess, and followed their lead in conversation, for he was quick enough to intercept a glance of perplexity exchanged between them. This made him sure that Ernestine was in the house; so he talked quietly, keeping his senses wide awake to every sound.

He was soon rewarded. His alert ear caught the sound of the closing of the house-door. He started up, and, going to the window, drew back the curtain. He was just in time to see Ernestine's bright hair beneath the lamp which was in front of the house.

He turned and snatched the shawl from the chair.

“She has gone without this!” he said to

Mrs. Silburn, with an appealing look. "You will excuse me!"

He was gone, and Dorothy was left looking in comical bewilderment from the door through which the doctor's figure had vanished, to the chair where Ernestine's shawl had been lying.

"Well," said she at last to Coventry, who stood gazing upon her with equal surprise, "no one could have helped that, and I'm awfully glad—I do hope they will make it up now!"

"In the meantime," said Coventry, "I had better go and look after Lingen, who, I suppose, has been left alone downstairs."

"Do," said Dorothy, "be quick, and bring him up here if he is not in a hurry. I want to see him. I may have to write a 'Lewis Lingen at Home' some day for the *Weekly Modesty*, and it's really rather easier if one has met the man."

"I will attend to your interests, my jour-

nalistic craftswoman," said Coventry, as he departed to look after his neglected visitor.

Dr. Doldy meanwhile, with Ernestine's shawl and hat upon his arm, was pursuing her down the street. It was a windy night; and Ernestine—aware that she was doing a very mad thing in thus rushing out into the night air without her wraps—went very quickly. But Dr. Doldy had been a great pedestrian before he settled down to London practice. Excitement now lent him unusual speed; and he soon overtook her. He startled her so much that she almost screamed aloud; for, coming behind her, he opened the shawl in his two hands, and, as he overtook her, clasped it around her shoulders. For a second a spasm of fear passed through her; but, looking down before she dared to look back, she recognised her shawl, and recognised also the hands which held it around her, and the cry of alarm died in her throat.

They stood in silence a moment; the wind came whistling down the street, and the dark

clouds hurried overhead. The shawl felt very pleasant to Ernestine, who had begun to shiver, though she had run so quickly; and the clasp of those determined arms which would not unloose themselves—did not that penetrate with a delicious warmth to the heart within the trembling form?

She steadied herself after a pause, and looked up with a flickering smile. "Thank you," she said, and made as to take the hat from him (which he still held by its ribbon) and go on her way.

Her faint smile was answered by one which had a savour of triumph in it.

"Now," he said, "I have caught you"—he suited his action to his words by clasping his hands more firmly (and indeed it was pleasant on that blustering and lonely night to be held so warm and so strongly)—"I shall not let you go until I understand what all this is about. I can't get on without you, Ernestine; and if this is the result of a difference of opinion about that confounded Richy's

glaucoma, I give in. I am ready to allow that you are the better doctor of the two."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Ernestine, in a voice which showed she was just ready either to laugh or cry. "As if I cared about that!"

"I thought you did, at first, Ernestine," he said, very tenderly; "and I wondered where my Ernestine—who, if a much too clever doctor, was indeed a woman—had vanished. But I was stupid then—worried, bewildered. I am convinced now that you have not deserted me out of mere professional pique; and, if so, I think—indeed, I am sure, Ernestine—you owe it to me to explain matters."

"I cannot do that," she said.

"It is a secret?" he asked, a little chill and dreariness perceptible in his tone.

"Yes," she answered; "but not one of my own."

"I believe that," he said, quickly. "The lines of your character are clear enough even for

me, who have stupidly judged you harshly of late, to know that you are incapable of keeping a secret of your own. And so—you cannot explain your conduct because it has to do with the secret of somebody else?”

“Yes,” said Ernestine.

“Then,” exclaimed he, “come back to me and don’t explain anything.”

All this time they were still standing in the street, the keen wind blowing upon them, the wild clouds casting dim shadows over the closed and shuttered houses.

“I—I am ashamed,” said Ernestine, her cheek flushing despite the chill air which blew upon it; “when you are so generous and my conduct must seem so unaccountable—I am ashamed to make a condition before I can even respond to your generosity.”

“A condition!—tell me, what is it?”

“That you will consent to use none of Laura’s money.”

Dr. Doldy loosened the clasp of his arms and drew back from her.

“You are driving me rather too hard, are you not, Ernestine? First, you desert me without cause or explanation; and then when I ask you to return you will only do so on condition that I effect my own ruin.”

“Forgive me for reminding you,” said Ernestine, “but I only left your house when you had told me to do so.”

“Don’t recur to that,” he answered pitifully; “we quarrelled—at least I did—I was angry, I insulted you; but you must grant that I was bitterly provoked. You were doing your utmost to ruin me then in another way—why are you still so anxious to accomplish that result?”

Where was this to end?—this altercation between two people who loved one another, yet were altogether at cross purposes—whose answers could not but be crooked?

Ernestine wondered, and made no answer. But after a moment the tears came suddenly upon her cheeks, and she turned to him in a

gust of passion such as he had but once before seen her in.

“I don’t want to harm you—why should I, for I love you! I am but a child crying for the light while the darkness is all about me.”

“Well, child,” he answered rather sadly, “cannot you take my love as a gleam of light out of the darkness?—for it is true.”

“I have taken it,” she cried. “It has been the light of my life—see here,” and she threw off the dark shawl as she spoke, and showed him the white flower which lay upon her breast—“the token was so sweet to me, I could not part with it.”

He came to her, as she stood there with her soft short curls tossing in the wind.

“Ernestine,” he said, “we cannot be separated; we are really more united than ever now that pain has come between us. Come home with me, and let us help each other through the world. If our individualities are too strongly marked, we must rub the edges

off. If you have secrets to keep from me, why, I must help you to keep them. I won't say that I will let you sin against professional etiquette and correct an elder doctor: indeed, I'll not promise but that I shall lock you out of my consulting-room altogether: but, Ernestine, I cannot do without you in my life—come back to it."

His tone and manner had a quaint blending of humour and passion as he spoke. Ernestine smiled.

"And my condition?"

"Oh—the money. Well, you can hardly expect me to do a mad and unaccountable action like that without a reason."

"But if I am allowed—in a little while—to give you a reason?" she said timidly.

"That would make it a different matter, of course," he said; and drew her hand within his arm.

"We shall quarrel again to a certainty," she said, smiling faintly.

"Never mind, dear; if we do quarrel a

little, we can make it up a great deal ;” and he ended all further hesitation in a very practical fashion by hailing a passing hansom.

Ernestine, driven swiftly to her old home, wrapped in her warm shawl, yielded to the delicious sense of utter dependence which forms one of the selfish elements in a woman’s love.

Entering the house and finding herself once more by her husband’s side, she could scarcely believe but that all the pain and confusion and separation had been a dream. She felt that the reality of her life was with him ; and, feeling that, she recognised that they must find their way together through the difficult entanglements and subtleties of right and wrong in this world.

And with this new light in her heart, she could yield herself utterly to the heaven-born breath of love, and let it fill her life anew with its sweetness and rose-colour.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FACE IN THE STREET.

LAURA'S wedding-day dawned as bright and fair as any bride could desire: earth and sky were as ready to rejoice and be glad as though the chaste goddess herself were being led to the altar.

And Laura was pleased: for she liked fine weather, as she liked all bright things. To-day, with all her plans consummating themselves admirably—her wedding-dress an undoubted success, and some jewels which pleased her exceedingly among her presents—the whole world appeared bright to her.

It would have been interesting to a student of human nature to watch Laura go through the mysteries of her toilette on that eventful

day: to observe how masterly was her power of concentrating her attention upon the immediate matter in hand. None of a girl's tremors and doubts as to her changed future distracted her attention from the due perfecting of her dress. Perhaps this was natural in a woman whose marriage was the deliberate outcome of her artifice. No thought of an unloved and helpless little being unnaturally orphaned, disturbed her serene contemplation of her dainty and girlish appearance. And if her sometime lover was brought before her mind now and again by an association of ideas, the thought of him did but add zest to her occupation; for she felt that now her triumph was complete. The man who had attempted to frighten and tyrannise over her was thoroughly punished and silenced; while she felt that she, by her own cleverness, had placed herself in an admirable position.

She looked perfectly charming in her character of the blushing and diffident bride; and Mr. Lingen decided, as he looked admiringly

upon the trim figure robed in its rich laces, and the soft, peach-like face with its downcast eyelids, that she was one of the best actresses of his acquaintance.

Dr. Doldy was troubled. A strange cloud of mystery overhung his niece and ward.

But he had promised to keep his thoughts well hidden to-day; and he went through his part of the proceedings as decorously as might be. But Laura recognised a difference in his look and manner; she felt certain that he suspected something; and her only thought was relief that at all events it was now too late for any harm to be done. Come what might, she was married; and though to a woman who loved society as Laura did, the loss of her reputation is a terrible thing, the blow, if it did come, would be greatly softened by the possession of her fortune. But as usual, with all her shallow acuteness, Laura misjudged those whom she knew best. She could not comprehend that, the evils done, and no redress ob-

tainable, there would be no satisfaction to either Dr. Doldy or Ernestine in exposing her.

But Ernestine found a great satisfaction in a strange task which she took upon her that afternoon. Knowing that on this day the power would become theirs to provide for Laura's child, she went to see the lady who was now supporting it. She came away from the interview bewildered, amazed. She had met a beautiful, elegant, and accomplished woman : a woman, as Lingen had said, able to hold a high place in society. Yet this woman was Yriarte's slave ; not only loving his faults, but worshipping his vices. Ernestine was sufficiently astonished at the glimpse she had obtained of a side of human nature which was new to her ; yet she had not heard the most extraordinary part of the affair. She did not know that this woman was Yriarte's wife, and would have died rather than reveal the secret, because Yriarte had persuaded her that, though he loved her, and would never desert her, it

was absolutely necessary that he must run all risks and marry for money, as (after drawing upon her to an extent only short of ruin) he found it impossible to secure ease in any other way; and neither did Ernestine know that this woman had been using every influence she possessed, and backing up every effort his connections had been making to effect his acquittal and release.

Yet, though she knew nothing of this, she had seen and guessed enough to puzzle her and make her walk home in a half dream. She was filled with admiration of this woman's heroism and endurance. What right had she to say that these high qualities were wrongly used — are not general ideas of right and wrong merely arbitrary? Do not the words mean something totally different, as regards the reality they convey, in different phases of human life?

Her honest mind was perplexing itself with this question, as she stood on the curbstone, waiting for a block of carriages to move on and

enable her to cross the road. It happened that she stood very near to a cab containing some gentlemen, which stood in the midst of the block. One of them leaned forward and put his head out at the window. The man was ugly—a grin upon his face showed cruel teeth; a leer in his eyes added to the unpleasantness of his expression, yet Ernestine stared at him with wide eyes. A likeness, a familiarity, so startled her that she did not shrink or turn aside from the insolence of his gaze, but seemed unable to remove her eyes from his. One of the other gentlemen suddenly leaned forward, speaking quickly some words which Ernestine did not catch, and, pushing back his companion, drew up the window of the cab. But, just as the window was closing, Ernestine heard the words, “Deuced fine woman.”

She shivered and flushed at once. Those words, that voice—yes, they were all part of the same personality. She remembered the voice well now, though it was only once that

she had heard it, when the same words were used in just the same way.

It was the leer and the voice of the man that she had been told was José Yriarte.

Could she be mistaken? She tried to catch another glimpse, but the carriage had driven on and was now getting out of the block.

But she was not mistaken, she felt assured. Every instant's reflection made her the more positive that the man whom she had seen was the same who at one time used to follow her home from the hospital, and had tried to fascinate her with his leer. And Dorothy had told her that this was Yriarte. And Yriarte was supposed to be in prison.

What could it mean? Bewildered and shaken, she hurried home, hoping to find Dr. Doldy. Surely the wedding breakfast would be over now: and he had said that as soon as Sir Percy and his wife left, he should return straight home.

He was not there when she entered. She went and sat in her especial corner in her

own room—the corner in which that infatuated lover, Dr. Doldy, had declared her to appear like a picture in a shrine. For he had fulfilled his old dream, and made her room full of the colours which harmonised perfectly with her hair and her face.

He soon came in from the festivities, going straight to her room, as he always did now (to make certain that she had not run away again, so he told her), and pausing a moment at the door to look at her. Yes, there was no longer an empty window seat, inhabited only by a shadow, and the peculiar darkness that comes when light is suddenly withdrawn—there was love, warmth, and home for him, for there sat his perfect woman—a woman as he thought, worthy of Shakespeare in her vivid life, her pure honesty, her errors which were born of love.

She looked up at him, her face full of perplexity.

“Arthur,” she said gravely, “it is very strange—very unaccountable—I am afraid

you will hardly believe me, but I have seen Yriarte to-day—in the street, in a cab.”

“My dear child,” responded Dr. Doldy, sitting down comfortably beside her, “much learning hath made thee mad.”

“There is a large query to the cause, and what are the symptoms?” said she with a smile upon her sweet puzzled face.

“You are dreaming—you don’t even know the scoundrel—you never saw him.”

“Yes,” said Ernestine, colouring faintly, “I know him by sight.”

“And how, pray?” asked Dr. Doldy, still incredulous, “I did my best to prevent your having to meet such a fellow.”

“He used to meet me sometimes on my way from the hospital to Aunt Vavasour’s,” she said, hesitating a little, “and once took it into his head to follow me home. Dorothy was with me one time afterwards, and told me that he was Mr. Yriarte, and he really is unmistakable.”

“Oh!” said Dr. Doldy wrathfully; “this

is what comes of women like you having to walk about the streets. I wish I had the cur here—he must needs not only insult my niece, but make eyes at my Ernestine!”

“Well,” said she, laughing a little at his wrath, “that doesn’t matter now, that I see. The great question is, how can he be driving about London a fortnight after he has been sentenced to penal servitude?”

“You must have been mistaken, child,” said Dr. Doldy, “the thing is absurd.”

“I was not mistaken,” said Ernestine positively.

“Stay! what was he wearing? perhaps he was being conveyed from one prison to another? Was there a policeman?”

“No. And now that you speak of clothes, I remember his hat and coat looked rather new. I have never seen prison dress. but surely it does not include a tall hat. And the men with him were foreigners, and not a bit like policemen. I wonder, I wonder—” She rose suddenly, and walked about the room, twisting

her hands together as she thought aloud, "can Laura have been playing a double part? Has her cunning discovered some mode of appearing to punish the man who insults her, while preventing the punishment from falling upon the man who has been her lover? It is possible! She is very clever. Oh, I hope it is so! I could almost like her again if she has done this; if she has enough love in her to carry out such a plan, why, how unjust I shall have been to her!"

"Ernestine," said Dr. Doldy, gravely "you seem to me to be talking very wildly. People cannot play with law. But do you know that you promised to explain to-day some expressions which you once used about Laura? Now, instead of mystifying me any further, come, sit down, and explain yourself. I shall really begin to think you are going mad when you talk enigmas about my niece, and at the same time declare that you see convicts driving at large in the streets."

"I am positive about Yriarte," said Ernes-

tine. "As to explanations," said she, a little wearily, "you had better go to Mr. Lingen." But, all the same, she came and sat beside him. Her pledge of secrecy expired to-day. Laura knew very well that Dr. Doldy's utmost wrath would do her no harm when once Sir Percy and Lady Flaxen had driven off to that mighty Charing-cross station, which a great writer was once heard to describe, in a poetic moment, as the gateway of the Continent. Her money was safe; her reputation he would protect, however angry he might be.

Ernestine felt strangely indisposed to mention Laura's name now that she was at liberty to do so. Her soul revolted from letting her husband understand the labyrinth of small deceits in the midst of which he had so unconsciously moved. She felt, too, that he had been made something of a puppet. The thing was over; she hated to speak of it. "Go to Mr. Lingen," she said; "he will tell you so much better than I can." At the same time she could not help letting enough fall in answer

to his questions to make the vein start on his forehead blue and distinct.

“Do you mean that Laura was ashamed of those letters?—that the man had some hold over her—nonsense! It is all of a piece with Yriarte’s driving in the streets—you are dreaming, dear.”

“Go to Mr. Lingen,” said Ernestine again. “You will soon learn whether the mystery that has been hanging—oh! so black a cloud!—over me, is my own madness or not. I have no wish to tell you anything of this intrigue which has forced itself upon my life against my will. And as Laura once reminded me, one has no right to gossip of things one may have seen professionally. Keeping secrets and telling them seem to be equally part of a lawyer’s business.”

“Then I *will* go to Lingen,” exclaimed Dr. Doldy, standing up to go on the instant. Ernestine detained him.

“Remember,” she said, “the condition I made on returning home about Laura’s money.

I could never bear that a single penny of it should be used in the house in which I live. I will not give Laura the triumph of supposing that I kept her secrets in order to obtain her money. You wished to be satisfied that there was a reason for this. Ask Mr. Lingen to satisfy you; he will understand. Tell him also that I have been this morning to see about the purpose to which I wish to devote that money. Yes, you are amazed; I have made no promises, for that I could not do; but I have satisfied myself that the money is needed. Yes, without your knowledge I have taken the means of satisfying myself! I have relied on your chivalrous temperament; you will carry out the plan. Now go, ask Mr. Lingen anything you choose. I am too weary of it all to talk any more."

She sat down again, and throwing back her wandering curls, took a bowl of white flowers into her lap and let her eyes feast on them. She craved the rest of beauty and purity.

Her cloud was passing over in reality ; but the blackness of it was yet visible.

Dr. Doldy gave her one look—saw the wave of abstraction coming over her face—and decided within himself that he was likely to get more satisfactory explanations from Mr. Lingen. So he went out and left her with her flowers.

He found several clients waiting in Mr. Lingen's outer office. He pushed through them and walked in unceremoniously. Mr. Lingen, airy and cool, was looking over the papers concerning which one of the impatient gentlemen outside was waiting to see him.

Dr. Doldy took off his hat, and Lingen, looking up blandly, saw the vein on his forehead.

“ Oh, Lord ! ” thought he, “ there's a storm brewing.”

“ My wife declares,” began Dr. Doldy, abruptly, “ that she saw that cur Yriarte looking out of a cab window to-day. He can't have escaped ! ”

“Already?” said Mr. Lingen, “strange things do happen sometimes; but that would be quick work.”

“Let the dog go, if he is out; I can’t stop to speculate on it now, what I want to know is, what reason has my wife to say that it is more just he should be let out than not? She has referred me to you; just tell me what she means.”

Lingen pushed his papers aside. Dr. Doldy was an important client. He let the gentlemen cool their heels in the ante-room, while Dr. Doldy walked up and down his sanctum, asking questions and getting momentarily into a whiter heat. Mr. Lingen took out his smelling bottle and prepared himself to be called a scoundrel.

And he was called that—and more.

He sniffed his scent and shrugged his shoulders.

“What else could I have done?” said he. “I have tried to do the best for all. By helping you, I have lost thousands of pounds by

Yriarte. The scoundrel pledged his properties twice over. If he is at large, I should be glad to get hold of him. But London will never see him again. I have to be calm; won't you try and be the same?"

CHAPTER XX.

“SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?”

THAT same evening in one of the largest hotels in Boulogne two men sat at a small table in the coffee-room, drinking.

The windows opened wide upon the harbour; the sweet sea-breeze entered and called people out to admire the calm, beautiful night.

But these two men, though they had but that day escaped from foggy London, were not to be attracted by the sea in its mood of sweetness, or the sky with its face full of stars. The beautiful and the picturesque were alike without charm for them. Both were accustomed to gravitate to a room exhausted of air and filled with mingled perfume and cigar

smoke. They were only chance travelling companions, drawn together by that odd attraction which makes such men invariably find each other amid a crowd. Community of tastes is soon discovered when the tastes are as simple as drinking, gambling, and telling very doubtful stories.

These two newly-made friends over their wine told each other several racy and charming stories, which got them into a delightful state of mirth and good humour. And then, when that form of amusement slackened, one of them—a small, dark man, with teeth that flashed ominously when he laughed—produced a new pack of cards from his pocket. His companion, a stout Frenchman, with dirty hands and many rings upon them, welcomed the sight with enthusiasm. In a few moments they were deeply plunged in their new amusement. The stakes became heavier with every fresh game, the excitement more enthralling. The Frenchman lost money rapidly, and grew more furious and suspicious with every fresh

deal. They were undisturbed ; it was late ; the coffee-room was empty. The waiters were standing outside the hotel taking the air and watching for any arrivals from the last Folkestone boat, which was behind its time.

There soon were several arrivals, and then the hotel people were too busy showing bedrooms and fetching luggage to notice the raised voices and mingled execrations in French and Spanish in the coffee-room. The Frenchman's suspicions had come to a climax. He was calling his companion a cheat in every manner which his voluble tongue admitted.

A languid English voice outside ordered "Something to eat, some dry champagne—and be quick."

"In the coffee-room, sir?" asked the polite landlord, who was a stout Englishman.

The gentleman to whom the languid English voice belonged looked into the coffee-room.

"No, in a private room. I can't take a lady in there ; there are fellahs gambling."

"Gambling, sir! Oh, impossible," ex-

claimed the landlord; and, handing the English visitors over to his chattering French wife to be shown upstairs, he hastened to the coffee-room.

There he found a scene worthy of a more artistic appreciation than he could give it. The two men leaning across the table, gesticulating, talking any language which came first—French, English, Spanish—or selecting the strongest expressions of all the tongues they knew to mingle in one concentrated jargon of oaths, exhibited certain classes of French and Spanish character to perfection.

But the landlord found nothing to admire in the scene. He soon made his voice heard above theirs, and, in a language as mixed as their own, informed them that his was not a gambling house, that they were in a public room, that he would not allow this conduct for an instant. He repeated this so often and so loudly that the two men stopped at last and gave him their attention.

“Very well,” cried the Spaniard in shrill

and infuriated English ; “ if we can’t do what we choose in this abominable hotel of yours, we’ll go to another. Make out the bill, sir, and be careful about it. I know very well what the items should be—very well I know. Make out the bills, sir ; we’ll go the first thing in the morning.”

“ Very well, sir, do as you like, sir—very well, sir,” responded the hotel-keeper, attempting to assume the calmness of contempt ; “ it doesn’t matter to me, sir ; gentlemen come and gentlemen go—it doesn’t matter to me, sir. But I can’t allow gambling ; clear up the cards, sir, this is not a private room.”

“ Show us a private room, then, you old fool,” cried the Spaniard ; “ show us a room, and send some brandy and sodas there. Come, *mon cher*, we’ll have out our game, and make a devil of a row upstairs to pay out this old fellow. I wonder if I could get a banjo ; I’d set open the door and sing some nice songs for the ladies.”

The gentleman with the languid English

voice was going up the hotel stairs with his wife while this went on. They paused a moment to listen to the loud dispute, which penetrated the whole house. The buxom landlady stopped too, and lifted her hands and eyes to heaven, and crossed herself.

The English lady trembled as the voices came up to them—trembled, and quickly put her hand on her husband’s arm for support.

“ What’s the matter, little woman ? ” he asked, as he felt her trembling hand.

“ I don’t know—I am frightened—those men frighten me.”

“ Why, Laura,” laughed her husband, “ I thought you were the pluckiest little woman out ! Come on upstairs : you are tired, that is what it is.”

They went on, by which they avoided the sight of the noisy gentlemen, who were just emerging from the coffee-room. And Lady Flaxen, with a heart sick with terror, went to her room.

Later on, when the wild air of a Spanish

drinking song was heard from the open window of a room which looked on the pretty lamp-lit courtyard, she started and trembled again so violently that Sir Percy ordered another bottle of champagne.

She rose and went to the window. She could not say how faint she felt.

The courtyard was very pretty. Full of flowers, and shrubs, and little lamps, it seemed the very place for a romance. And the wild, wicked Spanish song, which came in fits and starts from that window near, suited the scene wonderfully well.

Laura never forgot the look of that courtyard, or the scent from the flowers; for she endured terror and amazement as she gazed on them. The sound of that voice curdled her blood.

“Has he a wraith—a double,” she said to herself. “Can there be two José Yriartes?”

The voice ceased: but the sound of it haunted her. She rose in the morning pale with a languor which had less of affectation in

it than usual, and still under the influence of an uneasy feeling that she could not account for.

“We will go for a drive,” said Sir Percy over his breakfast. “There’s not much to be seen, it’s true; but you want some fresh air before we go on. You look like a ghost, Laura. The sea was too much for you.”

She laughed, and with some pretty speech soon pacified him.

He rose from the table, and, taking a cigar, prepared to go out.

“Don’t be an hour, Laura,” he said. “I shall have a carriage ready directly. You’ll find me on one of the lounges in the courtyard. It’s too much trouble to come upstairs again.”

So saying, he sauntered away. And Laura, putting on her hat with its long, cream-coloured feathers, and drawing her silk mantle around her, before the mirror, allowed to herself that her husband was right—she did look like a ghost. Fortunately the remedy for excessive pallor is easy.

As she opened the door she heard voices ; stepping out she saw two men ascending the stairs.

There was the burly landlord, and beside him a man with an indescribable air of slovenliness about him. His clothes were good enough, but they did not look as if they had been made for him. They hung loosely upon his thin figure. His face wore a rough, unshaven look, caused principally by a growth of short harsh black hair on his lip and chin. There was a something about him which can only be described by a slang word—a seediness, which made Laura shrink a little to let him pass. She never liked men who lacked the appearance of prosperity ; and as she stood there, in her rich dress, with diamonds sparkling at her neck, she seemed to belong to another world from that of this dark ill-dressed man.

He saw her—and before she had time to step back, looked her in the face with his

bold eyes. She knew him then. It was José Yriarte.

His ready wit showed him the situation at once. His friends had told him of her wedding; looking in her face he saw it turn pale with fear.

“Dios!” thought he to himself, “the chicken is on her wedding trip!”

“See,” he said to the landlord instantly, “it is unnecessary now to seize upon my luggage. Here is a lady who knows me very well.”

The burly landlord turned, and bowed low to the English lady whose husband drank so much champagne overnight and began the morning with Bordeaux. He felt a great respect for her, and waited with interest to see the result of this unexpected turn which affairs had taken.

Yriarte with his most exquisite leer and a smile of consummate assurance, advanced a step towards Laura.

“Mees Laura,” he said, engagingly, “I am

most unhappy. Here you see me without any money. The rascal Frenchman that I played cards with last night, he cheated me, he won from me every sou! Is it not unhappy for poor José? And the man is gone, there is no one to lend to me. My friends they will soon send money; but this great hotel man, he will not believe, and he refuses me the brandy and soda for which I am very dry. Mees Laura, you will help your poor José?"

He put his hands appealingly together, and smiled. Afterwards, when it was over, Laura wondered to herself whether bears grin when they are hugging a victim.

But now she stood shivering, dumb. Was it for this that she had gone through all the strain of the past months? Was the man unconquerable, that he should escape from prison to torment her again?

She was indignant as well as frightened. She was enraged that her revenge should be thus baffled.

She framed her lips to say "No" in answer

to his appeal, when up the stairs came a lazy voice, raised just a little, “ Laura, are you ready ? ”

Yriarte grinned from ear to ear, and, leaning towards her, “ Your José,” he said, in a low tone.

Laura pulled off her glove in nervous haste, and, drawing from her finger a diamond ring, handed it to him. She turned her eyes away, for she knew exactly how he would smile and bow, and try to kiss her hand.

Without word or look she began to descend the stairs, fearing each instant to meet her husband, drawing her glove on hastily to cover the absence of the ring. She shivered again as she moved, but this time not with fear, but rage. Last night the man’s voice had affected her much as though she had seen a ghost. But now, with the reality in all its inimitable impudence standing before her, her blood began to boil instead of curdling.

If she had been in England, she would have told Sir Percy some tale to hoodwink him,

and would have sent a policeman up the hotel stairs to take her old lover back to prison, but here she was helpless. There was nothing to be done but to control herself as well as she could, enter the carriage and drive away by the side of her husband, who, looking at her as he lit another cigar (having finished one while awaiting her in the courtyard), remarked that she looked much better; she was not half so pale.

"I don't like this place," she answered restlessly; "I always hated Boulogne, it is so abominably vulgar."

"Well, we'll leave it this afternoon," answered Sir Percy, with his usual amiability.

"Why not sooner? Let us go to the station and find out about the trains."

"You are an impatient little woman," remarked Sir Percy; but, as he had no will of his own in the matter, he had the horses turned towards the station. They found a train which departed at a sufficiently early hour to please Laura; and then she suggested

that the carriage should go back for the luggage and her maid.

“ You are a capricious little monkey,” said Sir Percy, whose easy-going disposition was somewhat startled by these freaks of fancy ; “ you wanted to go for a drive when we came out.”

“ Yes, but there isn't time, dear,” said Laura, looking up at him with those eyes so well trained in eloquence ; “ and there is no good in returning to that hotel with those noisy men in it ; and you know you thought the wine very bad. Let us have some lunch at a café here ; it will be such fun.”

Sir Percy, considerably to his own surprise, was persuaded into sending a package containing money to Laura's maid to pay the hotel bill ; and, in fact, into doing what Laura pleased. But the truth was, that he was still capable of being reduced to a sort of gelatinous state by the fire of that wilful lady's eyes.

So she got her way in this little affair, by

using her native gifts for intrigue and persuasion. They went in search of lunch, and Laura set herself to amuse her lord, and seemed to enjoy herself immensely. Yet all the while she saw, not his face before her eyes, but that grinning face which had confronted her on the hotel stairs.

Her heart turned sick when she thought that chance might bring him to that very train, and accident might lead him to the very carriage she travelled in. And she had a new sensation with regard to him, which made her very uncomfortable. His appearance in freedom was so unexpected and unaccountable that she began to think he really must be much cleverer than herself: she was crushed by the entire futility of her own effort to crush him. What if he should amuse himself—perhaps attempt to maintain himself—by tormenting her?

Laura, looking at her husband across the café table, wondered whether she had better throw herself on her old lover's mercy, and, as

hating him seemed useless, pretend to love him again : should she make him aid her in any future intrigues, and help her to make a fool of her amiable husband ? Or would it be wiser to make a confidant of the latter gentleman instead ?

She had her money ! yes ; and now that was made safe, she began to set a high value on her social position and her reputation.

And thus on the first day of her honeymoon Laura found herself in a full ocean of doubt and fear with a path before her in which she felt as if rocks stood up out of the deep sea.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DRAWING-ROOM CHAPTER.

“DEAR Miss Armine, how glad I am that your picture is getting on so fast. It is really a great success ; but don't work too much yet, or the Doldy Doctors will look grave.”

“I have got good luck with it, Mrs. Silburn !—it has found a purchaser already.”

They were talking in Mrs. Silburn's drawing-room. It was one of her afternoons when her intimate friends gathered, when the writing-tables were pushed aside, and Coventry, Mrs. Silburn, and the kittens were all supposed to have nothing to do but to be at the disposal of their visitors.

“I was very much annoyed at losing my

model before I had finished," went on Miss Armine; "it was very difficult to complete it. And it really is a pity that such a perfect model should be a convict."

"Poor Anton," said Dorothy, rising, as she spoke, to welcome Ernestine, who was shown in just at that moment.

"Are you speaking of Anton?" she exclaimed. "Do you know anything about him? Whom do you think I met yesterday in the street?"

"Who!—how can I tell?" said Dorothy. "But I should like to know what can have made you so excited. Come, sit down. Why, Ernestine, you used not to be so nervous."

"No," said Ernestine, "and I ought not to be now. But my views of life—my comprehension of how things should be—have all been so upset, so altered, that I don't think I have got over it quite; and really it is startling to meet a person in the street whom I should as little have expected to meet as a person just dead—it was Yriarte."

“ Oh ! ” said Dorothy, with a world of meaning. She then went across the room, and, opening a door, said, “ Coventry, Yriarte has got out. Didn't I tell you so ? ”

Coventry, a moment after came into the room. He came and sat down by Ernestine, as he always did when she was present.

“ How do you know he is out ? ” he asked Dorothy.

“ Ernestine has just seen him, ” she answered.

Ernestine looked from one to the other. “ Tell me, ” she said, “ what makes you take it so quietly ? How is it possible ? ”

“ All things are possible, ” said Dorothy oracularly, “ where Government officials are concerned. I know a little of the efforts that have been made for him, and a journalist gets to know something of the wheels within wheels. ”

“ It is a strong case, ” said Coventry, “ when bribery for small and influence for large people can be backed by such an argument as that

the matter had been manipulated in court, and that the vagabond had been sentenced more severely than he deserved. I don't know what officials are to do but take the shortest way and save all the public fuss and worry which otherwise might ensue. And then there is the consideration of expense. If we find that there is a prisoner in our prisons unjustly condemned, from that point of view we may well be excused for giving him up. It appears absurd at once that we should burden ourselves with his maintenance when his own Government is willing and anxious to take him off our hands. We have tax enough on the national purse for the support of our own ignorant criminals, behind whom those iron prison gates close so inexorably. When the condemnation of a foreigner appears unjust, Government will surely find some way of saving his porridge."

Ernestine looked in bewilderment from one to another.

“ You don’t mean to say,” she exclaimed, “ that he has been knowingly *let out* ? ”

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders. “ You are so straightforward still,” she said. “ We will make no statements about Yriarte ; but there was a story known to a few of us a while ago about a man of equally influential connections who had been sentenced for life. He was a man much of Yriarte’s sort, quite able to make himself comfortable under adverse circumstances. They gave him oakum to pick, and told him to do a little when he liked. He passed the days reading novels. It is said that he read all Dumas’ and all Scott’s. When he got very bored with reading, he picked a little oakum for a change, and to restore his circulation. One day he was fetched out of his cell and taken into the governor’s room. The governor sent away the gaolers who had brought him, and locked the door on them. He then whispered a word to our friend, and opening a small door pushed him through it and shut it behind him. The

man found himself in a court opening upon the street, where two of the aforesaid influential connections awaited him. When they told him he was free, he was angry, and said, 'Nonsense, it is a trick.' 'Why,' exclaimed one of his friends, 'you are blind. Look at your hair.' And then he remembered that for a little while it had been allowed to grow."

"Oh, dear," said Ernestine, "how strangely things are done in this world! Wouldn't it be much simpler and much less trouble if people just did their duty?"

Coventry wickedly shook his head.

"I am really very doubtful whether it would," he said, "unless we could all be brought to do it at once; by the way, *Minerva Medica*, you must read *Matthew Arnold's* poems. You continually remind me of him in the way in which you refer to this world as a thing outside of yourself, a troublesome thing which you cannot understand. I hail you as one of us poets; I never heard a

thoroughly practical man say, 'in this world,' for he could not stand sufficiently outside of the world to use the words with any meaning."

"Now you are laughing at me," said Ernestine, blushing, as she often did, under Coventry's penetrating eye; "don't be hard on me; I am not a poet, but only a poor practical soul myself."

"There you remind me of Matthew Arnold again; he is always attitudinising as the practical man, inspector of schools; making reports on education in foreign countries, and so on; but he is only practical by effort. You will soon see in his poems how he speaks of this world as a prisoner might of his cell. And it is just the same with you. You are perplexed and baffled by forms of life with which you have no sympathy; and yet you want to work and take your place and live your life in the midst of them, and so you call yourself practical."

"She *is* practical," said Dr. Doldy, who had just come in, and quietly approached them.

“I should like you to see her shaking her curls over the housekeeping books.”

He drew a chair up and sat down on the other side of her. The people who called Ernestine cold would scarcely have known her had they seen her now, her face covered with fleeting emotions as she sat between these two men.

“She says we have too many servants,” he went on, speaking in a manner of his own, half humorous and half in earnest; “and she has taught me such a lesson by running away and leaving me to find out what it was like without her, that I believe if she sends off all the servants, and only allows me a dinner once a week, I shall submit. By the way,” he said, more quietly, and opening the subject evidently with the need of some self-control, “has Ernestine told you of her unexpected meeting yesterday?”

“Yes,” said Dorothy, “we have been talking about it, and Ernestine is innocently amazed that we think it possible.”

“Well, possible or not, I am inclined still to think it a dream. Ernestine has only seen him once in the street.”

“Don’t you remember, Dorothy,” said Ernestine, turning to her, and blushing a little, “that night when we passed him under a lamp-post outside Aunt Vavasour’s house? When you saw him afterwards in court you recognised him.”

“Let me think . . .” said Dorothy, with her head on one side. “Yes, I remember. He was smoking; and as we passed he took his cigar from his mouth to say, ‘Deuced fine woman.’ He admired you very much, evidently, if you care for the compliment.”

“Well, now,” said Ernestine eagerly, arresting a rising laugh from the others, “you will allow that I cannot be mistaken when I tell you that as he looked out of the cab window at me, I heard him say quite loud, ‘Deuced fine woman.’”

“The leopard cannot change his spots,” said Coventry, when the laugh which Ernestine’s

eagerness and blushes raised, had subsided; "but what a lamentable want of originality. Thorough-paced scoundrels appear as a rule to lack imagination. They go over the worn tracks of villainy, and the same vulgar phrase of admiration which they have applied to handsome women since modern slang existed, they will use for our *Minerva Medica*!"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Lewis Lingen, who had constituted himself an occasional visitor at this house, which had the especial charm, for him, of being unlike any other house he entered. The atmosphere of mingled purity and Bohemianism which pervaded it made every one feel at his ease; and an hour spent in calling on Mrs. Silburn was generally found to be an hour of rest.

"Have you heard anything?" asked Dr. Doldy, immediately.

"Not yet," said Mr. Lingen. "They are evidently determined to keep it dark, if it is true. It will be a difficult matter to ascertain anything certain about it."

“Well,” said Coventry, with a smile, “our authority here grows the more positive, the more she thinks of it.”

Ernestine spoke quickly and gravely. She did not want ‘the fine woman’ story repeated to Mr. Lingen.

“I could not be mistaken in that man,” she said. “The dandy was gone certainly, and he looked unshaved, but there were those teeth. And remember,” she added, “a doctor is accustomed to see people under different conditions, and to recognise them, and to note changes of appearance apart from changes of dress.”

“Very true,” said Dr. Doldy, gravely; “a nightcap or a new Paris bonnet; the difference is marvellous.”

“You are profane, Doctor,” said Mr. Lingen (who was a little relieved to find his old friend in a less terribly tragic mood to-day). “Mrs. Doldy’s remark is a very discerning one. She is quite right; a doctor is much less liable to be deceived by a change in ap-

pearance than a person with a less practised eye. I am disposed to think that we may put faith in Mrs. Doldy's recognition of the man."

"I can't think what the House is about," said Dr. Doldy, "when things like this can be done under the rose."

"The younger members would be glad to get hold of such a case," said Coventry; "judicious nursing of it would make the political fortune of a rising radical. But who is to overlook our great systems of legislation? Who can have an eye upon every corner in the land? Who can ascertain whether every official does his duty? And, more difficult still, who is to check the secret orders of high functionaries? Anyone who has watched the working of a large household will know enough of the difficulty of managing human beings by system, to see the impossibility of making any system perfect, or of preventing infringements of it—minor elasticities, informal pieces of

jobbery—call them what you will. If we had no private interest in this affair, I should like to hear B—— asking his question upon it.”

“And do you suppose,” said Mr. Lingen, “that there would be found no one clever enough to answer him? Public matters are, more or less, as they are made to appear.” His thought was, as he spoke. “From what I have heard, I should not be too sure that B—— has not been among the quiet intriguers for this release. Where there are ladies concerned, a social bramble creeps a long way. You see,” he went on aloud, “when you consider the matter quietly, Yriarte’s party would have a very strong case. Not only is there the ordinary power of a foreign Government, which always has great weight and has accomplished more remarkable things than this before now; but, if Yriarte has made the most out of his facts to his supporters, they can put on the screw by saying that a gross injustice has been committed.”

“How?” asked Dorothy, whose eyes looked very bright.

“Only a little collusion,” said Lingen in an airy manner, to satisfy Dorothy,—“I must not go into detail.” Then turning to Dr. Doldy he said in a low voice, audible to him alone, “They can put it that he was prosecuted for attempting to obtain some money from Miss Doldy for the maintenance of the child which had claims on them both; and it would appear that Yriarte was at the time supporting the child, although of course he has never spent a penny on it himself. Still, he got it cared for; and, as Miss Doldy is well known to be an heiress, and Mr. Yriarte a man now altogether without means, the prosecution would appear in a rather bad light, and there would be a strong case for the Home Secretary.”

“And I,” ejaculated Dr. Doldy, with a groan so touching that everyone started, “I was the prosecution. A nice affair this is for a man of position.”

Dorothy’s bright eyes were now explained

by a remark of hers. Dr. Doldy had risen from his chair, and was walking about the room in a fume; everybody was silent, feeling sympathetic and uncomfortable, and her voice dropped quietly into the silence, disturbing it more effectively than the report of a cannon.

“What a glorious paragraph this will make!”

Mr. Lingen dropped his eye-glass suddenly and sat down very unobtrusively in a chair near. He had been a little touched and flattered by the earnest regard of Dorothy’s unusually bright eyes.

“Quite true what people say of these female journalists,” he thought. “Did I not see a review the other day in which Dorothy Silburn was denounced as an unsexed woman? I’m inclined to think that reviewer had some wit: it cannot be right when a woman looks at you so sweetly that you think she has fallen in love, and you find she is only sucking your information for a newspaper paragraph!”

“Mrs. Silburn,” said Dr. Doldy, “pardon

me, but you are not so lost to all sense of everything but journalism that you will betray the confidence of your friends?"

"Oh," she said, waking up from her absorption (in imagination she had already earned an unusually large fee from the *Morning Mail*), "I suppose you would not like it!"

"How can you ask?" exclaimed Dr. Doldy. "Give me your word of honour..."

"Oh, I promise," cried Dorothy; "but it's hard to relinquish early news, especially a spicy bit. But I promise—of course; I really did not think."

"A paragraph—spicy—" repeated Dr. Doldy; "I'll shoot any editor that prints it. Why, as it is, I am strongly disposed to follow Ernestine's example, and run away from the whole thing. You don't know, I suppose, whether a couple of physicians—married—would find a good field in the Sandwich Islands or some such place?"

"Oh, it will all be forgotten soon enough,"

said Dorothy, "especially if nothing more is told," she added, ruefully.

"The Government will say nothing, you may be sure," said Mr. Lingen. "Go for a holiday; forget it yourself, and you will find it forgotten by others. When Sir Percy and Lady Flaxen return and take their place in society, their friends will not be curious. Yriarte, if escaped, is of course out of the country already; and his connections will look after him in future, we may hope."

Miss Armine, who, being a discreet little lady, had held her peace all this time, not quite understanding the whole of the matters discussed, now ventured to ask Mr. Lingen a question.

"Do you think," she said, "if Mr. Yriarte has been let out, that Anton will be let out also?"

"I don't know," he answered; "it is doubtful, I should think, as he has no connections. But there will be some efforts made probably."

"I would like a talk with you about that,

Lingen," said Dr. Doldy. "We must find some means of helping that poor fellow."

"I hope you will," said Dorothy. "He looked so innocent and puzzled in court; I don't think he half understood what it was all about."

"And I hope so!" cried Miss Armine, enthusiastically. "He was such a handsome creature, with the loveliest grey shadows about his shoulders. And such a model—he never seemed even to breathe. Fancy wasting him on convicts!"

Her wail was so genuine that it created an effectual diversion. Everybody laughed except Ernestine, who was thinking perplexedly to herself.

"How strange it is," said she to Coventry, "that if you look at the world and events with their proper face on, all seems so commonplace and easy; yet if one turns back but a little bit of the curtain which hides the realities of the mingled lives which make up

the world, everything appears different and complicated."

"Dr. Doldy," said Coventry, turning to him, "Minerva Medica is puzzling her brains too much. I prescribe an immediate holiday for her. Make her give up attempting to think out the problems of this world. Women ought not to think, you know."

"At all events," said Ernestine, with a smile, "it is a mistake to think too much, from a hygienic point of view. One reaches a stage every now and then when one should give up thinking and take to living. And perhaps, too, the experiences of life do more to solve these problems than too much thought."

"Let us all go for a holiday," said Dr. Doldy. "Suppose we hire a barge and go down the river."

"Or a gipsy caravan!" cried Dorothy.

Mr. Lingen rose, to take his departure. The proposed delights were a little out of his line; a skiff above Windsor, or a four-

in-hand to Brighton, might have attracted him.

“When you discuss such idling as that,” he said, “it is time for me to go. Such men as I are not made for dreamy holidays. We are plunged so rapidly from one series of complications into another—our minds are so filled with a succession of romances, crimes, secrets, intrigues—our brains are required to work so incessantly, that such a holiday would be maddening in its quiet.” This is what he said, and it sounded very well indeed; it does not do for a busy lawyer to convey the idea that he even knows how to unbend.

“I suppose,” said Coventry, “your plan is to rattle half over the world in an express train, thirty-six hours at a stretch. Yours is an essentially modern life. I believe I belong to a bygone age; I like to be idle.”

So saying he stretched himself in his hammock. His kittens, who were asleep in it,

aroused themselves to purr over him. Mr. Lingen departed; and the others gathered round Coventry to "babble of green fields." And Coventry, with his eyes on Ernestine's sweet face, from which the cloud was passing, murmured snatches of verse full of buttercups and children's laughter.

THE END.

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