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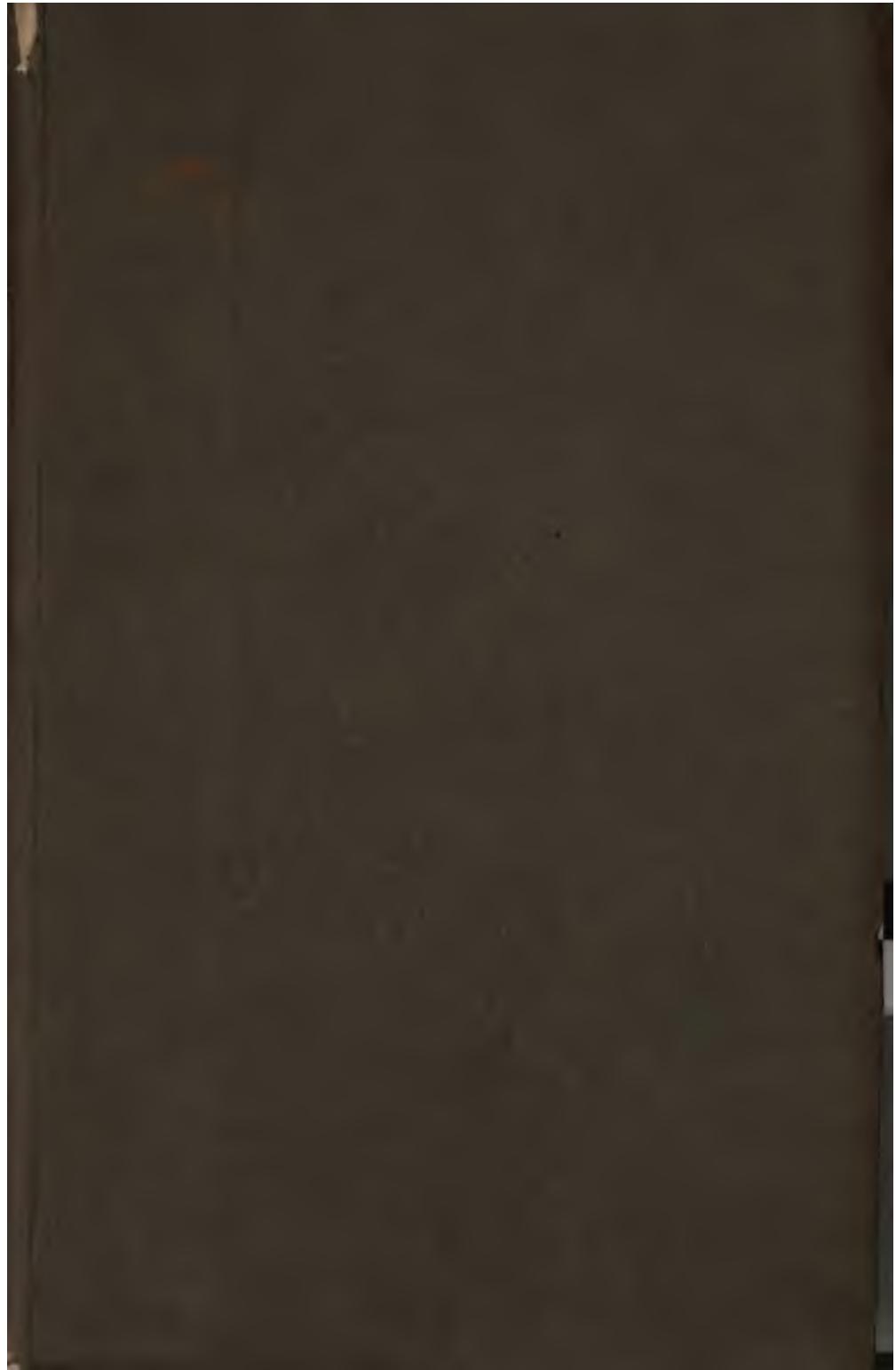
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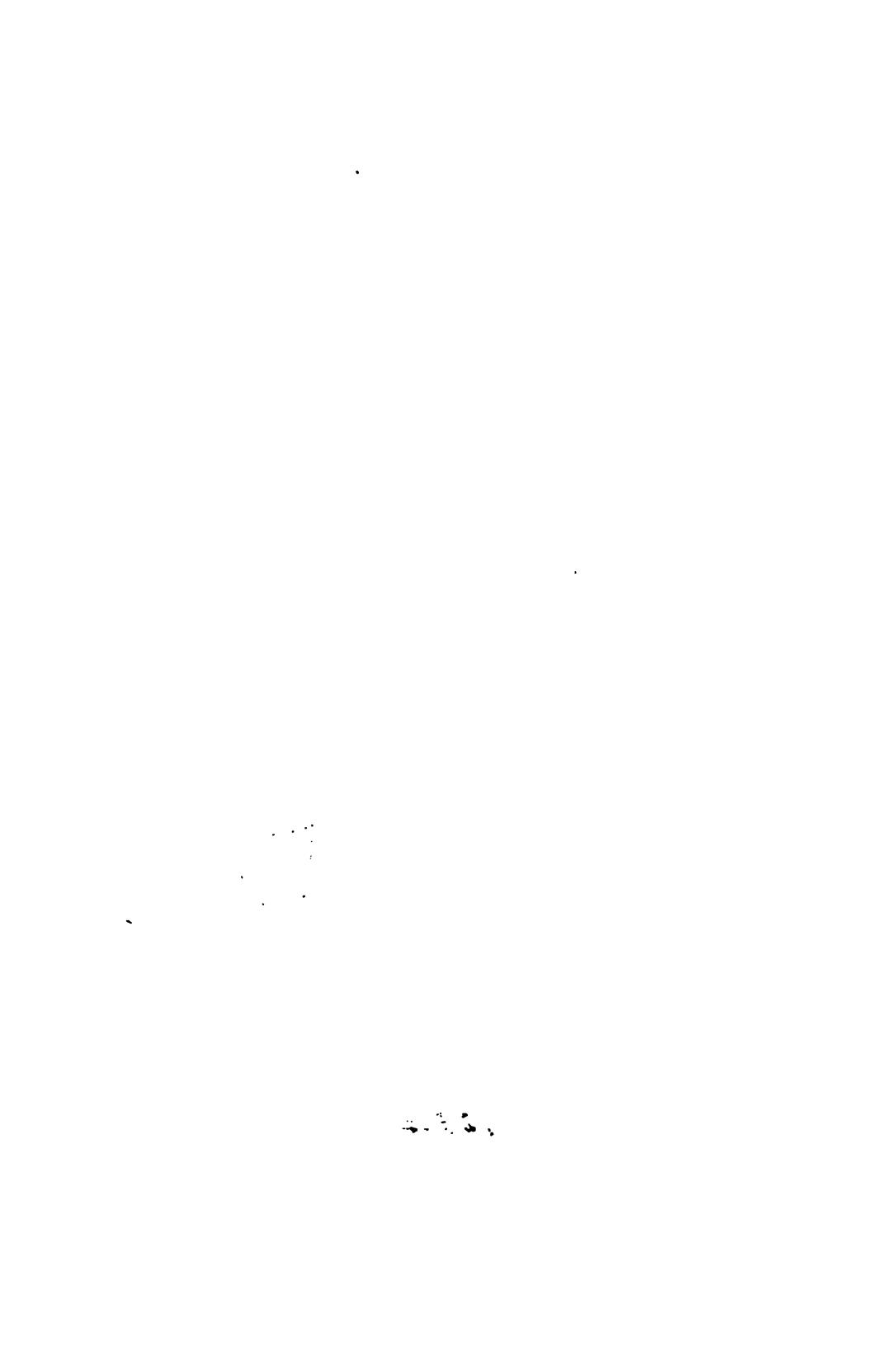
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FASHION

AND ITS VOTARIES.

BY

MRS. MABERLY,

AUTHOR OF "LÉONTINE," "MELANTHE, OR THE DAYS
OF THE MEDICI," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

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F A S H I O N.

CHAPTER I.

GLYNDON COTTAGE was situated in one of the prettiest and most romantic parts of a southern county of England. It was close to the village of the same name, but shut out from its view by the little well-wooded enclosure in the midst of which it stood. It had in everything appertaining to it a peculiarly English air; it was large enough for comfort—small enough for economy, and was sufficiently ornamented to show that independence, if not affluence,

reigned within its walls. The house was low, but extended over a considerable surface of ground; the upper windows were shaded by a broad projecting roof; the lower ones opened to the ground beneath a spacious verandah, round the pillars of which were twined many rare and beautiful creepers, with their large flowers and graceful tendrils meeting overhead, and forming a succession of bowers. The cottage stood upon a slight elevation, in the middle of a beautiful pleasure ground, not large enough to aspire to the dignity of belonging to a park, but sufficiently extensive to escape the appearance of the narrow strip of ground generally allotted to a cottage. This lawn or pleasure ground was, near the house, broken by flower-beds and evergreens, mingled here and there with a picturesque thorn or oak, round which the ivy clung; and at a distance the smooth greensward lost itself softly and naturally beneath the

shade of the large and spreading trees which concealed the boundary of the grounds. It was a beautiful garden, perfectly beautiful in its own peculiar style, neither Italian, nor French, nor Dutch, but simply and purely English, rural, fragrant, fresh, and arranged with the most scrupulous neatness and good taste. There were no grottoes, no Chinese bridges, no imitation rocks nor cascades; the little stream that crossed the lower part of the lawn ran in its natural course, and rippled and bounded over its own stones and pebbles without being caught in its joyous way, and forced to pause until it had formed a stagnant pool, choked up by water lilies. No, there it ran merrily along, drinking in, as it were, the fragrance wafted from around, and kissing the sunbeam that rested so lovingly on its breast, until the eye, as it followed its wandering course, could trace it no longer, where it reached the heavy shadow of the

dark protecting trees. A happy, life-like look did that little stream impart, and everything around the cottage seemed happy and well-cared for, even to the rolled and polished carriage road, looking like a band of smooth satinwood as it wound through the finest of the scattered trees, and ended in a broad sweep before the cottage door. As you approached that door, the scene opened a little to the left, some large meadows, evidently belonging to the cottage, gleamed through the branches of the old oak trees; and the farm buildings, intended not to be seen, just discovered themselves enough to add the surpassing delight of home-feeling to the spot. Beyond the trees which skirted the ground at the back of the house rose the spire of the old village church; and the striking of the clock which glistened upon its side in all the modern splendour of large golden figures, might be distinctly heard by the inmates of Glyndon Cottage, reminding

them, if they had need of the awakening summons, that even in the earthly paradise in which they dwelt, they must watch and pray, and remember that their days, however happy, were numbered.

The proprietors of Glyndon Cottage were Mr. and Mrs. Conway. Mr. Conway was the last descendant of an ancient family, the members of which had always deemed it necessary to vie with the extravagance they saw practised by others, in order to maintain their pre-eminence in the world of fashion. Little by little, their large fortune had dwindled down to a comparatively small one; and as in the estimation of the giddy world poverty is a sin, the family had gradually sunk from its former high estate. Unfortunately for Mr. Conway, the tastes and habits of his ancestors had never altered with their circumstances, and any chance there might have been of saving some part of the property from the general wreck was

totally lost; and Mr. Conway, upon the death of his father, found himself penniless, with the exception of two hundred a year, which had been so secured that it could not be swept away with the rest. Fortunately for Mr. Conway, nature had not been niggardly to him of her gifts; and just as his situation appeared desperate, his very handsome person attracted the attention of a young lady possessed of a considerable fortune, and who afterwards became his wife. The accident which led to a meeting productive of such happy results was one of every-day occurrence. Mr. Conway having tried every rational and irrational device for rendering his two hundred a year the nucleus of a grand fortune, had just reconciled himself to the idea of leaving England for ever, and establishing himself in a mercantile situation in India, when one day, during his conference with a confidential friend, his banker in the city, a bevy of fair

damsels entered the room. They were the daughters and niece of the banker, the Misses White and Miss Jones. An introduction naturally took place; and when, after some little time, the acquaintance of Mr. Conway with these ladies had ripened into an intimacy, he so repeatedly heard the vivid expressions of regret, that "such an aristocratic looking being should go to die in India," that he began to perceive it was a sacrifice he was no longer called upon to make. In process of time, Miss Jones became Mrs. Conway, bestowing with her hand a fortune of three thousand a year, which to her husband appeared riches beyond his most golden dreams. Mrs. Conway, whose greatest ambition was to escape from her city connexions, and make what she called a "genteel marriage," insisted upon the whole of her fortune being settled upon her husband, and nothing could exceed the promised harmony of their

existence. Mr. Conway, whose first fear was to see his newly-acquired fortune dissipated by folly, proposed leaving London, and establishing themselves in the country; and Mrs. Conway, whose idea of London was Cheapside all the week, and Kensington Gardens on Sunday, did not make any objection, especially as the lilacs and laburnums were just then in blossom. The newly-married pair set out upon a tour; and having inspected every place to be let or sold that was likely to come within their means, the purchase of Glyndon Cottage, with the grounds belonging to it, was the result of their deliberations. It must not be supposed, however, that this great event was concluded with equal delight by both the interested parties. Mrs. Conway, a woman of yielding and gentle habits, said little; but she was, at the bottom of her heart, bitterly disappointed. She could not deny the enchanting beauty of the spot, its

romantic situation, the magnificence of the surrounding scenery, nor the comforts with which the house was replete, and which might easily be increased; but still she was dissatisfied, although then and ever afterwards the real reason of her displeasure remained locked within her own bosom. She was ashamed to confess that, after all, it was chiefly the name of the place which caused her unhappiness. *Glyndon Cottage* did not, to her ears, sound aristocratic; if it had been *Glyndon Park*, or *Glyndon Hall*, or *Mount Glyndon*, or *Glyndon House*, she would have been happy: but the word *cottage* was hard to bear. So many of her city relations had cottages: she remembered “*Rose Cottage*,” and “*Eglantine Cottage*,” and “*Ivy Cottage*,” and a multitude of other cottages christened after a multitude of great people and small people; and the result of her recollections was, that, after all, to the ears of her distant friends, her

country house would not sound a bit better than their Highgate Villas. This was the first trial poor Mrs. Conway had to bear; but she did bear it, and bore it as few people bear anything, without complaining and without remark. Some feeling, which she did not even try to explain to herself, forbade her to reveal to her husband the secret of her distaste to the word "cottage;" so she resigned herself quietly to become the inmate of one of the prettiest and most comfortable habitations in England. Mr. Conway, who was merely prudent, but never stingy, gently explained to his wife his reasons for rejecting many large and imposing-looking country houses, which he might have obtained at an apparently more moderate price than that which he had paid for Glyndon Cottage, but which would have entailed an expenditure far beyond his means to support. Mr. Conway was a very excellent and conscientious man, and having

received his whole fortune from his wife, felt himself bound to manage it for her to the best advantage. He did not with blind folly surround her with extravagance, and deprive himself of all but common necessities, as though he were receiving alms at the hands of her whom he had married; but he placed himself and his house at once upon a scale of comfort and respectability which could leave nothing to be desired; and before long, Mrs. Conway acknowledged that there was a pleasure and independence in living completely within their means, of which she had never dreamed; and when she saw the many luxuries and amusements which such a system permitted, she almost ceased to regret that she was living in a cottage, and forgot her antipathy to the name. Mr. and Mrs. Conway were not, however, condemned to pass their lives always in one spot: they made frequent journeys abroad, and sometimes spent a short time

in town, although neither felt much disposition to remain there—Mrs. Conway, from fear of her plebeian relations; Mr. Conway, from a secret dread of being drawn into the vortex of fashionable dissipation, which he well knew would speedily reduce him to his original state of destitution. Glyndon Cottage became, therefore, their chief and favourite abode, and the birth of a son and a daughter seemed to leave them nothing to desire.

CHAPTER II.

MANY years had passed since Mr. and Mrs. Conway had established themselves at Glyndon Cottage, but the time had gone by like so many hours, for, in the quiet retirement in which they lived, little had occurred to break the routine of every-day life. Like everything else, however, this state of repose was destined to have an end. One day, Mr. Conway received a letter which startled the whole family from their usual placid tranquillity. The letter was from one of Mrs. Conway's relations, who was esta-

blished in India, and it contained the generous offer of a highly advantageous situation for her only son, Philip, who was then just fifteen years old. The boy had been educated partly at home, partly at a private school kept by a clergyman in the adjoining parish, and he had just arrived at the age when it was difficult to decide upon the course which it was best to pursue. So great was the horror which Mr. Conway felt towards the allurements of the world, that he trembled and hesitated ere he launched his only son upon that sea of danger and of toil. He wished to send him to college, but an invincible terror of the associates whom he must meet, and the excesses in which he possibly might indulge, restrained him from following his first impression. Mr. Conway was one of those persons who prefer remaining at a distance from a difficulty to mastering it through the power which experience gives. From the

fact of his own family misfortunes having originated in the extravagance and dissipation of its members, and their blind devotion to the dictates of fashion, he had imbibed a positive aversion to the world, and continued to cherish the feeling until it had become a mania. He looked upon the act of sending his child into society as that of consigning him at once to destruction. Naturally imbued with the same ideas as his father, Philip Conway, although very clever, was something of an oddity. Having no companions of his own age, his time was principally occupied by study, and the only recreations the country afforded were riding or walking with his sister, and fishing in the beautiful trout streams with which the country was intersected. Mr. Conway, even with his strictness of opinion, could not object to these harmless amusements; but Philip, although without confessing it to himself, had already begun to grow weary

of them. His busy and inquiring mind longed for a wider field of action, and no sooner had he been made acquainted with the offer which his parents had received, than he caught eagerly at the prospect it opened to his view. He prayed, he entreated to be allowed to go to India. To his mother he promised eternal watchfulness over his health; to his sister, innumerable letters, and presents of curiosities without end; and to his father, such attention to his business as to ensure his coming home loaded with gold. Mrs. Conway wept, and looked, first at her son, and then at her husband. Ellen, with her arms clasped round his neck, and the tears streaming down her cheeks, whispered to her father, "not to let Philip go;" but Mr. Conway hesitated and sighed, and read over and over the letter of his Indian friend. The appointment was one of the very best, offering advantages to which it seemed difficult

to assign a limit; and it would also at once resolve the question, which had so long secretly agitated the breast of the anxious father, as to “what was to become of Philip,” by removing him to a sphere of action which, at all events, was more useful and creditable than frittering away his energies in the empty pursuits of the fashionable world. Prudence at length prevailed; it was a hard task to part with his only son; but real affection is more shown in the sacrifice we make for those beloved, than in the more common and selfish practice of wishing to retain them constantly by our side. Mr. Conway, whose whole heart was bound up in his domestic affections, would willingly have expatriated himself, and followed his son to India, but he could not ask his wife and daughter to leave their happy home, and to separate from them was equally impossible. Nothing remained, therefore, but to permit Philip

Conway to depart alone, and, a month after the receipt of the important letter, he had taken leave of his weeping parents, and set out for that land from which few expect to return without having amassed a considerable fortune—a sad exchange for all that it has cost: ties broken, friends estranged, a youth of exile, for an old age of money and ill health.

CHAPTER III.

GLYNDON COTTAGE looked very desolate for some time after the departure of Philip. Mr. and Mrs. Conway were more together than usual; and poor Ellen wandered about with tears in her eyes as she went her daily round and vigilantly tended all the beloved objects that her brother had confided to her care. His pony, his favourite pets, and some particularly fine flowers, which had been special objects of his protection—these were all to Ellen assacred deposits, and not for a moment did she neglect them. Then, after

a little while, came letters from Philip; and the joyousness with which he described all his adventures went far to diminish the pang of grief which wrung the hearts of those left behind at every mention of his name.

There is comfort, though mixed with sadness, in perceiving that the object of our solicitude does not share our sorrow. It is easier to suffer alone. The good spirits of Philip had a beneficial effect upon the inmates of Glyndon Cottage. Mr. Conway walked with a firmer step as he made the daily tour of his meadows and farm-yard; and his brow was placid, as in days of yore, when seated in the library where so many of his hours were passed, and where Ellen, with the freedom of an idolized child, so often stole in to tell him some trifling anecdote which she had picked up in her morning walk. Mrs. Conway, a gentle, listless, useless sort of woman, had given less sign

of sorrow; and now the tokens of rejoicing were scarcely made manifest save by redoubled diligence in her worsted knitting, and a greater anxiety about the shades of her Berlin wool. She had wept when her son left her, but she was not broken-hearted; all that she had of affection, or ambition, or spirit was centred in her only daughter—she was her second self. Ellen was so good, so active, so useful to her mother, supplying with such infinite tact the deficiencies which nature had left in the maternal mind, that Mrs. Conway found herself totally helpless without her, and mistook the feeling of dependence for the warmer one of devotion. She told Ellen every day that she could not live without her, and that she must never marry; and Ellen smiled, and raised her brilliant eyes to her mother with a look of infantine glee. She had but little thought of love or marriage, and the idea seemed to her something almost ludicrous. Ellen Con-

way at sixteen was perfectly charming, frank, affectionate, confiding, and without a thought of self. Educated hitherto under the watchful eye of a father, she had not learned any of the young-ladyism which girls carelessly brought up, or too early exposed to the influence of bad example, are certain to acquire. She never thought of the effect that she produced, or the admiration she excited, for she had not been taught that by these means her welfare in life was to be secured. She was equally at her ease whether addressed by a lady or a gentleman. No one had told her that her fate depended upon her entrapping a husband lavishly endowed by fortune, and that to obtain his good-will she must violently affect qualities she did not possess, and detract from every merit to which others of her sex might lay claim. A word of ill-nature would have seemed to her a sin—a thought of double-dealing too degrading to be entertained for a moment.

She was warm-hearted, religious, and sincere, with buoyant spirits, and a voice of silver-toned sweetness that went to the heart.

In person, Ellen Conway was scarcely less gifted than in mind, although her beauty was not such as a painter or sculptor would have adored, for its character was more that of expression than of form. She had the radiant brown eyes and finely arched brow of her father, but the head was slightly deficient, both in character and size, and there was a little hardness in the line of her mouth, which prevented it from being perfectly beautiful when in repose. In speaking or smiling, this expression instantly vanished, and the tender playfulness of her manner dispelled at once any disagreeable impression it might have made. Ellen Conway was not the least like a woman of the world. Had she always remained as she was, she would have been a creature to

cherish, to watch over, to guard against every danger; but evidently she was a person more impressionable and of natural good disposition, than one of powerful mind or distinguished talent. She looked loving, and kind, and good; and though her manner was polished and gentle, yet it was too infantine and too unguarded for the world—it would have been mistaken for levity, or laughed at for childishness. No; decidedly Ellen Conway was not fit for the world. So had her doting father said to himself at least a thousand times, and it appeared to be more easy to carry this idea into effect in the case of Ellen, than it might have been in that of his son. He felt, therefore, little uneasiness upon her account, but lived on, day after day, enjoying her presence, watching her gay movements and sunny smile, with the gladness of a child hailing the new-born summer with its flowers and its warmth, and forgetting that they must

one day have an end. This feeling of affection, of loving her as if she were but a beautiful child, seemed more or less to affect everybody connected with Ellen. The neighbours all liked her, the poor people of the village adored her, and the great people of the only very grand house within visiting distance of Glyndon Cottage, especially patronized her.

Glyndon was situated in what was called a good neighbourhood; that is, there were a great many small places not far distant from each other, and in the village, which was scattered on the side of a hill, were many single houses, the residence of quiet people and elderly ladies, who gave early tea-parties, and now and then in summer a dance upon the grass. Although this system of society may not appear attractive, there were among its members many estimable and agreeable persons. Some who preferred retirement, some compelled by the

scantiness of their means to keep aloof from all that might induce unnecessary expense. The village of Glyndon might not be free from some of the little incidental heart-burnings and jealousies which seem inherent in the nature of man, but it could also boast, like many of its class, of stronger friendships among its members than are often to be met with in society of a more extended scale.

Country neighbours are not of necessity good friends, but they are generally so; for the pursuits of all more nearly assimilate than where society assumes the artificial shape it thinks necessary to its well-being in the hurrying and struggling life of a large town. Added to this, there is the natural feeling of union, of dependence upon each other, to which human nature is actually reduced in the comparative solitude of the country, which goes far to unbend pride and still the workings of malice. To

be comfortable in the country, it becomes somewhat necessary to be a little amiable, and to let the transcendent merits of self veil their glories for a moment while admitting the humbler light of those who happen to form the surrounding community.

Upon her first arrival at Glyndon Cottage, no one could have suffered more than Mrs. Conway had done at the prospect which the society of the country held out. It is true that it was many grades higher than that in which she had originally moved, but having married a man of good family, she at first supposed that miracles in the way of society would follow such an event. By degrees, however, perceiving that this was not the case, the apathy of her nature prevailed, and she sunk into a state, if not of enjoyment, at least of content and submission. She had her secret longings for distinction, but had not an idea how it was

to be achieved ; and although covertly despising much of the society in which she found herself, she was too listless, and, perhaps, too good-natured to express her discontent, or betray her want of interest in individuals who so frankly tendered the hand of friendship and good fellowship to a stranger. Mrs. Conway, therefore, was nearly as popular in the village and neighbourhood of Glyndon as was Ellen. It went far, however, to reconcile Mrs. Conway to a country life, when she found that all her neighbours were not exactly of the same class as those with whom she had at first become acquainted, but that Brandesford Hall, the greatest house in the county, was situated within three miles of Glyndon ; and still further was she disposed to submit gracefully to her fate, when it appeared that Lord and Lady Brandesford were inclined to be, what is called, the best possible neighbours. They were not often resident in the country,

but when they were at home, the house was always full of company, and Mrs. Conway found her dreams of grandeur agreeably realized when, having recovered from the alarm with which the first days of their acquaintance had filled her, she found herself hospitably and kindly received by persons who were looked upon in the neighbourhood with all the reverence due to royalty. Lord and Lady Brandesford had two daughters and one son, who was much younger than his sisters. The girls, who, notwithstanding all their efforts, still preserved that appellation, were ten and twelve years older than Ellen Conway, and as, except when anything interfered with their own plans or desires, they were not particularly ill-natured, they had hitherto always shown the "cottage beauty," as they called her, especial kindness. It was now three years since they had been at Brandesford, but they were expected to spend the

autumn in the country ; and Ellen, forgetting that, at the mature age of sixteen, she might not be as great a favourite as heretofore, looked forward to their arrival, at the close of the summer, with all the delight of a school-boy counting the hours as his holidays approached.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was nearly sunset one evening, when Mrs. Conway, having walked at least twenty times from her sofa to the window, and as often returned, took the desperate resolution of removing the whole of her little work-table from its habitual corner, to the seat under the verandah. She established herself comfortably in the shade, and, surrounded by her balls of worsted, appeared less uneasy than she had been during the last hour, although the constant glances which she cast towards the far-off road, showed that she was in expectation of some arrival.

It was very seldom that Mrs. Conway was alone; but this day happened to be a solitary one, and, from the indolence of her habits, one of total seclusion. Mr. Conway had taken her carriage and horses to a distance, having actually left home to pay a visit to an old friend, and he was not expected to return until the following day. Ellen had gone to take her usual evening's ride, and Mrs. Conway remained sole tenant of Glyndon Cottage.

Mrs. Conway was one of those persons to whom solitude, even for a few hours, is actual suffering. Without mind, without education, she had no resources within herself, and constantly depended upon others, and accidental circumstances, for amusement or even occupation. Her society was not disagreeable; because she was so much interested in the most trifling affairs of others, as to give her undivided attention to the most elaborate details, which often

redeems a person from the accusation of stupidity, as often incurred by others who are merely inattentive. Her mind was, however, completely vacant; for the puerile ideas which constantly flitted through it, could not be called thoughts. Constant intercourse with her would have been most wearisome to one of an imaginative turn, but to the world in general she appeared a quiet, inoffensive person, with an average portion of knowledge and conversation.

The extraordinary want of intellect with which most women are afflicted, may account, in some degree, for the incessant labour they bestow upon the most trivial and useless occupations—occupations by which no human being seems benefited, but which they laudably term, “not wasting their time.”

Mrs. Conway would have been deeply offended had any one presumed to convey such a hint to her. The winding or un-

winding of a skein of Berlin wool was to her an event of great importance; the finishing one row of stitches, and beginning another, an epoch in her day, and the whole household was duly made acquainted with it.

Mr. Conway, a man of studious habits and tastes, having vainly endeavoured to find some spot in the mind of his wife which might be susceptible of culture, retired within himself, and left her unmolested to pursue her useless avocations, reconciling himself to the course, by calling them “harmless,” and secretly resolving that his only daughter should become a more efficient member of that community, into which no one individual was sent to be merely a burthen to his neighbour. And so Mrs. Conway knitted on, day after day, and year after year; for hours at a time, she sat with her eyes fixed upon the little coloured thread passing over her fingers, and her

shoulders lazily embedded in the soft cushions of her chair, while her feet rested upon a high stool placed in front of her. It was in this position she was sitting, beneath the flower-clothed verandah, the western sun just tinging with red the lilac ribbons in her cap, when the sound of horses' feet made her start from her repose, and turn hastily to the road, where Ellen soon appeared, urging her pony to its fastest canter as she wound through the trees. The face of Mrs. Conway brightened with delight, and laying her knitting-needles carefully across her knees, she awaited the arrival of her daughter, who in another minute stood by her side, and leaning over her chair, tenderly embraced her.

“ My dear Ellen, where have you been? I thought you would never come home!” were the first words spoken by Mrs. Conway, in a somewhat discontented tone.

“ Dearest mamma,” answered Ellen, “ I

have only been out two hours; and you know Bilston Abbey, where you desired me to go, is full five miles from here."

"Ah! true," said Mrs. Conway, languidly; "but you ride so fast in general, I thought you would be back directly."

"Have you wanted anything, dear mamma?" asked Ellen, looking round anxiously, and picking up a ball of worsted that had rolled from the table.

"No, nothing particular, my love; but these summer days are so long."

"And so delightful," added Ellen, joyously. "If you could see how beautiful the country looks now that all the hay is mown—all the way from Bilston hill it looks like pleasure ground—and everything so deliciously sweet and fresh; for my part, I should like summer all the year round;" and Ellen looked lovingly up at the beautiful flowers that were clustered above her head.

"Ah! well, summer is good in its way," replied Mrs. Conway, who had resumed her knitting. "The cream is better; but somehow, I think one gets over the day more comfortably in winter."

"Oh!" said Ellen, with a shudder, "pray don't talk of winter, with its horrid short days."

"I think that so pleasant," observed Mrs. Conway. "A nice short morning, just long enough for a drive without fatigue; and then the evenings, one manages to get through them by sleeping a little between dinner and tea. But, good heavens——"

"What is the matter?" said Ellen, as Mrs. Conway suddenly started from her recumbent position, and sat upright.

"Twenty-six, twenty-seven, thirty! What on earth shall I do? But no, no; it is in the other row! Twenty-six, twenty-eight, thirty — quite right. What a relief! I

thought I had dropped a stitch;" and Mrs. Conway, heaving a deep sigh, sunk back to her horizontal reclining.

"Shall I count them again for you, mamma?" asked Ellen, in no way astonished at the sudden excitement displayed by her mother.

"Thank you, my love, they are right. I feel quite easy in my mind now. But what were we talking about! Oh! Bilston Abbey. And how is poor dear Mrs. Stirling since her accident? Did you see her?"

"No, mamma, she was out driving for the first time; she is so much better; so as I had a little time to spare, I just rode round by Brandesford, to know if there was any news of their coming."

"And what did you hear?" asked Mrs. Conway, so eagerly, that she half raised herself again from her cushions.

"What do you think, mamma?" said Ellen, with her eyes glistening with delight.

"They are coming home directly; to-day—
to-night. I dare say by this time they are
come."

"No, really!" exclaimed Mrs. Conway.
"I thought they were only to come next
week."

"No, no, they positively come to-night.
I saw Mrs. Wilson, the housekeeper. You
may depend upon it my news is true," said
Ellen, shaking her pretty head with an air
of importance.

"Well, that is very extraordinary," ob-
served Mrs. Conway. "I wonder what could
have made them change their plans!"

"I don't know," said Ellen, thoughtfully.
"Perhaps they wanted some country air."

"Oh, they would never have left Lon-
don for that!" replied Mrs. Conway, rather
disdainfully. "Did Mrs. Wilson not say
anything about it?"

"Mrs. Wilson did, now I remember, say
she thought it might be the dissolution of

parliament. She said, that perhaps Lord Brandesford might wish to canvass the county for Augustus."

"Why, Augustus is not of age, is he?" inquired Mrs. Conway.

"No, mamma; but he will be next month; the twenty-fifth is his birthday. You know he is just eight years younger than Rose," answered Ellen.

"Ah, true! I ought to remember their ages better," said Mrs. Conway, with a sigh. "They were little children when I first came here. But what else did Mrs. Wilson say?"

"She did not say much, I think," replied Ellen; "nothing that I recollect. But I was so glad to hear that Maria and Rose were really coming, and so soon, that I did not particularly listen."

"But did she not say whether they were coming alone, or whether any other persons were expected?"

"I believe she did say there was to be a great deal of company," said Ellen, carelessly; "but, mamma, when shall we go to Brandesford? I do so long to see Rose again."

"A great deal of company," repeated Mrs. Conway, without attending to the question of her daughter.

"Yes, mamma," said Ellen, gently, but with rather a disappointed look.

"Ellen, my love," exclaimed Mrs. Conway, after a short pause, during which time she had appeared lost in thought, "I have settled it all."

"Settled what, mamma?" asked Ellen.

"Why, you see, my love, it is of consequence that we should be the first to greet our neighbours on their return; and as I shall not have any carriage to go to-morrow, you had better ride to Brandesford in the morning, and make my excuses for not being able to call."

"Oh, mamma, how delightful!" exclaimed Ellen. "What a pity that you cannot come."

"You must bring me an exact account of all that you see and hear, my child; especially try and ascertain who are the expected guests at Brandesford."

"Oh! only strangers from London, I suppose," said Ellen,—"no one that we shall the least care about. I am very sorry that any one is coming. Do you remember how pleasant it was the last time the Brandesfords were at home, when we used to ride up in the evening to the cottage in the wood to eat strawberries and cream—and then our fishing-parties on the lake. How sorry I am that poor Philip should lose all this."

"Ellen," observed Mrs. Conway, very seriously, "your black habit fits you much better than your blue one."

"Does it, mamma?" said Ellen, looking surprised.

"Yes, my love; that one is too loose round the waist; see, I can put my hand through it;" and Mrs. Conway, drawing her daughter towards her, proceeded to criticise and arrange her riding-dress, which certainly did not do justice to her rounded and sylph-like form. "I must write to town for another hat for you," observed Mrs. Conway, still pursuing her own train of thought, and turning over every article of the dress of Ellen, who submitted passively, with the docility of a child. "And I dare say these collars with frills are out of fashion by this time—they were last year's, I think."

"I forget," said Ellen. "And does the fashion so very much signify?" she added, timidly.

"More than you can possibly be aware of," said Mrs. Conway, mysteriously. "Ellen, will you always be a child?"

"Dear mamma, shall we not have tea?

Let me ring for the candles," said Ellen, playfully ; and taking Mrs. Conway's hands, which still held the folds of her riding-dress, she, with infantine grace and glee, placed the neglected knitting-needles within them, and slyly gathering up the skirt of her habit, darted through the open window of the drawing-room and disappeared in the shade.

Mrs. Conway gave one look at her beloved knitting, saw that the stitches were all right, and then allowed her hands to sink gently down upon her lap. That evening she worked no more—her thoughts were busy elsewhere — Brandesford Hall was about to throw open its gates.

CHAPTER V.

HAPPY and light hearted, Ellen set out the next morning for her visit. In compliance with the oft-urged request of Mrs. Conway, she had donned her best riding attire, but it was not needed to set off beauty such as hers. Her eye sparkled and her cheek glowed as she cantered along the smooth road that led to Brandesford Hall, and she scarcely slackened her pace until she came within sight of the house. How her heart beat with pleasure as she rode across the magnificent park, startling from among the

long fern the beautiful deer, who beneath the sheltering branches of the old trees were hiding from the rays of the noon-day sun. Ellen felt perfectly happy. She was going to see again her dear friends—the friends of her childhood and her youth—and she thought of them with the love of an un-spoiled heart. They were her friends when she had last seen them, three years before; they were still her friends, and her lip trembled with emotion as it spoke their names. Maria and Rose Brandesford were to her perfection—if they had faults, she did not see them; but her nature was one which could see no fault in any one it loved, and many were those her heart held dear, for the cold world had not yet breathed its icy breath upon her glowing breast, and the eye of affection, ere it pauses to analyse, is blinded by the warm tear of admiration and love. The return of a friend was to Ellen an era of joy, and among all her favourites,

the Ladies Brandesford held the first place. They were so different from the other girls with whom she had associated, so clever, so accomplished, and above all, so very kind to her, who, in her own estimation, was immeasurably their inferior. In all this Ellen was mistaken; but the fault was a generous one. She had loved the ideal in her friends, and clothed them in the poetry of her own heart. What joy was in that heart when, upon arriving at the door of the stately mansion, Ellen was informed, not only that its proprietors had returned, but that Lady Brandesford and the young ladies were at home. Ellen followed the gliding step of the groom of the chambers with a rapidity that seemed almost to frighten him from his propriety, and scarcely waited until her name was announced ere she threw herself into the arms of her friends, and cordially embraced them. As there was not any one present besides their mother, Maria and

Rose condescended to return the somewhat rustic warmth of this greeting with every semblance of affection, and Ellen did not perceive that their countenances betrayed quite as much of astonishment as of interest as they gazed upon her. They had left her a child—a beautiful child—with long hair streaming over her shoulders—they found her a full-grown woman, but retaining the graces of her earlier days, made still more fascinating by an extremely natural manner, as far removed from freedom as it was from shyness. Ellen had not yet learned to be shy. The Ladies Brandesford, with their experience of eight or nine London seasons, had nothing left to learn. They saw at a glance how dangerous a rival to their fading charms the “cottage beauty” might prove, and rapid were the schemes which they instantly devised for either keeping her out of sight, or producing her to the society with which they expected to be surrounded

in a manner that might annihilate all chance of her occupying much of its attention. They, however, had too much tact to allow the slightest indications of their thoughts to disturb the harmony of their well-regulated countenances, and replied to Ellen's hurried questions and remarks with every semblance of interest. Little did the poor girl imagine that of the three persons who sat smiling upon her, there was only one who was in the least glad to see her. That one was Lady Brandesford. Her views and those of her daughters differed considerably. They thought only of themselves, their flirtations, and the ultimate chance of marriage. Lady Brandesford was ambitious; she dreamt of place and power, and the aggrandizement of her family. Her daughters having disappointed her expectations by their failure in securing great matrimonial alliances, were now but secondary objects of interest to her. All the feelings of affection she possessed

were centred in the person of Lord St. George, her only son. To him she looked with renovated hope; for through his means a long vista of power opened before her. He had only just left College, and Lady Brandesford resolved not to lose a moment ere she endeavoured to secure for him a seat in Parliament, hoping thereby to increase the influence of the family sufficiently to obtain some one of the many distinctions which the government of the day have always in their power to bestow. Parties in the county in which Brandesford Hall was situated were extremely divided, and Lady Brandesford, who had thoroughly calculated every chance, was perfectly aware that there were few people whom it was more important to attach to her side than the father of Ellen Conway. It was neither from his riches nor the extent of his landed property that Mr. Conway possessed so great an influence in the county in which he

resided. Glyndon Cottage had not pretensions to be called an estate, but its owner was revered as few of the magnates of the land could boast of being. His intrinsic worth stood him in lieu of hereditary power —his good sense and clear judgment were never at fault; and his opinion was eagerly adopted by the right thinking and honest whenever it was openly expressed. It had become a habit among the country gentlemen and rich farmers to consult him upon every occasion of difficulty; and so candid and impartial were his judgments, that persons of all parties and opinions were willingly guided by them. It is true that Mr. Conway would have preferred remaining unconsulted and undisturbed; but his notions of benevolence repudiated all selfish feeling, and in the goodness of his heart and his honest philanthropy, he would tear himself from his books and his studies, and listen to complaints, disputes, and consultations,

which often converted his beautiful library at Glyndon Cottage into a miniature court of justice. A man of this calibre was not to be neglected by Lady Brandesford, whose whole soul was in intrigue, and it was this reason which had caused her to smile so graciously on Ellen Conway upon her arrival to pay her first visit, and which rendered her more attentive than usual to the manner of her daughters towards their village friend. She saw instantly the effect which her beauty had produced; and although the vanity of a mother might have been wounded by the contrast between Ellen and her own sallow, discontented-looking daughters, yet at that moment the violet of the cottage was a greater object in her eyes than the more stately flowers of Brandesford Hall. Ellen must be protected even at the expense of the all-accomplished Maria and Rose. The visit of Ellen had been prolonged far beyond the usual length of morning visits,

and still she showed no inclination to depart. Radiant with happiness and the genuine emotions of her young heart, she sat between her early friends and talked incessantly. She did not perceive that the conversation was but languidly supported by her companions, but went on giving them whole histories of their neighbours, and the various changes which three years had made in the society of the village and county. All were objects of interest to her, and she could not imagine them to be otherwise to those who for so long a time had passed a great part of every year amongst them. There were, however, no marrying men in the immediate vicinity, and this would have been the only point of attraction in her discourse to girls so utterly spoiled and sated with society as the Ladies Brandesford. Lady Brandesford watched the languishing conversation, and at a convenient opportunity rose from her chair, and having looked for a moment

from the window, turned so as exactly to confront Ellen, exclaiming, as she did so, “Why, my child, how pale you are grown! I am sure your ride has been too much for you this sunny day.”

“Oh, no!” replied Ellen, “it was delightful—the sun was certainly a little hot, but I shall have it in my back going home.”

“That is still more dangerous,” observed Lady Brandesford; “nothing so likely to make you ill—you must positively not ride home. I will order the pony-carriage, and drive you myself to Glyndon.”

“Thank you, dear Lady Brandesford,” said Ellen, much flattered by the condescension of the stately Lady Brandesford; “but, indeed, unless you wish to go, I am quite able to ride—I am so accustomed to it—I never think of the weather.”

“I do wish to go,” insisted Lady Brandesford. “I shall be so happy to have the pleasure of calling upon Mrs. Conway,

without giving her the trouble of coming here."

"Mamma will be delighted to see you," said Ellen, simply.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Conway! She was always a great favourite of mine. I have no doubt I shall find her knitting as usual, close to the window. Is she as fond as ever of her Berlin wool?"

"Quite, I think," said Ellen. And then, as if some degree of apology was necessary for the predilection of her mother, she added, "Mamma has such very delicate health, that she cannot go out much, and working is a great amusement to her."

"Ah! and of all things knitting is the most charming," said Lady Brandesford, who would not have touched a needle for the world. "It is so easy, so little trying to the sight, and so very useful. But I forget to order the carriage. Maria, will you ring the bell." The three young ladies

rose at this request, and the bell having been rung, the carriage was duly ordered; Ellen's horse, at her request, sent home; and Lady Brandesford, having made a sign to Ellen to sit down again, continued—

“But I must get Mrs. Conway a little out of her quiet ways, and your dear good father also; they really shut themselves up too much. And, do you know, Ellen, I mean to be very gay this year.”

“Really!” exclaimed Ellen, with sparkling eyes. “But then it is always so pleasant here.”

“Not a bit,” said Lady Brandesford; “we are not a degree more agreeable than our neighbours when we are alone; but I don't mean to be alone; I shall have the house full all the winter. There are the Percys coming, and the Wyndhams with all their daughters, and the Boltons, and the Marchmonts, and Darlingfords, and a thousand others. Then we shall have a

host of men, a troop of idle lords and commoners, and some of the wits, Harry Devereux, Howard Montrose, William Marsden, and the beautiful Mrs. Harewood, that all women hate so, and God knows who besides. Maria," she added, raising her voice—for the young ladies had retired to a short distance—"who else is coming?"

"I am sure I don't know, mamma," drawled Maria, rather sulkily, for she had not heard the name she most wished to hear while Lady Brandesford ran over her list; "I always forget people if I don't see them."

"Oh, surely not," said Ellen, naively. "I think that is just the time to remember them."

Lady Brandesford smiled slightly—so slightly, it could scarcely be called a smile—and continued—

"So we shall have plenty of dancing, Ellen, and you must get some pretty gowns,

for I mean you to be very much admired.
But there is the carriage—let us go."

Ellen rose, shook hands with her friends, and soon Lady Brandesford's beautiful white ponies were seen trotting away under the experienced hand of their stately and still handsome owner; while the smiling Ellen, as she passed the window, looked back from the carriage and kissed her hand.

" Maria," said Lady Rose Brandesford, coolly, as her eye followed the carriage, " do you think mamma is *quite* mad?"

" Decidedly so, I should say," replied Lady Maria, raising her shoulders. And the dutiful daughters turned sulkily from each other, and left the room by opposite doors.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER a visit which had lasted a full quarter of an hour, Lady Brandesford found herself again in her pony carriage, and proceeding at the same rapid pace on her return to Brandesford as that at which she had left it. The spirited ponies trotted eagerly on; and the impatient hand of their mistress rather accelerated than controlled their movements. Lady Brandesford, a tall and rather large woman, with black eyes and a quantity of rouge, was one of those persons who contrive to look a great

deal younger than they really are. Her manner, which was gay almost to affectation, added to this effect. She did very little in this world, particularly of good, but she was always in a hurry, always seemed overwhelmed with engagements, spoke very fast and very loud, and looked as if she wished to be thought a woman of business. She was radiant with pleasure, as on leaving Glyndon she gracefully turned her head and bowed to Mrs. Conway, who had accompanied her to the door of the cottage. She felt sure that she had "come, seen, and conquered," for she had long since ascertained the secret bias of the mind of her village friend. Of Mr. Conway she was not so sure; his nature was one of sterner mould; but his wife and child once gained, she flattered herself he could not long resist; at all events, it was her best mode of attack. Mrs. Conway loved Ellen devotedly, but there was a good deal of am-

bition mingling with her love; and in her heart Mrs. Conway often pondered upon the hard fate to which her daughter was destined in being condemned to the obscurity of a country life such as she herself had undergone. People have often more courage for others than for themselves. Many feelings interwoven had combined to render Mrs. Conway passive and submissive to her lot in life; but want of energy, not of desire, had been the prevailing cause; and now, when she would not have to act for herself, she felt much more spirit. The visit of Lady Brandesford had had an almost magical effect upon her. It seemed as if all the shadowy ideas which at different times had floated through her mind were now suddenly condensed into one distinct form; and, by Lady Brandesford's words, Mrs. Conway felt a sort of justification of her secret dreamings, of the propriety of which she had hitherto intuitively doubted.

“ We must bring Ellen out, my dear Mrs. Conway—it is quite a sin to shut her up in this way. We must marry her well—and, believe me, the sooner the better. Look at my girls.”

Such had been the tenour of the discourse which the industrious Lady Brandesford had held to the weak-minded and indolent mother of Ellen, who, as she gently responded, “ Do you really think so?—Well, perhaps we ought—I have no doubt you are right,” followed with her eyes the steps of her daughter, who, having left the room by the open window, was busy in the garden gathering flowers wherewith to ornament her father’s room. After Lady Brandesford’s departure, Mrs. Conway returned to the same occupation. Ellen was still there, gliding from flower to flower, holding, as well as she was able, her little basket and the folds of her habit in one hand, and with the other selecting all that was most beau-

tiful and sweet, or that she knew to be a favourite with her father. At last her labour was over, and she turned towards the house, and came to the seat under the verandah, close to the spot which was occupied by her mother. She took off her hat, untied the handkerchief from her neck, and began to prepare the flowers she had gathered, which two large empty flower-pots placed upon the rustic table before her appeared destined to contain.

“She is very beautiful,” said Mrs. Conway, half aloud. “Yes, I really think she is destined to be a great lady.”

“Did you speak, mamma?” said Ellen, quickly, and turning her head half round.

“No, my child,” replied Mrs. Conway, with a slight start; and then perceiving the flushed cheek of her daughter, she added: “But what can you have been doing, Ellen, to get such a face? Do come closer, and let me look at it.”

Ellen obeyed, and kneeling down before her, a comic expression stole over her features as she marked the dismay painted upon Mrs. Conway's face.

"It is positively shocking."

"What is, mamma?" said Ellen.

"Why, the way in which you have burned your face."

"Well, mamma, is it surprising? I rode to Brandesford in the very hottest part of the day; then I sat talking to Maria and Rose for more than an hour, which made me hotter still; then I came home with Lady Brandesford, who, somehow or other, always makes me feel as if I had walked ten miles; and now I have been gathering flowers for dear papa, and dragging this long habit about the garden in the sun—can I help having red cheeks?"

"I don't know how it is, but I think you always have them now," said Mrs. Conway, in a discontented tone.

"And yet, dear mamma, you do not love me less," said Ellen, tenderly, and she wound both arms round her mother.

"No," said Mrs. Conway, kissing her forehead; "but it is so very unbecoming—so countrified—so—" *vulgar*, she would have said, but she could not bring herself to apply such a word to her darling Ellen. With the leaven that was creeping in, there was still great affection for her only daughter in the heart of Mrs. Conway.

"Then what can it signify, mamma?" asked Ellen. "If I looked pale, like Rose, you would be frightened, and think that I was ill."

"No, my child; that is not the pallor of illness—it is a high-bred, fashionable paleness, such as great ladies always have."

"But you do not want me to look like a great lady," exclaimed Ellen, suddenly sinking down upon the floor, and crossing her

hands before her, while her lips and eyes sparkled with mirth at the idea.

“And why not, my child?” said Mrs. Conway, rather timidly.

“As if every one did not know who I am,” cried Ellen, laughing.

“Not quite every one,” replied Mrs. Conway.

“Well, every one here, at least; and every one at Glyndon and Brandesford, and all about the country.”

“Yes; but the country is not everywhere,” said Mrs. Conway; “and, indeed, my dear Ellen, you are too great a child. Now, do promise me to take more care of yourself, and to wear gloves and a veil. I positively,” she added, drawing the head of Ellen quite close to her, “see freckles!—one, two, three—actually three already!”

“Are they dangerous, mamma?” said Ellen, archly.

“My child,” answered Mrs. Conway,

solemnly, “you really must take care of your complexion; you do not know of what serious consequence it is.”

“Only to a peach, or an apple, or a cherry,” said Ellen, with the most provoking unconcern. “But I know,” she added, starting up, “that I heard a carriage. Oh, yes! there is papa, and his flowers are not ready. Oh, mamma, how naughty you have been! You don’t know what harm you have done me!” And casting a look of tender reproach towards her mother, she hastened round to the door of the cottage, to meet Mr. Conway. Poor Ellen, she little dreamt that much more harm had been done to her that day than causing her to neglect her flowers!

CHAPTER VII.

How happy was that “evening at home” at Glyndon Cottage. Ellen having made the tea, poured out a cup of it for her father, and established Mrs. Conway in her usual comfortable corner, sat down to her work, and creeping up as close as she could to his side, gave to Mr. Conway, in her usual joyous strain, a full account of her visit to Brandesford, and her delight at seeing her old friends, as she called Maria and Rose. As they all sat together, they formed a beautiful family group. The quiet, gentle mother looking admiringly at her daughter;

and the somewhat severe manly beauty of Mr. Conway, softened down and irradiated by the kind smile with which he listened to, and gazed upon, his lovely and loving child. Happy as the inmates of Glyndon Cottage habitually were, this evening seemed brighter than usual, so radiantly shone each countenance there. It appeared as if some secret joy animated every breast, and yet hitherto nothing but the most common occurrences had been related or discussed between them. It might have been thought that nought beside was wanting. The parents and the child surely sufficed to each other! They were so happy, so blest, thus peaceably dwelling in each other's love. What need was there of other thoughts and other things to fill up the measure of their content? The vanities of the world had nothing to do with hearts like theirs—the coldness from without could not come to chill such honest and simple affection as united them all. Happy

would it have been for them had they been satisfied thus to remain—happy would it be for all, would they dwell contented with their lot, finding joy in the self-satisfaction which the earnest fulfilment of home duties brings to the honest heart, instead of idly seeking a more sparkling existence, alike hollow and fallacious—gilded afar off by distinction without renown, and pleasure without joy. And yet within one bosom in that hallowed spot already secretly rankled the poison of the “world,”—already the pure and sacred fountain of a mother’s love was troubling at its source. Mrs. Conway, as she looked at the snowy brow of her daughter, had strange visions mingling with the consciousness of present happiness. Coronets, and diamonds, and the glitter of the world’s joy came flitting past; but as she listened to the conversation of Ellen and her father, a sensation of something like despair suddenly seized her.

Ellen having finished her recital of the events at Brandesford, went on giving to the delighted ear of her father a thousand anecdotes of all that had occurred during the two days of his absence—her flowers, her birds, the various pets confided to her care by her brother Philip—her favourite poor old people in the village, and some neighbours with whom she was particularly intimate—all came in for a place in her narrative; her low, musical voice now raised in animation, now murmuring softly, according as her story ran from gay to grave, and every sentiment she uttered breathing that simple purity of mind so inimical to the jargon of the world, and betokening a spirit so undesirous of its gloss and glare, that even the slow-minded Mrs. Conway could not but be struck by its force. She sighed as she said to herself, “It will be very difficult to make Ellen anything but a simple country girl.” But then she thought of Lady Brandesford, her high

tone and rapid words, and the balls, and the new dresses, and the endless list of company she had that morning detailed to her wondering ear, and Mrs. Conway again leaned to the side of hope. As she kissed her daughter, upon wishing her good-night, she secretly determined not to mention her thoughts to Mr. Conway, but to write next day to Madame Louise, and make particular inquiries as to the fashions.

The following morning, a letter from Philip arrived. He spoke with rapture of his present abode, the climate, the mode of life, and everything by which he was surrounded, and the sisterly fears of Ellen were hushed as she read the letter; but a slight pang of wounded affection thrilled through her bosom as her father remarked, "Poor Philip, I am glad he went; he is evidently happier in India than here."

It was the truth; and although not expressed, the feeling breathed through that

and every letter which he had written since he left England. Ellen sighed; and as her eye wandered over the home of her birth, and the many objects of her tenderness by which she was surrounded, she said aloud, as if involuntarily, “I could never be so happy anywhere else as I am here.” As she spoke these words, apparently unconsciously, Mr. Conway, who was reading, suddenly raised his eyes to the face of his daughter. She was standing near the outer edge of the verandah, looking out upon the flowers and trees before her. A brief expression of alarm passed over his face, and rising from his seat, he drew the arm of Ellen within his own, saying, as he did so, “My child, we have not taken our usual walk this morning.”

Ellen started, and looked up with a smile. “No, papa: only think of our forgetting it; but Philip’s letter put everything else out of my head. Where shall we go? Suppose

we try the wood to-day, the sun is very hot."

They walked for a little while in silence, until, having gained a beautiful secluded spot among the trees, Ellen proposed sitting down beneath the shade of an arbour which she had lately made, and which was covered with a profusion of honeysuckle and roses.

"And so, my child," said Mr. Conway, after a few minutes' pause, "you think you never could be happy anywhere but here."

"I am sure I could not," said Ellen, quickly; "that is, not so very happy; for, of course, I never could like any other place as well."

"It is in the place then, Ellen, that the power of attaching you lies, not the persons by which it is inhabited?" asked Mr. Conway.

"Not quite, dear papa," she replied, softly; "for your presence, and that of mamma, would make any place delightful to me. But

you will own that in one's own home there is a charm that does not seem to dwell anywhere else, an interest that it is impossible to feel away from it."

"It is quite true, my child," said Mr. Conway, with a sigh.

"It is so delightful to look every day at the same things, to watch the trees, and the flowers one has planted; when they open their beautiful blossoms they seem to thank us for having taken care of them, and everything else just the same. Now in any other place, one feels, though one may admire, one cannot love such things, for one has not nursed them into being."

"But if they are finer, far more beautiful than your own, does not my Ellen prize them more then?" said Mr. Conway, inquiringly.

"Oh! it does not make the least difference," replied Ellen, readily; "they may be finer but not half so dear, for they do not

come from home. No, papa," she added, shaking her head with an air of wisdom, "it is of no use making comparisons; I never did, and never shall, like anything so well as my dear, dear home." And she kissed her father's hand, partly in gratitude, partly to conceal the tears which had sprung to her eyes.

Mr. Conway drew her to his side, and pressed his lips upon her forehead—she was his life, his hope, his darling, the realization of every dream which had painted perfection in woman, and he looked with some degree of sadness upon her as he reflected how sacred were the feelings of simple goodness such as hers, and asked himself whether they would always be cherished and respected by others as they had been by him. He had, as she had said of her flowers, nursed her, and her thoughts, so divinely pure, into being; and beautiful was the opening blossom now smiling to his eyes,

—beautiful, and tender, and sweet, twining and clinging to the parent stem in humble and affectionate content. The father and the child, as they sat together there beneath the shade of the fine old trees, formed a picture upon which the eyes of angels must have rested with looks of love—the parent, the honest friend and guardian, contemplating the holy gift granted to him by Heaven in the person of that innocent child, and the gentle daughter lifting her meek, but glad-some eyes, to meet the glance of him to whom, next to her God, she had ever confided each secret thought. Yes! meek, but fearless, was the upraised brow now scanned by the searching look of a fond father; for the heart of Ellen knew no guile; she had nothing to conceal, not even a passing thought of which she need have been ashamed, and the judgment of her father had never been to her the stern tribunal it is to many. She knew that none but feel-

ings of kindness and interest for her filled the breast on which she leaned ; and even if sometimes his decisions might thwart her momentary wish, she never questioned their soundness, but submitted with the blind grace of true affection, satisfied that it is watched over and well advised ; and therefore it was that the father and the child were all in all to each other ; their love was part of their being, and hand-in-hand they had glided on for years in mutual trust and support, each mind acquiring the finer tints of the other, and soul watching soul as the godlike virtues of charity, and faith, and love, developed themselves in the daily walk upon earth, in the hourly discharge of the endearing duties of domestic life. And now, as they sat together, the father of Ellen looked upon her and smiled ; and again and again he pressed her to his heart, then held her from him as if to count the various charms upon which his delighted gaze so

loved to linger. Ellen was particularly beautiful that day, every feature lighted up with a brighter tinge than usual; for the society of her father was always joy to her, and the emotion caused by the arrival of Philip's letter had not yet passed away. Once more Mr. Conway looked at her, and then, as he passed his hand slowly across his eyes, he sighed deeply. A sad vision had appeared for a moment before him as he asked himself secretly for whom had he reared this tender and beautiful being, and what was to be her future fate when his eye should no longer watch over her? For a moment there was a feeling of agony in his heart—each fibre seemed to thrill and tremble, and a chill crept over him. Ellen, who had started from his side to watch the flutterings of a beautiful butterfly hovering above the flowers, did not see the paleness which had overspread his face. When she returned he smiled as usual, only perhaps a

little more sadly, and as he took her hand kindly, he said,

“Do you know, Ellen, while you have been looking at the butterfly, of what I have been thinking?”

“No, papa—how could I?” answered Ellen, laughing.

“I was thinking of you, my child,” said Mr. Conway, gravely.

“Dear papa,” replied Ellen, tenderly; and although her eyes still continued to watch the movements of the butterfly, she held up her cheek to be kissed, as if in gratitude for the words of her father, but a deep sigh from him startled her, and she turned and looked anxiously in his face.

“Something is the matter,” she said, hastily. “You are not well, papa, and you have not told me.”

“Well, but ill at ease, ill in spirit, dear child,” replied Mr. Conway, in a stifled voice, and then, as if having formed a

sudden determination, he added, hastily, “Ellen, I have a secret to tell you—I must tell you.”

“A secret, papa,” said Ellen, joyously; “oh! what is it?” and then she added, more seriously, “we are not going away, I hope—not going to travel again, and leave dear, dear Glyndon?”

“No—not to travel,” answered Mr. Conway, slowly; and seeing the blush of alarm which had overspread the face of Ellen at the bare idea of leaving her home, he paused, and then added, hesitatingly—

“And if it had been, dear Ellen—would it have been so very great a misfortune?”

“Oh! very great indeed,” said Ellen, impetuously. “I remember how I grieved all last summer when we went to Germany; I did nothing but think of all that was going on here, and all we were losing by being away. Dear papa, what a relief to find we are not going to travel—you fright-

ened me so at first;" and she gave one deep hurried sigh, as if a heavy load had been removed from her breast.

"Dear child," said Mr. Conway, seriously, "there is no feeling in the heart of woman more precious than love of home and its various duties; but it must not be carried to excess."

"Oh! papa, can it be?" said Ellen, sadly, and looking round her with an undisguised look of love.

"Any feeling can be, and may then become culpable," replied Mr. Conway; "for what was reason given to us, if not to regulate our feelings?"

"It is true, papa; but it is so difficult when one loves anything so very very much as I do Glyndon;" and she bent her head down, and began deliberately to pick to pieces one of the roses she had gathered. The love of home was with her a genuine and inborn passion—no one knew it better

than her father, or could sympathize with it more, and he actually trembled as he proceeded.

"And has it never occurred to you, dear Ellen," he said, "that perhaps circumstances might arise which might render it impossible for you to pass your whole life here."

"They might, papa, certainly," answered Ellen, recovering her spirits; "but they will not; most circumstances are under our own control. Why do you make me think of such things?"

"It is necessary—positively necessary," said Mr. Conway, and his voice was so much less steady than usual, that Ellen started, but in a moment afterwards her fears had given way, and she exclaimed, playfully,

"Ah! you want to frighten me—something about economy, I suppose, and Philip's expenses."

"I was not thinking of that," said Mr. Conway.

"Well, never mind the circumstance, dear papa, we can talk about that another time—but now the secret; since it is not going away, I am not afraid of anything. What is it? Do tell me, papa," and she looked up caressingly into his face.

"Are you very anxious to know?" said Mr. Conway, trying to smile.

"Very, very—so do tell me at once. I am dying to know it."

"My child," replied Mr. Conway, "the secret is about an event which is supposed to be a very important one in life—at least," he added, in an encouraging tone, "in a young lady's life. I have received a proposal of marriage for you."

"Papa!" said Ellen, starting up.

"Yes," cried Mr. Conway, without giving her time to speak; "Mr. Lindsay has made proposals for Frederick, his only son, and he wished me to break it to you; he will be here to-morrow to speak to you himself—

but Ellen, my child, what is the matter? Oh! my God! I have killed her!" cried the unhappy father, as his daughter, who at the first word had turned to a deathlike palleness, sunk upon the ground before him, and burst into tears. "Ellen, my child! look up—speak to me!" he exclaimed, "oh! I have been too rough—too hasty, with a tender nature like hers—there, she revives. Oh, Ellen, speak to me—say you forgive me. I did not think the news would have shocked you thus, my dear, dear child;" and the poor father continued to chafe the hands of Ellen, and support her in his arms until she partially recovered; her tears in a little while ceased to flow, and then she was very still. She raised her eyes timidly to his, then hid her face upon his breast; but she did not weep or show any sign of violent emotion once that she had recovered her senses. She looked round upon the flowers and the trees, but not as she had looked

before. There was an expression of fear and of dismay quite unusual to her countenance. A new light, and one full of terror, seemed to have broken upon her mind, and though she did not speak, a whole history might have been gathered from her face as she glanced from one object to another, and seemed to ask her own heart if it was true that she was expected to part from them, if it was possible that she could persuade herself to do so.

"Papa," she said, after a little while, "shall we not go home? Home!" she repeated, in a low voice, and with a shudder she for a moment closed her eyes as her father, deeply grieved at the emotion he had caused her, drew her arm silently and fondly within his own. No one could guess how deeply and passionately at that time Ellen Conway loved her home.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN hour afterwards, Mr. Conway, upon leaving the drawing-room, turned to his wife, and said, "Mary, you will remember your promise?"

Mrs. Conway bowed assent, and without raising her eyes went on with her knitting. The countenance of her husband was clouded as he turned from her, but she did not see it; she was working more industriously than ever, and a bright red spot shone in the centre of her usually pale cheek. It was evident some discussion, not quite so amicable

as usual, had taken place between the husband and the wife. It was the question of the marriage of Ellen. From the first mention of the subject, Mrs. Conway had given it her most decided opposition, and combated the reasoning by which she was met, with a vigour for her quite unprecedented. For this unusual conduct she would not give any sufficient grounds, and Mr. Conway, tired by her monotonous refusal, had quitted her presence with the request that "she would remember her promise."

This promise consisted of the assurance that she would in no way seek to influence her daughter, either for or against the marriage proposed to her. Mr. Conway, who was incapable of suspicion, had no idea that the refusal of his wife to adopt his opinion arose from any other feeling than the very natural one, of dislike of parting with her daughter. And yet this very objection seemed partly obviated by the respective

position of the parties, for in the event of her marriage, the new home to which Ellen would be conveyed was but a few miles distant from that of her parents; still Mrs. Conway objected, and wound up every objection by declaring, "that if ever Ellen married Frederick Lindsay, it would be totally against her consent;" and it had been a long time before Mr. Conway had succeeded in so far reducing his wife to common sense, as to make her conform to his wish of leaving the judgment of Ellen quite unfettered by any previously expressed opinion on the part of her parents.

The proposed union was one which, in a worldly point of view, would have satisfied many an aspirant to matrimonial honours. Mr. Lindsay was a rich country gentleman, the possessor of a fine estate, in admirable order, and of a good, large, commodious country house, well arranged; well furnished, and with a suitable establishment. Every-

thing was handsome, comfortable, and gentlemanlike; but then Mr. Lindsay was one of the many country gentlemen who do not think it necessary, for their respectability, to go every season to London; and then the name of his place was Leviston, a harmless circumstance it would have seemed, but Mrs. Conway thought otherwise. A secret longing for something grand possessed her. At present, her views upon the subject were undefined; the extreme youth of Ellen had seemed to promise time for their advancing to maturity, but the sudden announcement of Mr. Lindsay's proposal had deranged every thing. Mrs. Conway tried to think, but the only result of her meditation was, that "she could not tell exactly what she wanted; but certainly she did object, and very decidedly, to the marriage in view." More than this she could not explain, and even to herself she scarcely ventured to acknowledge the frivolous and worldly

nothings which weighed with her. She had heard Mr. Lindsay called "the Squire;" she had never known of any great people coming to stay at his house, as they did at Brandesford; and then, his name was so common—Ellen would be nothing but "Mrs. Lindsay;" and in the idea of her mother, Ellen deserved a much better fate than that. The merits of the individual in question were never once taken into consideration by Mrs. Conway. It was nothing that Frederick Lindsay was handsome, amiable, and clever—a man that any woman might adore; Mrs. Conway thought of him only as "Frederick Lindsay," and no more. To be no more was all his sin, but, in her eyes, that was sufficient.

One fortunate circumstance alone presented itself to the alarmed mind of her mother, as it had previously done to that of Ellen, it was not probable that they should be forced to commit themselves by

any instant decision. Frederick Lindsay was abroad. He had not long left the country, and had written to his father to try and find out the views of Mr. and Mrs. Conway for their daughter, but without authorizing him to take the very decided step that he had done. Mr. Lindsay, however, was one of those old-fashioned persons who know but one way of finding out anything—that of asking a plain and direct question. He had therefore sent for his friend, Mr. Conway, made a formal proposal for the hand of his daughter, the most liberal offer of settlements, and only awaited the reply of the young lady, to write to his son and inform him that he might come home and be married as soon as he liked.

Nothing could be more un-romantic than the whole affair in the manner in which he had arranged it; and Mr. Conway, who was very nearly as matter of fact as his

friend, had not foreseen any wonderful difficulty to be overcome in confiding the matter at once to the ear of Ellen, until, shocked by the stunning effect it had produced upon her, he paused, and began to consider whether a very young and inexperienced girl could be expected to look upon things with the same business-like view as was taken by two sedate old gentlemen of retired habits and subdued feelings, who had learned to consider the illusions of life with no very complacent eye. The deep love of Mr. Conway for his child had suddenly stood in the light of some knowledge of the world to him, and his first care, after having taken her to her own room, had been to seek Mrs. Conway, and endeavour to impress upon her mind all that he wished her to do and not to do; with what success, his parting words seemed to announce; and long after he had left her, his wife continued to sit brooding over all

that she had heard, and perfectly undecided as to what she should say to Ellen upon the subject. There was a terrible conflict in her mind. On the one hand, the undisguised favour in which the measure proposed seemed to be held by her husband; on the other, her own secret and vague ambitious views; while mingling with both ideas, came thoughts of the happiness or unhappiness of her daughter, to which she certainly was not indifferent; and now and then a small glimmering of worldly prudence upon the wisdom of finally rejecting so very advantageous a marriage as she knew it would be reckoned in the neighbourhood, where marrying men, as it usually happens, were scarce. And then it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Conway that it was but a short time since she had listened to a long discussion upon the very fact of whether Frederick Lindsay would select his bride from among the beauties of the

country, or aspire to some more brilliant and ambitious alliance elsewhere ; and Mrs. Stanley, the wife of the rector, had given her opinion as to the latter course being the most probable for him to pursue.

Mrs. Stanley had a beautiful daughter, and Emma Stanley was just two years older than Ellen ; it therefore struck Mrs. Conway that certainly the fair Emma had endeavoured to attract the attention of Frederick Lindsay, and failed, which was the cause of Mrs. Stanley's having pronounced so decided an opinion.

This was a great point in favour of Frederick Lindsay—it would be a severe mortification to the proud and domineering Mrs. Stanley, that Ellen should carry off the prize, and Mrs. Conway, like most of the little-minded people of whom society is composed, set a much greater value upon anything, the moment that she knew its possession was to be the cause of disappoint-

ment or vexation to any of her friends. Altogether, it was a very embarrassing state of feeling, and at length, Mrs. Conway, perplexed still more by such unusually deep meditations, really did not know what to think.

In this dilemma she remained for some hours, at one time positively making up her mind that Ellen must become Mrs. Lindsay, at another, banishing the thought of such a possibility with the utmost contempt, until, suddenly, the idea of Lady Brandesford suggested itself—it was a fatal idea to the future hopes of poor Frederick. Lady Brandesford had uttered the important words, “We must marry her well,” in speaking of Ellen; and now that they came back upon the ear of Mrs. Conway, it appeared as if all her former reflections had been utterly senseless. Lady Brandesford, of course, could not call such a marriage, “marrying well.” In an instant the

mind of Mrs. Conway glanced over the magnificence of Brandesford Hall, the high-sounding names of its owners, and their constant visitors, and plain Mr. Lindsay of Leviston sunk back even beyond his former insignificance in her eyes. Such a thing was not to be thought of again, and having at length come to that resolution, she appeared to be more satisfied; she raised her head like one who has just recollected something which puts them on better terms with themselves, and looked round the room. It was several hours since Mr. Conway had left her, and yet Ellen had not appeared. This was so unusual, that Mrs. Conway began to feel alarmed, and was just rising to go and seek for her, when the door opened, and she entered the room. Her face was pale, and her eyes red,—it was evident that she had wept long and bitterly, but there was a calmness about her that did not speak of grief such as might have been

expected from the violence of her first emotion. The childishness of her manner was hushed, for she had for the first time reflected that she could not always be a child, and it had given a strange turn to her thoughts, and a different expression to her countenance. If she looked less lovely with her air of anxiety, she was more touching than a few hours since, when, with the buoyant grace of childhood, she would have bounded across the lawn; her step was sobered, and there was trouble in the hurried glance she cast upon the face of her mother as she entered the room; was it not a pity to have marred such joyous innocence by thoughts of love and marriage? Mrs. Conway did not ask herself the question, but an undefined feeling of sadness struck upon her heart, as she marked the change in the face of her daughter, and she said, kindly, "My dear Ellen, where have you been so long?"

"Mamma," said Ellen, without answering the question of her mother, "have you seen papa?"

"Yes, my love!" replied Mrs. Conway.

"And he has told you all—all about this proposal of Mr. Lindsay?" said Ellen, blushing deeply, and speaking with difficulty.

"Of course, my child, but do not let it distress you—do not think about it."

"I must, mamma," said Ellen, calmly.

"Oh! because it is the first," replied Mrs. Conway, laughing; "wait, and you will have plenty more, and then you will not think so much about them."

"And did papa tell you what he wished?" continued Ellen, without appearing to hear the remark of her mother.

"Yes—no, that is, not exactly," said Mrs. Conway, hesitatingly. Ellen turned her eyes seriously towards her mother, and Mrs. Conway pretended to look in an opposite

direction; in a little while she said, "Well, and so Mr. Lindsay comes to-morrow; and what do you intend to do, my love?"

"I suppose," said Ellen, gravely, but without betraying any additional emotion, "that sooner or later I shall marry Mr. Frederick Lindsay."

"God forbid, my child!" said Mrs. Conway, starting up, and then, as she suddenly remembered the injunction of her husband, she added, "unless you wish it yourself."

"I do wish it, mamma—at least, I believe so," replied Ellen, solemnly, and then, as Mr. Conway appeared upon the grass just outside the window, she hastily quitted the room by the verandah, and putting her arm through that of her father, they walked on together.

"The girl must be mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Conway to herself, as she threw herself down upon the sofa, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER IX.

As early the next day as Mrs. Conway imagined that the rules of society permitted a morning visit to be paid, she was at the door of Brandesford Hall. Never before had she entered the stately park with such feelings of confidence in herself, for notwithstanding their intimacy, Mrs. Conway always was, to a certain degree, awed by the condescending grandeur of Lady Brandesford, who was not sufficiently well bred or amiable to render imperceptible the grade which separated her from her more

humble country friend. This day, however, Mrs. Conway felt perfectly equal to any one and anything, for she had come possessed of a secret which she well knew would not be heard with indifference by the person whom she intended to consult.

Mr. Lindsay had always been the most uncompromising opponent in politics to the house of Brandesford, and Mrs. Conway had quite tact enough to perceive that the proposed union of Ellen with his son might be an object of very great importance to the ambitious and manœuvring lady, who aimed at complete sovereignty in her particular district. She had, moreover, heard from her confidential friend, Mrs. Stanley, that Lady Brandesford had at one time formed the design of marrying her youngest daughter to Frederick Lindsay, and thereby cementing the friendship which had hitherto been but forced and hollow. As to the truth of this statement, Mrs. Conway was utterly

in the dark; but as it had been made to her she partially believed it, and it gave to her certain feelings of triumph which she could not wholly repress, even though they were at the expense of her best friend. And yet, upon the whole, Mrs. Conway was a very gentle and amiable woman.

Upon her arrival, on the morning of her visit, Mrs. Conway was shown at once into Lady Brandesford's boudoir. To the placid and indolent Mrs. Conway, it appeared perfectly incredible that a lady in the position of Lady Brandesford should voluntarily plunge into the accumulation of business in which she always seemed to exist. It was not the first time that Mrs. Conway had penetrated into the boudoir, but she had always found it the same—a mass of business-like looking articles, and its occupant in a loose morning cap and *peignoir*, and apparently the personification of hurry and care, and agitating secret

affairs. Lady Brandesford had, however, too much knowledge of the world ever to show herself to that world otherwise than she knew she ought to be seen—serene, winning, and triumphant. She could in a moment apparently dismiss from her very thoughts everything connected with seriousness, and devote her whole power to the airy discussion of the veriest trifle, as though it were the subject of the deepest importance to her.

It would have required a far deeper power of probing the human heart than Mrs. Conway possessed, to have penetrated through the bland smile with which Lady Brandesford received her, the feelings of anguish and anxiety which at that moment were rankling in her bosom. With one hand Lady Brandesford closed the *secretaire*, upon which some hundreds of letters and accounts were lying, and with the other she drew Mrs. Conway towards her, and placing

her upon the sofa by her side, was instantly in deep conversation with her. It was some time before an opportunity offered for the communication which was trembling upon the lips of Mrs. Conway, but at length, breathless with excitement, the agitated mother unfolded to her patroness the offer that had been made to her daughter, and requested she would advise her upon so important a matter. If there was one thing that Lady Brandesford liked better than all else beside in the world, it was to be asked for advice; it is, in fact, the only thing that people ever do like to give, and upon this occasion Lady Brandesford was neither sparing of words nor counsel, in endeavouring to impress her opinion upon the wondering ear of her visitor. It would, however, have puzzled even a statesman to have ascertained what that opinion really was, so craftily and cleverly did the patronizing lady turn and re-turn the mirror, as she

debated the various advantages and disadvantages of so young a girl being married and settled in the country before she had seen anything of the world. Mrs. Conway smiled, and listened, and sighed, and smiled again, as her voluble friend ran over the touching changes and chances of woman's life, much as if she were trying the keys of a pianoforte, and wound up with a few majestic chords, indicative of her sincere and constant sympathy, her extreme readiness to be of any use in her power; and a final prayer, that they would come to no positive arrangements with Mr. Lindsay, without confiding the matter to her.

If Mrs. Conway could, by any possibility, deduce any tangible sort of advice from the torrent of words which had rushed forth at her bidding, it was, "not to be in a hurry." She at least thought, or hoped she might so construe her words, for even upon this point Lady Brandesford had contrived not to be

very lucid, but as it was exactly the view Mrs. Conway wished to take of the case, it was not wonderful that she should imagine it to be the opinion of her amiable and devoted friend.

Having exhausted the subject thoroughly, to her heart's content, Mrs. Conway at length took her leave, Lady Brandesford (who had long since wished her visit at an end) kindly pressing her to stay for luncheon, and holding both her hands as though really grieving to part with her. Mrs. Conway, however, steadily refused. Her heart was full, and she longed to be again at home in order to prevent the determination of Ellen from hardening into obstinacy, and to undermine gradually the favourable impression which, in spite of his proclaimed neutrality, she knew that her husband entertained towards the marriage in question. Supported by the conviction that Lady Brandesford was of the same way of thinking as herself,

Mrs. Conway felt an unaccountable increase of courage; and as she wended her way homewards, a variety of agreeable thoughts suggested themselves to her vanity; Lady Brandesford so evidently thought that Ellen was thrown away upon Frederick Lindsay, she must have something in view for her that was very superior.

“Who knows,” said the infatuated mother to herself, as the carriage passed the stately portals of the park, “if Ellen may not one day be mistress here—Lady Brandesford so pointedly said that Augustus, her only son, was coming home immediately;” and as this thought came like a sunbeam across the mind of Mrs. Conway, Leviston and the Lindsays faded away in the shade until their glory was no longer perceptible. She sat more erect in her carriage, and actually smiled and bowed, though all alone, for every object which she passed seemed smiling at her, and she felt as if all nature was

congratulating her upon the wondrous fortune and grandeur which it must be the fortune of Ellen to achieve. The happy mood in which she found herself so shortened the distance, that the spire of Glyndon church rose abruptly before her eyes ere she well knew that she had quitted Brandesford Hall. Her spirit was there even while she was re-entering her village home. With a sigh, as if awakening from a pleasant dream to a sad reality, she cast her eyes towards the cottage—visible from the height upon which it stood from the opposite side of the village—and the thought of her foolish heart was, not that it was the hallowed spot containing husband, child, and home, all that makes up the blissful sum of life to woman, but that Ellen was not doomed, like her, to pass her life in obscurity, and that soon that humble roof would be exchanged for one beneath which pomp and show, and all the glories of the earth, would

be gathered together at her feet. With a feeling of pity for her own misfortune, Mrs. Conway sighed as the carriage stopped at the gate of the cottage—a gate too unpretending to boast of the appendage of a lodge—and having waited until the servant had carefully closed it behind the carriage, she had full leisure to cast a discontented glance upon the small though beautiful enclosure in which she stood, and which she did not dare to dignify by the name of “ park.”

It seems incredible that such folly could enter the heart of a wife and mother; but Mrs. Conway, whose apathy it was difficult to move, actually looked sullen as she approached the picturesque and beautiful spot which contained her home. Alas! how soon that look was to change—how soon was the vain and worldly feeling she had allowed to creep into her bosom to give way to one, of which, at that moment, when in-

solent ostentation was her leading thought, she had never dreamed.

On arriving at the house, Mrs. Conway was somewhat surprised that Ellen as usual had not hastened to meet her, for the drawing-room windows stood open as usual; but she had entered the room, and even passed into those beyond, and not a soul was visible. It was too early for Ellen to take her usual ride; and Mrs. Conway, concluding that she must have accompanied her father upon some of his excursions, had returned to the drawing-room, there to await her coming, when she was suddenly startled by the sound of heavy footsteps in the room above her head. She listened, but the sound had ceased; a moment afterwards, she fancied she heard a cry. Her blood froze with terror. But it might be in the village. She hurried to the window, and listened—not a sound came from without—the day

was sultry, and the air was still. Having stood for a few moments beneath the verandah, she turned to re-enter the house, when a shriek so piercing burst upon the air, that instinctively she caught hold of the frame of the window near which she stood. There was now no mistake—the voice came from above, and the trampling of many feet showed something had happened.

Mrs. Conway rushed to the door, up the stairs, and reached the landing just in time to see the inanimate form of her daughter borne from an adjoining room, and to hear one of the servants exclaim, “My mistress, my poor mistress, who will break it to her?”

“What has happened?” she gasped forth.
“Ellen, my child!”

“Oh, no! my poor dear master! She has only fainted. Oh, don’t go there!” cried the pitying voice of her maid, as the wretched mother, who had thrown herself by

the side of her child, rose distractedly, and turned towards the room from which she had been carried. "My master has had a fall," continued the woman, catching the struggling form of Mrs. Conway in her arms, to prevent her entering the room. It was of no use; she broke from her, and, staggering up to the bed, round which she could see the doctors and others stand like spectral messengers of woe, she beheld her husband—a corpse. There was no outward sign of injury, no blood, no wound, to tell the manner of his death; but on her confused and terror-stricken ear fell the words, "Concussion of the brain—fall from his horse—never spoke afterwards," and such like horribly calm assurances that no hope is left upon this earth. She did not ask—she did not speak; but, tottering as she stood, she passed her hands slowly over the brow whose statuary whiteness told the tale of death too well, and, bending her head, she gave one

long, long kiss to lips which never more could speak even a last farewell; and then she turned, and, with a gesture of command, bade those around begone and leave her to her sorrow. They went—she was alone—alone with the dead; and yet she neither trembled, nor did she weep. She knew not how the hours went by, how night came, and day followed; the weak, gentle mind was unhinged by the sudden grief, and she seemed for many days as in a trance; sometimes she was delirious, but at last she sunk to sleep—a long and death-like sleep. When she awoke, she saw that she was in Ellen's room, and the child of her love, with pale face and tearful eyes, was bending over her, and pressing her wan hand to her own heavy and throbbing heart.

"Mamma," said Ellen, softly, as she hailed the only gleam of recognition which had shone for many days from her mother's eyes,—“Dear mamma,” repeated Ellen,

bending down to kiss the blanched lips before her; and the wretched woman, recalled from the happier state of unconsciousness by the voice of her child, threw her arms round her neck, and, for the first time since the fearful shock she had sustained, burst into tears.

CHAPTER X.

THE grief of Ellen was not less poignant than that of her mother; but it had not the same effect. Instead of being rendered helpless, and becoming a burthen to others, the energies of her mind seemed suddenly to have awakened. A painful look of responsibility was upon her face; for, in fact, from the moment of her bereavement, she had become the sole responsible agent within the desolate walls of Glyndon Cottage; and it was pitiable to behold the premature look of care called up into the almost childish

countenance of the poor girl by the sudden stroke of her first misfortune. It was impossible that she should be spared the smallest of the heart-rending details following fast upon the steps of the angel of Death. She had watched and prayed beside the body of her beloved parent; she had seen him laid in his coffin, and noted, with steady eye, the removal one by one of the few objects which seemed still to connect him with this world; and nothing now remained before the last sad duty of following him to his grave but the still more terrible and distressing one, because its nature is so worldly and so cold—that of reading the will. Poor Ellen literally shuddered when it was announced to her that such must be the fact ere the funeral could take place; it seemed as if every imaginary sorrow possible had fallen at once upon her head, as, with a faltering step, she took the keys which Mr. Stanley, the clergyman of the parish, put

into her hand, and followed him and the physician who had attended her father in his last moments into the library. Mr. Conway's chair was standing in its usual place, and the book which he had been reading was still upon the desk, with an ivory paper-knife between the leaves. Ellen cast a hasty look at these objects, and the tears rolled silently down her cheeks. She unlocked her father's desk, and immediately the will was found; and Ellen, by the directions of Mr. Stanley, carried it up to her mother's room, and endeavoured to elicit from her some directions as to when and where she desired that it should be opened; but Mrs. Conway was utterly unequal to give even the smallest assistance. Her sorrow had so taken the turn of apathy, that she could not rouse herself even at the entreaties of her child; and the only words which Ellen could extract from her were, "Send for Lady Brandesford." This she

continued to repeat when spoken to, and it became evident that it was her only desire. If anything could be more repugnant than another to poor Ellen, it was the idea of the worldly, loud-talking, over-dressed Lady Brandesford bending over the coffin of her father. So completely did she feel the "ladies of the Hall" to be holiday friends, that her mind had not once reverted to them. Much as she loved Maria and Rose Brandesford, their idea was always connected with gaiety, and music and dancing, with all their festive imagery, rose up before the eyes of the afflicted girl as she pondered over what seemed to her the strange request of her mother. Then, and only then, did she recollect, that, affectionate as had been the expressions of Lady Brandesford, all her demonstrations had ended in words. Not one visit of condolence had she paid, unless it could be called a visit her having driven to the door to leave a

note; but for that sympathy which is soothing to the deepest grief, that heartfelt kindness that prompts the prosperous and happy to seek the suffering and bereaved, and pour from their own cup of bliss some drops of balm into that of their neighbour, which the wrath of God has suddenly emptied, Ellen had looked, and might have looked for ever in vain, from one whose heart was steeled against all the holier and loftier emotions of human nature. The woman of the world had nought to do with sympathy and grief. A false shame kept her back from the bed of death, as it does all who put forward their extreme sensibility as an excuse for withholding their presence in the hour of sorrow. It is not this that leaves the sorrowing lonely, and the afflicted comfortless, in the hour when, to the strongest, the weakest may be as a bulwark against the torrent of despair; when the smallest may be to the greatest

an angel of mercy, shedding round the sinking heart the holy dew of a tender sympathy, breathing words of heavenly hope and trust, and weighing each favouring act of God against his chastenings, until the chilled and humbled spirit, rebellious in its grief, grows meek, and tender, and submissive. Such are the hearts and minds lovely in the eyes of God. Such are the words and acts that cleanse the nature of man from many a grosser stain. Such is the presence that leaves around the tear-bedewed couch of despair a halo of comfort, and gratitude, and hope, as though the smile of an angel had lingered there; but it is not such that the worldly and selfishly impure can bring to the bed of death; and when they urge, in fashionable jargon, "that they are bad comforters," that "they can do no good," it is but a sin the more. It is withholding the straw from the drowning man, the crust from the starving child,

under the base and heartless veil of uselessness, as if the wish, the desire to do good, however humbly, were not most beautifully gracious to the eye of God; but they think not of that. They are hemmed round by conventional ideas; they fear not to play their hypocrites' part to the necessary perfection; they shudder at the mere possibility of being forced for a moment to look into their hearts; and the votary of the world shuts out his own soul from his view, and goes on in his cold selfishness, living from day to day by the false excitement of a world which will one day desert him, when no longer an object to it. In the meantime, all is sunshiny and gay—no need to think or feel, to soothe the sorrowful, or comfort the distressed. A wrinkle in the brow of fashion must not be hazarded by any such false ideas of duty or true Christianity as entering the scene of sorrow. A decent amount of regret gracefully ex-

pressed, at most, a brightly-coloured eulogium of the virtues of the deceased, and this is the all permitted, expected, and expended amongst the butterfly denizens of a world living only for pleasure and for show, and for heartless and contemptible vanity. Exactly as much sympathy as this had Lady Brandesford bestowed upon the bereaved inmates of Glyndon Cottage, to which, in the superabundance of her philanthropy, she added the inquiry of "how the poor dear Conways were going on," every time that she had met the village apothecary going his rounds upon his rusty-looking, ill-groomed roan pony. This had already happened three times, for Lady Brandesford made a point of driving through the village every day, because it did not belong to her, and a little bit of fashionable charity now and then swelled the list of rural benefactions, for she would fain have been considered as the Lady Bountiful of the place.

Having fulfilled these arduous duties, she had dismissed from her mind every immediate thought of the "poor dear Conways," whom she did not expect to see at least for two months, for she had some indistinct idea of "that sort of person" always making a long business of a death in the family. Great was her surprise, therefore, and still greater her embarrassment, when a note from Ellen was put into her hands, requesting her presence the next day at Glyndon. She would as soon have thought of being sent for to a lunatic asylum. What could they want with her? And the very hour that was fixed was one which she had destined to a distant excursion and pic-nic, for her house was already filled with visitors. She read and re-read the note; it was plainly and steadily written, "The funeral cannot take place until my poor father's will has been read; and as mamma is quite unable to leave her bed, she makes it a

particular request that you will be present. Dear Lady Brandesford, I hope you will not refuse." Thus had the poor girl written, and although it would not have cost the woman of the world the slightest pang to refuse that or any other request made under the most touching circumstances, she determined to accept the invitation, having first duly impressed upon every individual in her house the extraordinary hardship she was about to undergo—the very great disappointment it was to put off her pic-nic to the next day, and the extreme tenderness of her heart, which could not find courage to refuse "those poor dear Conways" even so marvellous a demand. Having made a sufficient degree of fuss about all she was going to do and not do, and having been duly flattered and praised, and secretly laughed at by her company, and hated by her daughters for disturbing their amusements, Lady Brandesford sat down to

consider the affair, which she had at first thought so unfortunate. Lady Brandesford had but one way of considering everything, which was, to ascertain exactly how much it might be brought to bear upon her own interest, so as to be made useful. She soon began to perceive that the very circumstance to which she had so strongly objected, might in the end be actually beneficial to her. In the first place, there was something magisterial in being asked to be present at the opening of a will. Her opinion evidently must be of great consequence, and, considering that Mr. Conway had been a man of good fortune, and so highly respected in the neighbourhood, it would certainly be known all over the county that she was chosen as a confidential friend, and was not a thing to be despised. It gave her the air of being a respectable friend, and adviser to two helpless women, and country people are fond of what they call “respectable.”

Yes, decidedly the “poor dear Conways” were excellent people, and could have nothing but the very best of friends.

After these reflections came others of a nature somewhat more tangible, a good deal more base, and therefore infinitely more natural to the mind of a Lady Brandesford. It was of very great importance that the fortunes of Mrs. Conway and Ellen, and their exact position, should be known to her. Who could tell when such knowledge might be made available? for, as Lady Brandesford well knew, there was a secret with regard to her own which made her tremble even to think of; and therefore she resolved, that until the last moment she would not think of it, and in the mean time it might be very pleasant to have to advise her friends upon the distribution of their money, which she imagined might amount to no inconsiderable sum; for Mr. Conway was one of those persons who had been always

said to be “very well off,” and yet who “spent nothing;” therefore she had not the least idea what his real income had been; and before she had finished thinking about it, she had magnified it into a sum which even in her eyes was monstrous, and she determined to be very early at Glyndon the next day, and to leave nothing unsaid or undone to prove what a wonderful comforter she was, and how deep and heartfelt was her affection and sympathy for her very particular friends, “the poor dear Conways.”

CHAPTER XI.

IN attempting to decide which is the strongest vice that governs the erring nature of human beings, how much feeling, eloquence, learning, and time, have been expended! And yet to this hour the question remains most satisfactorily undecided. Love, hatred, jealousy, avarice, revenge, play, bigotry, and many others, have all been cited in their turn to appear and answer for having enticed the frail mortal still further from the path of virtue and moderation than ever he had been lured be-

fore, and the only defence has ever been, that “there is another worse than he;” and so it seems, and would still seem, as each passion tells the tale of the woes that it has caused. And yet there is one, of which men take but small account—one, which is as strong, or stronger than all which have borne for centuries the anathema of mankind—the vice of selfishness. It is useless to attempt to hide it under some fashionably euphonious phrase, or to gild it over with the sophistry of “every man of the world must be selfish.” Such is not the case, nor is there even in the selfish world any necessity for it. The grasping hardness of an ill-disposed heart may catch at what is esteemed by the equally evil as a maxim of worldly wisdom, but sooner or later he will find the flimsy tissue fall to shreds within his hands; it will consume away, and the ashes will be upon his head. Selfishness is not necessary more than any

other sin ; but it is the cherished failing of the mean and narrow-hearted, and as widely differing from prudence or foresight as a reckless profusion and waste is from generosity. It debases the mind and blackens the heart, destroying all trust in humanity, all reverence for the higher attributes of truth and honour. The essentially selfish man is thoroughly dishonourable ; his mind is filled with constant meannesses, by which he hopes to advance some interest of his own, and he views all his fellow-creatures with the eyes of his own heart. He does not trust any one, knowing how little he himself can be trusted. Narrow, and doubting, and contemptible is the every thought of a selfish man ; but the day comes when his wickedness falls upon his own head. The favour of the world fades more quickly than the leaf, and friendless, and comfortless, and deserted will be the man upon whom the blight of adversity falls, who

has passed through the sunshine of life with nothing but self in view. Kindness begets kindness, and confidence brings its sweet reward; but he who has trodden down the timid and the meek, whose heart never knew the throb of a tender pity, whose eye never glistened with a tear of sympathy, will find his own cup bitter to the dregs.

If ever selfishness was embodied in the form of woman, it was in that of Emily, Countess of Brandesford. It might not to the unpractised eye be as apparent in her as in many others, for the gloss of the great world is the varnish of many a vice; once, however, the key had been discovered, the cipher of her every word and movement might have been read with ease. Hitherto prosperity had gilded her path, but now there were clouds discernible in the horizon of her fortune, and, irritated by the possibility of a reverse, all the baser passions of her mind had awakened with double force.

The irrepressible thought of self was uppermost in all; even upon the solemn occasion in which, summoned to the house of death, she was about to play the part of a mourner, she could not for a moment divest herself of her ruling passion. Nothing that she was to do must be done quietly: she must produce an effect, upon whom or for what reason she did not stop to inquire, but of the fact she was persuaded, and how to succeed became her first care. Her dress for the occasion was, in her eyes, a matter of the greatest importance; many gowns were tried, and then laid aside; she did not know what to choose. She spent the whole morning in her dressing-room, in consultation with her maid, Mdlle. Justine, who, anxious for *les convenances*, strongly suggested that, for the house of mourning, to mourn even in semblance was a token of respect. Lady Brandesford tried on her crape and her bugles, and her jet, but the sun was shining

brightly, and the transparent black bonnet made the rouge upon her cheeks look horrible; decidedly she would not go in mourning—she should not produce a good effect. This objection was, however, at last overruled by Justine. And so, when, after endless changes and consultings, and study sufficient to have determined the dress of a whole fancy-ball, she at last made a very rich and elaborate toilet, combining all the newest fashions, she found that it was long past the hour which she had appointed for being at Glyndon Cottage. “A funeral can always wait,” was her secret reflection as she stepped into her well-appointed barouche, which, with its four beautiful horses and outriders, had long been at the door, and away she glided, in all this state and finery, to enter the abode of the broken-hearted widow, whose only consciousness of the great honour that her house was receiving, was an increased flutter of nervous-

ness as the sound of the trampling horses reached her ear through the half-closed shutters of her room. Lady Brandesford had come the long way through the village, in order, not only that her brilliant equipage might be duly admired, but that every one might remark the zeal of friendship by which she was animated.

As she drove through the town, she made as many bows as she possibly could ; and having swept up to the cottage door, she descended from her carriage, and prepared to sail into the drawing-room, fully confident of the effect she was about to produce. Her stiff silk pelisse rustled as she walked, and throwing back her long crape veil, she endeavoured to compose her features into something of a sorrowful expression as she entered the room. One glance, however, round it seemed totally to disenchant her, and her face assumed the most blank expression of disappointment. She would

have been at a loss to say what it was that she had actually expected; but some confused idea had been flitting through her mind of “country neighbours assembled,” until she had taught herself to believe that the occasion upon which she was going to officiate was one of the most public nature. To her dismay, she perceived that, besides Ellen, but three persons were present, Mr. Stanley the Rector, Dr. Benson, and a little man in black, that she took to be either a lawyer or an undertaker, she did not condescend to examine which. Here was a party upon which to produce an effect! Poor Lady Brandesford was thoroughly vexed; but failing in one point, she hoped to atone for it in another; and with a sudden affectation of sensibility, she extended one hand to Ellen, who advanced to meet her, and with the other raised her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes, but without endangering either the red or white paint

with which her face was covered. She was, however, not destined to have a scene. Ellen, whose heart was breaking with her own sorrow, neither wept nor lamented. The impression which Lady Brandesford always produced upon her, had, at that moment, the effect of freezing her tears; and with a low but steady voice she thanked her for coming, and assured her that the delay had not been of any inconvenience. Lady Brandesford made a thousand excuses and inquiries, all the time keeping the hand of Ellen closely pressed within her own; but there was no possibility of exciting more than a gentle reply from the poor girl, who was completely subdued by her sorrow. As soon as she could release her hand, she turned towards Mr. Stanley, and, at a sign from him, the little man in black stepped forward, and with professional alacrity proceeded to break the seals of the packet, and read aloud the last directions

to his wife and child from him who still lay unburied within the walls which held them. Then were the stifled sobs of the poor orphan heard through the room, but faintly; for she had gone to sit down at the furthest end, and her head was buried in her hands. Lady Brandesford looked curiously at her, and thought of her own father's death, a week after which she had attended a ball at court, and then she turned and fixed her eyes upon the little man in black, and gave him all her attention. His task was not a long one; for the will was clearly made, the testator leaving all of which he died possessed to his wife, with the exception of ten thousand pounds to each of his children upon their coming of age, and a few trifling legacies to servants. The bulk of his fortune, consisting of eighty thousand pounds, together with the small estate of Glyndon Cottage, was left solely to the disposal of Mrs. Conway; and it was not without a

sigh of envy that the great lady contemplated the exceedingly independent life which fortune had thus secured to her friend. Some feeling of the sort she endeavoured to express, as the weeping Ellen, having noted the departure of the little man in black, rose from her chair, and came to sit amongst her friends. But there is no sympathy in a heart like that of Lady Brandesford; and the words died in confused sounds upon her lips, and she could only sigh and put her handkerchief to her eyes, over and over again, as if so strange a visitor as a tear were likely to be there. Ellen soon checked her sorrow, and listened calmly to the comforting tone of the good Rector, who seemed to feel her grief as his own, and spoke in glowing terms of the virtues and graces of mind of him they had lost; and the mourner's heart was cheered; for while yet a voice is raised in eulogy of the dead, we still feel as though we held

commune with him for whom we mourn. While yet there is a lip to speak, or an eye to weep, let us bless them—the tomb has not yet closed—all is not yet taken from us—the memory of the departed is green. But when the still, cold, silence of oblivion seems drawn like a curtain round their grave, the real chill of death falls upon our soul—then, and not till then, we feel parted for ever—then the sorrow is our own—there is none to soften or to share—the busy world moves on—it forgets, and smiles; we *remember*, and mourn.

CHAPTER XII.

THE house was empty at last. Lady Brandesford, having done all that was possible under the circumstances to make herself of consequence, although secretly trembling lest she might be asked to visit the sorrow-stricken widow in her chamber, had taken her departure, wondering why “people of that sort” always make so much more fuss about their relations than anybody else. The clergyman and the doctor had returned to their respective avocations, and the little man in black had long since been seen glid-

ing down the road towards the village, with a blue bag under his arm. Ellen was alone in the house—a moment of luxury to her; for as yet such had been the constant claims upon her attention and care that she had felt too weary to weep, too busy to indulge in the long train of sweet and tender thought, when the whole life of a beloved individual seems to rise up before us with a thousand traits of goodness and of beauty we had not before remarked, and which now we cherish one by one, and engrave upon our memory with fond and tearful affection. How strangely had a few hours altered the position of Ellen. On the morning of her father's death, her only fear had been that she might one day be forced to leave her home. She was now independent; not a word had been spoken upon the subject of her marriage; she was even ignorant as to whether Mr. Lindsay had ever paid his promised visit to the cottage or not, and her home

was still her own. Ellen looked round upon it, and thought of the funereal train which the next morning was to leave its walls, and she acknowledged to herself that she had been wrong, that it was not in the power of inanimate things to chain the human heart to their clay ; it was the spirit that had shone there which had so endeared them to her ; that spirit had gone forth, and of what availed the rest ?

She had not known until this how much she had loved her father, how she had leaned upon his strong mind for support, and how she trusted to him her every thought. In one instant he had been snatched away, and what had she now for comfort ? Nothing but the soothing certainty that she had never caused him one moment of sorrow ; and, young as she was, Ellen could reflect and compare, and she knew she had been a dutiful and an affectionate child, and not as many are to their parents. She tried to

look back over her past life, but she could not call to mind the hour when she had seen a frown upon her father's brow; and how many a pang was she spared by this blessed thought? She thanked God from her heart, and her tears were softer as she took her place by her mother's side, remembering that she had still a great duty to perform, and an irksome one it proved to poor Ellen. The mind of Mrs. Conway was just of that stamp which seems formed unintentionally to torment every one within its reach. It could make no effort of itself, and for many days after that terrible one when the grave opens to receive its own, when all our wounds bleed afresh, and our soul's soul seems entombed within the yawning gulf that has swallowed up all we loved, the unhappy woman did not appear even to wish that any improvement should take place in her mode of bearing her sorrow. So utterly selfish was her grief, that she

never appeared to think of the heavy burthen she was laying upon her dutous child, and it was not until a temporary indisposition detained poor Ellen for some hours from her side, that she began to feel her inestimable value, and to tremble lest danger should arise. The excitement consequent upon these feelings proved beneficial to her, and by degrees she roused herself from the torpor into which she had fallen. She consented to leave her room, and from that day one improvement followed another until things began almost to resume their usual course at Glyndon Cottage.

The effect of grief upon a mind like that of Mrs. Conway is never so lasting as that to which an intellect of a sterner mould is liable. All the energy of the former exhausts itself at once; the sorrow is excessive, but it melts away in tears and lamentations, and comfort comes at last. But the grief of a strong mind is terrible to bear, deep,

silent, and never-dying, for, a look or a tone, and it springs to life again and again, poignant and fresh and spirit-crushing, and the heart throbs and bleeds while the eye is calm, and the lip firm. This is the grief the strong mind will bear to the end, finding no relief and seeking none, patient, enduring, and true. Happy are they thus loved and thus mourned! It sometimes startled the sensitive nature of Ellen to perceive how rapidly, once the ice was broken, Mrs. Conway regained her tranquillity of mind. It seemed to the affectionate girl that the loss of her father was a blow which in her whole life she should not recover, and it was with amazement she beheld the change which it appeared to have caused in the character of her mother. A nervous restlessness had taken possession of her, and from having been all her life positively averse to business, it now appeared to have a sudden

charm for her. There was a good deal to be done, as everything now depended upon her ; but Ellen could have wished that the anxiety about worldly affairs had not been so great. She had never heard her mother talk of money in former days—now it was her constant theme, and the possession of it appeared to give no inconsiderable pleasure to her. Ellen, who was almost culpably ignorant of its value, could not help feeling a certain measure of disgust as she witnessed the effect which it appeared to have made upon the mind of her mother ; but she tried not to perceive it, and endeavoured, by constant occupation, to shut out intrusive thoughts. She returned to all her old habits—nothing was omitted—no hour was changed ; the daily walk and the daily ride were taken, though in silence and in tears. Nothing is so difficult or so agonizing as to do as we have done before, and yet know that the spring of our life is

broken; but to the young and ardent nature of Ellen, it was not so severe a trial as it would have been to one whom grief had already bowed—one who had weighed everything in the scale of life, and found all wanting. It is neither to be wished nor expected that sadness should dwell for ever in a youthful mind. Ellen, in her gradual progress towards recovery, had many a bitter struggle; but she did recover calmly and slowly, at least to outward appearance, and in redoubling her care and attention towards her mother, she felt as if she was best fulfilling the wishes of the parent she had lost. Fortunately for Ellen, the real cause of the sudden amendment in the state of mind of Mrs. Conway was completely shrouded in mystery. Had she been able to trace to any individual the power which had made her mother turn to worldly thoughts and interested views for comfort, she would have loathed that individual for ever. She was, however, much too inno-

cent of all guile to suspect that such a thing was possible, and therefore, in the long conferences which had taken place between Lady Brandesford and her mother, since the latter had resumed her usual habits, she saw nothing more than a continuance of that friendship which she knew had always existed. In the ensuing spring, Brandesford Hall was again deserted for town, but a constant and voluminous correspondence was duly kept up between the great lady and her friend, and it never occurred to Ellen that there was anything unusual in a woman like Lady Brandesford's devoting her time to endeavour to alleviate the dullness of the country by a constant succession of amusing letters from town; she merely thought Lady Brandesford very good natured, and more so than her daughters, for Maria and Rose had only written once to her during the London season, and then but a very few lines.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE spring had passed away, the London season was over, and Brandesford Hall was again inhabited. The village gossips were once more upon the *qui vive*, and their hearts rejoiced in again having the power to tell the sundry goings and comings of the inmates of the great house. It was so pleasant to ask, and to wonder, and to find fault; for, in spite of all the manœuvres of Lady Brandesford, the Brandesfords were not particularly popular in the neighbourhood. Lord Brandesford was too pompous and too

silent, his son too stupid, and his daughters too scornful and pretending. They were all too full of their own ideas and schemes to have leisure to be perfectly agreeable; but being the greatest people in the country, and therefore supposed to be the most powerful, they were naturally toadied, flattered, and apparently allowed to occupy the pinnacle of perfection upon which they had modestly placed themselves. They kept open house while in the country, and the people liked the dinners, and the balls, and the bands playing, and the races and fêtes that were sure to take place. It was different to anything they had at home, and to many it was the only glimpse ever afforded of a world which they knew but by hearsay.

Lady Brandesford was in an intoxication of delight whenever anything of display was going on. She certainly made up for all want of attention in the other members of the family, for her activity was incessant,

and the effort must have been very laborious. Her voice might be heard above that of every other individual present, and she never seemed to remain in the same position for two minutes together. A fever of hospitality devoured her, and nothing was too minute to escape her attention. She was the most wearying person in the world, thoroughly vulgar, perfectly insincere, and yet, from her noise, her restlessness and persevering impudence, had contrived to establish a reputation of cleverness, and to domineer over thousands who are always perfectly willing to bow their necks as long as the foot that tramples upon them belongs to a high-sounding name and a large fortune, for in the meanness of their hearts they may then hope to get something in return. And these are to be found abundantly everywhere, and in every grade of society, but without constituting the whole, for, to the honour of humanity, exceptions always

exist. Sufficient support was, however, afforded for a character like that of Lady Brandesford, whose object was selfish consideration. Although she was generally surrounded by that which, individually considered, was the very worst company, it was perfectly immaterial to her. She did not want good people, or clever people, or accomplished, intellectual society ; she merely wanted a multitude to follow, to applaud, and to admire. She knew this was to be accomplished by the coarse arts which she employed ; and therefore, why should she waste her energies in more subtle attempts ? Bustle and display, and what she called consequence, were her only occupations ; mortifying others by every possible exercise of caprice, prejudice, and ill-nature, her only enjoyments. The constant excitement of society was her existence, for she had no self-reliance, no serious thoughts, and none of those tender and household feelings that

make a woman's home her heaven. She perhaps had the natural affection for her children that even a tigress feels for her young, but the furtherance of her own schemes, through their means, was the basis of her love—and, worthy imitators—their regard for their mother pretty nearly amounted to the same feeling.

Until latterly, the course of Lady Bradesford along the sea of fashionable life had been as undisturbed as that of a ship gliding over the ocean before a favourable summer breeze. Her first disappointment had been in the non-establishment of her daughters. In this she always maintained she could not deserve the slightest degree of blame. She had brought them out young—very young—in short, from their infancy they had been thoroughly inured to society—every advantage had been lavished upon them. She had never allowed herself one

moment's repose—day after day, night after night, and year after year, they had been duly paraded, exhibited, puffed-off, and held out to the highest bidder in that humaan Tattersall's for young ladies, the London world; but no pretenders to the fair prizes had ever appeared. Some few humble aspirants to the honour of having a fashionable wife might in their earlier days have ventured to raise their eyes so high, but they had been hastily *brusqué* by the young ladies, or frowned off by their mamma, and it was many years since even such had been seen.

All London was perfectly familiar with the faces of the Ladies Brandesford. They had been painted and modelled by every artist of renown, had appeared in every Annual, and undergone all the graceful schemes for advertizing female beauty and fashion a thousand and a thousand times; their

names were as duly registered in every gathering of the world, as though stereotyped for the purpose; and all to no avail.

Fifteen weary years had rolled their course since the Lady Maria had made her *début*, and twelve since Lady Rose had followed, and yet still they remained, as the younger young ladies by a few seasons pertly called them, “ those eternal Brandesfords.”

This had at first been a severe mortification to Lady Brandesford; but it had come on by degrees, and latterly, as she had given up all hopes, she became more and more indifferent to her daughters. They had grown thin, and pale, and black, and no longer excited the attention which had once been lavished upon them; and their mother considered it to be time lost to do anything extraordinary for their interest, although to the world they were still the ostensible objects of the continual round of gaieties going on wherever Lady Brandesford re-

sided. Their fate was but the fate of many, and like the many, they alone were to blame; but blame is the last thing women of the world ever attribute to themselves. In their own eyes, the selfish are always perfect.

Lady Brandesford having, therefore, abandoned all expectations of either of her daughters making what is called a good match, continued her career of dissipation, and was somewhat comforted when success at length crowned one of her most important undertakings, and it became evident that her son would be chosen as a representative of the county in which he resided. Other hopes began to dawn upon her, and visions of political influence promised to add lustre to her already brilliant social position. Lady Brandesford then rose immeasurably in her own self-esteem. It would have been difficult to determine where this unusual aggrandizement might have ceased, had not events taken the most sudden and unex-

pected turn. All at once she found the earth give way before her feet.

One morning, Lord Brandesford, who, although on perfectly good terms with his wife, seldom obtruded himself upon her society, walked into her room, and announced in the plainest words that he was a ruined man—irretrievably ruined. Lady Brandesford for the first time in her life turned pale with emotion—nay, actually trembled; but still she refused to believe in the direful intelligence.

It was not until after many long and patient interviews with her men of business, many harassing investigations and reckonings, that she became persuaded of the fact, although it still seemed to her bewildered senses quite incredible that the rich, the envied, the worshipped Lady Brandesford should ever fall from her high estate, and actually partake of the most common and vulgar want of mankind—the want of

money. Such, however, was the case. The estate of Lord Brandesford owed a great deal more than its original value. He had, in fact, always been distressed, for he had always spent much more than his income; and he had gone on carefully concealing the state of his affairs until it was no longer possible for him to do so. It is true, the world was still ignorant of the truth; he still preserved his credit; he could still defraud the honest tradesman, and heap debt upon the head of his only son, and in this doubly deceitful position he was ably supported by his wife. Upon learning his embarrassments, all that she asked of him was to continue silent, and to leave the management of affairs to her. It was exactly what he wished, and he gladly complied with her request.

In a little while the impending ruin seemed forgotten; the house went on as usual; no alteration was visible either in

the establishment or the gaieties, and Lord Brandesford, for the first time in his life, congratulated himself upon having the best wife in the world. The disreputable means to which she so unblushingly had recourse, were perhaps a secret from him; and he did not, or would not, see that sometimes a strange face or uncouth form stood boldly prominent in his gilded rooms, receiving from the noble lady of the mansion attention and civility far surpassing that which she lavished upon her immediate friends. The meanness of the selfish woman of the world had no bounds; but the transition by which she had passed to a sort of female *chevalier d'industrie* was so easy that she had not marked it; it seemed quite natural that she who could do so much for other people, should find them ready to do something for her in return.

Like all other resources, however, this must have come to an end, but for the in-

cessant vigilance with which she followed it up; and her life presented the most extraordinary and degrading picture of that portion of society supporting itself totally upon its *prestige*, and stooping underhand to every description of meanness. There were moments, however, when even the callous mind of Lady Brandesford trembled, moments when the failure of some scheme brought to her recollection the insecure footing upon which they all were based, and threatened to plunge her into the abyss of public disgrace which she had so long dreaded. It was a horrible life; but the mind of such a woman could not feel the moral degradation. So long as the means of display were available, so long as the world was deceived, and still gave her its empty smile, she was satisfied. The consciousness of depravity did not oppress her, nor the contempt of individuals alarm, so long as she imagined they had not the power to molest her.

This state of things had continued for some time, when the death of Mr. Conway had opened new views to the indefatigable Lady Brandesford. It appeared actually to her experienced eye as if a treasure had been laid at her feet, and she lost not a moment in laying her plans to secure it. The first obstacle, however, which presented itself, threatened to prove fatal. Mrs. Conway might easily be managed, but Ellen, with her straightforward simplicity, was difficult to subdue; she must therefore be deceived, or her presence would infallibly mar every scheme. At the first mention of an alliance between her and Frederick Lindsay, Lady Brandesford had deemed it a matter of the greatest expediency; but the death of Mr. Conway had altered her views. The character of Frederick Lindsay was one which forbade her to hope that he would ever be anything but an insuperable obstacle in her path. Ellen must be separated from her

mother; but it was not to such a husband she must be confided—not to one who would watch over her, and make her interest and that of her family the object of conscientious solicitude. Such a guardian would be too vigilant and too honest, and Lady Brandesford instantly determined that the marriage should never take place. In this she was inadvertently ably seconded by Ellen, who had so frankly announced her intention of not quitting her mother, that Mr. Lindsay had regarded it as a positive rejection of the advances of his son, and formally repeated it to him as such. Frederick had therefore remained abroad, and Ellen had passed the year following the death of her father in the retirement of her home; but the year was over, and retirement was no longer possible, for Brandesford Hall was again inhabited. Ellen was again seen galloping her pony across the park, and the village gossips declared that Mrs. Conway and her

daughter were in greater favour than ever, and that it really was very kind of Lady Brandesford to come every day to Glyndon Cottage, and take poor dear Mrs. Conway out in her pony-carriage—for so great a lady, they did think it was very considerate and very amiable, and, in the simplicity of her heart, Mrs. Conway thought the same.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was the day appointed for the archery meeting at Brandesford, and the joyous groups of country people were already assembling in the park. It was one of the occasions when the great condescend to be looked at by the little—when the many are permitted to admire the amusements of the few, which they are by no means allowed to share. A portion of the park adjoining the pleasure-ground had been railed off, so as to form a sort of enclosure in which the visitors might congregate, and make a

picturesque background to the scene where the principal actors were to exhibit. Nothing could be better arranged, or have a prettier effect, and the beautiful spreading trees, with their outstretched arms, gave shade and shelter from the heat of the sun to many a fanciful group that even Watteau would have delighted to paint. It was beneath one of these trees that two gentlemen had established themselves, occupying the large and comfortable sofa placed there for the occasion, in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of any other person joining in their conversation. The gentlemen were two of the most distinguished of Lady Brandesford's guests, Mr. Howard Montrose and Sir Francis Riverston. Mr. Howard Montrose was a very distinguished man, though it would have been difficult to say how he deserved the name; but the fact was a certainty—it was admitted on all sides—he was sought for

by everybody—praised by everybody—always called Howard Montrose, and by a great many fine ladies “Howard,” *tout court*; and yet nobody knew exactly why they called him so, or why they made an exception in his favour, and treated him quite differently from other men. The fact was, he was the fashion. One did so because the other had done so; for the fashion comes no one knows exactly from whence, and the idle world follows blindly, as sheep follow the tinkling of a bell, without even raising their heads. An empty sound is sufficient for them, as it is for the world, for so few people have the slightest power of discernment, that they are much obliged to any one who will decide for them, and tell them what to think. Be this as it may, Howard Montrose had arrived at that proud eminence of being the fashion in the fashionable world. His word was law, and his sanction and protection a blessing. He was

taken as a model; his coat was copied, his hat was copied, his seat on horseback, and the very way he lounged in his opera-box; and even the manner he pushed his fingers through his long silky hair was supposed to be the only proper way of arranging his curls, and everybody tried to do the same. There were a great many imitations of Howard Montrose, and yet, as there was very little really remarkable about him, they all more or less degenerated into caricature. He had passed the age when he could have been called young, though looking considerably younger than he really was. He was not a handsome man. Scarcely above the middle height, his features were not regular, not even good, with the exception of his eyes, and his dress was always plain, even to simplicity. He was totally devoid of affectation—at least to all appearance. There was therefore very little to copy, and the real secret of his success lay

so near the surface that it was totally overlooked by his numerous imitators. He was reckoned by them very clever, but he was not a very clever man—he was only a little more clever than his neighbours—a very little, but that little sufficed. He escaped being dreaded as a genius, and yet shone triumphantly above the low range of the common intellects by which he was surrounded. He did not want to be eloquent. He had no ambition to shine in history, or to draw down thunders of applause in the senate of his country. The field of action he had chosen for himself was the velvet-covered ground of the fashionable world ; his life must be passed in a drawing-room ; —his nature was too indolent, his abilities too circumscribed, to have attempted any other career; and the practical cleverness with which he chose his vantage-ground, and kept it, was in fact the only cleverness he possessed. He had that sort of animal

instinct, always allied to cunning, that showed him at once the weaker as his prey. He knew that, in the flowery world where it was his ambition to shine, the influence of women was predominant, and he had calculated to a nicety the general poverty of intellect with which he would have to measure his force. The eye, the ear, and the interest might be ever appealed to—the mind seldom, the heart never. This was pretty nearly the groundwork of his principles, and in his long and close intercourse with the world he had found no reason to change. A thorough man of the world, he had the worst opinion of that world, and it would have been difficult for him to have thought otherwise, as he had always frequented the society of the baser portion of it; for the great world has its basenesses, and its villains of gentle blood, even as the lower world has its coarse ruffians, at whose crimes the polished knave

will shudder, not from a sense of their sin, but from an oppressive sensation of disgust at their vulgar atrocity. Howard Montrose was a thoroughly heartless man—he secretly laughed at those who were otherwise. An epicure in egotism, he actually traded on the selfishness of others. He managed them through their bad feelings, never through their good ones. Indeed, it would have been impossible to induce him either to seek or believe in such, and yet to all appearance no one entertained a less sombre opinion of the world. He was no gloomy ascetic, no fault-finding or disappointed critic of men and manners. He was jovial, light-hearted, frank, and with an easy half-comic impertinence, in which in reality lay half his power; for although he was too gentlemanlike to be disagreeable to any one, people felt that he could be so if he chose, and as his sharp sayings passed for wit, and his banterings for satire, people

always tried to keep him in good humour, which was not difficult, for he was constitutionally good tempered, with an even flow of spirits, and no gout or tic douloureux to make him look older than he really was, and render all the very young and active men objects of hatred to his eyes. Such was not the case; he had no dislike to persons younger than himself: on the contrary, he loved to patronize, to dictate, and to foster all the morbid aspirings to frivolous distinctions he detected in his friends, and although he secretly laughed at the undue pre-eminence of his power, he was delighted to exercise that power, and that not for the advantage of mankind. His pleasure was to see the tiny insects of fashion buzzing round him, and to watch them follow or annihilate their fellows, according as it suited them. He looked on, as he would have gazed curiously into a glass case of flies, or a basin of golden fish, and he saw

but that which he had always seen and always felt—that the objects of fashion were self and self-importance. He saw the little cringing to the great, instead of making themselves great by their own means, and he saw the great trampling the lesser underfoot, unless when, by some accidental circumstance, they might be made conducive to their own purposes. He saw talent neglected, and genius scoffed at, unless it would stoop from its lofty throne to caress the prurient taste for notoriety of the frivolous and vulgar great. He saw worth set at nought, and intellect held cheap, when their possessors were useless as friends, and might be dangerous as rivals; while frivolity was courted, and profligacy in either sex not only overlooked but openly encouraged, when its perpetrators were those whom it was convenient to retain among the foremost of the ranks.

All this, with the thousand shades and

distinctions meaning nothing, but which are conventional hypocrisies, Howard Montrose had been familiar with from his infancy, and the reflective turn of his mind had at first made him start and shudder at the moral depravity which seemed breathed with the breath of life into the bright beings by whom he was surrounded; but custom soon deadened the impression, and example became a sanction too powerful and glaring to withstand; he soon followed where others led, and did even as they had done, and recognised but one law for the whole, the indulgence and gratification of selfishness at any cost. From that hour he had lived only for himself and his own advancement; pleasure and power had been his sole objects. He carefully studied his game, and had played his cards to perfection; the triumph, indeed, was an easy one even to his slender abilities; but one thing was necessary, and that was, patience, and with this quality he

had been gifted by nature to an extraordinary amount. Even that which he despised never succeeded in wearying him, because he had his object in view, and by being determined to accomplish it, he had succeeded. His empire once established, it needed little effort to maintain it, and he now gave the law unquestioned. He was supremely happy; nothing was wanting to make life a continual pastime to him; he had no annoyance and no fear, except a slight misgiving that he might some day grow too fat; and this was the only thing that disturbed the serenity of his brow. There was certainly a little danger of it, for his natural habits were indolent, but as yet it only threatened at a distance, the evil had not fully declared itself; his step was still light, his waist small, and his complexion had acquired nothing of the ruddy hue of health he so cordially detested; he still looked extremely well. Such in per-

son and in mind was Mr. Howard Montrose. Few, however, who had merely glanced at him as he sat lounging on the sofa beneath the tree at Brandesford Hall, would have given him credit for the tact, calculation, and perseverance he really possessed, he looked so simple, so carelessly good humoured, as he sat with his hat half over his eyes, scanning the various groups as they passed, and making remarks to his companion. That companion—how totally different was he also from what his appearance would have led one to suppose! Sir Francis Riverston was perfectly handsome. Figure and face were alike faultless in the regularity of their proportions—he was tall, not too slight, and graceful in every movement; he had beautiful brown eyes, brilliantly white teeth, a complexion finer than that of most women, and luxuriant dark hair. His dress had evidently occupied some of his attention, but he was not over-

dressed, nor was there anything frippery in his appearance; he looked the perfection of an English gentleman—a distinction unattainable to any other nation in the world. It was, however, the expression of his countenance which so much belied his nature. His broad bold brow and full eyebrows gave him an appearance of thought, his silence that of reserve, while in reality he was totally incapable of thinking, and he did not talk much from never knowing exactly what to say. He also was an absolute votary of self. He adored himself; proud of his beauty—proud of his fortune, for he was very rich, he did not see why the whole world should not adore him likewise—that is, the whole of the fashionable world—he recognised no other. He forgot, however, that he had not yet made himself of use to that world, and that many others were gifted with very similar advantages; he never looked to the true cause of things, but

chafed and wondered at his own want of success. He had been out now several seasons, and his position was far different from that which he had expected at starting. He was, it is true, received everywhere, invited everywhere, and tolerably flattered and courted; but that, in his opinion, was not enough. He had an inordinate value for himself, and fancied that, because he came of an ancient race, and possessed an ample fortune, his very appearance was to excite a marvellous sensation, and his mortification was in proportion to the extravagance of his anticipations, when he saw others, not possessed of a tithe of his advantages, far surpassing him in what he looked upon as perfect happiness—position in the fashionable world. Amongst the many, his particular friend, Howard Montrose, was not the least enigma to him. He was not a man of very good family, and his fortune was barely sufficient to enable

him to maintain his proper appearance in society; and yet the whole world was at his feet. How was this? Sir Francis could not tell, but the fact was established beyond a doubt. From the moment he made the discovery, he attached himself warmly to Howard Montrose. He fancied that, by study, he might acquire his powers; but his mind was far too vacant to acquire anything that demanded thought. He gazed upon the artist, but never attained his art, and he soon felt, that however useful, when present, the countenance of his friend might be, it was but a borrowed light, and was in reality of very little service to him. His temper, not naturally perfect, began to grow sour, and he actually entertained feelings of resentment against his chosen patron for not having done that which he had never asked him to do—placed him upon the throne of fashion by his side. It was not, however, that Mr. Howard Montrose did not know

all that was passing in the thoughts of Sir Francis Riverston—he was perfectly aware of it, but he chose to be asked, and toadied, and flattered. The coquetry with which he dealt out his patronage was part of his amusement, and he liked to conceal it under the mask of a *bonhomie* which deceived many—an air of friendly good nature towards a man much younger than himself, as if he enjoyed his society and the freshness of feeling with which he entered upon his career in the world. Howard Montrose was reckoned a remarkably good-natured man. People who cavilled at his other qualities never thought of denying him that one, always so singularly undefined and misapplied—good nature. A very slight effort at calculation had early shown him that this popular error was one always to be encouraged. No one can imagine the great number of sins the reputation of good nature, if it is well managed, can be made

to cover. Charity is nothing to it. With Howard Montrose everything was calculation. He lived by it. The devotion of Sir Francis at the moment that it was tendered exactly suited his patron. He wanted something new, and the well-stocked preserves of the young man promised him amusement in the winter, whenever he had a week to spare. He took him under his protection, but as yet had not done anything for him beyond accepting the vacant seat in his phaeton upon one or two public occasions. He calmly awaited the moment when the aspirant to butterfly renown would confide to him his wishes and his hopes; but the moment did not arrive. Many times he thought it was coming, but the mysterious air of Sir Francis had explained itself by a consultation about a bet, or a device for a new button, and Howard Montrose was still at liberty to take the attentions of his friend as pure emanations of an affectionate heart.

All at once, however, the interests of the parties changed, and the sought-for became the seeker—a strange metamorphosis! and this was all brought about by a moonlight walk!

CHAPTER XV.

THE orange-tree walk was one of the most beautiful spots in the romantic and highly-ornamented pleasure-grounds of Brandesford Hall. It formed a terrace along the border of the lake, and took its name from a succession of orange trees placed in boxes at intervals along the open side of the walk, the other being closed in by a flowering shrubbery, above which rose the stately oak trees that flung their branches across the path, and at intervals darkened the sloping bank down to the edge of the water. At

the other side of the lake, the graceful proportions of a Greek temple stood out in dazzling whiteness from among the trees, and was with them repeated by the glassy bosom of the light wave wandering at their feet. Farther off, the Eastwood hills rose boldly in the back-ground, and a mass of wood seemed to cover most of the intervening country. On the near side of the water, art seemed to have been as prodigal as nature upon the other, and flowers, and statues, and vases bearing beautiful shrubs, were profusely scattered over the rich green turf. The scene was gay and gorgeous in the glance of the noonday sun; but how beautifully chastened when a bright harvest moon had climbed above the hills, seeming, in the clear expanse, to rest upon her silver way, while each ripple, as if thrilling with delight, hurried on to welcome with gentlest kisses the beam so bright and bashful that had come to seek shelter in

its breast. It was upon a scene like this that, the evening before the archery *fête*, two persons sat and gazed—two persons upon whom the beauties of bounteous nature were totally thrown away—Lady Brandesford and Mr. Howard Montrose. They had left the house under pretence of inspecting some of the preparations for the next day's *fête*; and having walked for some time, sat down in one of the shaded alcoves of the orange-tree walk, in order to enjoy the cool air wafted over the lake. Strange to say, for a few moments neither of them spoke, and yet no two persons whose minds wandered less into the mazes of the ideal ever sat silently looking upon a vision of soft beauty. Neither was there anything of the ideal in the thoughts which for the time had arrested the flippancy of the conventional jargon which generally served them for conversation: of a very material nature were the reflections filling their minds. Howard

Montrose was thinking of the delight of having a magnificent country house and a clear fifty thousand a year; and Lady Brandesford suddenly recollect ed, that instead of this being her case, she was looking, perhaps for the last time, upon the fairy riches before her; for her resources were almost at an end—her credit totally exhausted. A few months more, and all the glories of her home would have passed into other hands; and as her eye wandered over the several objects of art before her, they stood as if so many items in the advertisement of the auctioneer, who, ere long, would dole out her treasures to others. Without the appendages of rank and riches, what would become of her? She shuddered as the thought passed over her, and all at once burst into tears. The unfeigned and intense look of surprise with which her companion turned his eyes upon her face had something almost comic in its expres-

sion, as much as if he had said, “Can it be that such a woman knows how to weep!” It was, however, true. There she sat, the haughty, disagreeable, overbearing Lady Brandesford, crying like a village school-girl, and, moreover, wiping off large patches of her rouge as she endeavoured to dry her tears. For a few moments, Howard Montrose looked at her in silence, and then he began to consider the part he was expected to play and the effect he was to make, for even with the oldest of friends he never neglected his part. “She is growing sentimental—what a confounded bore!” he said to himself; and a look of impertinent conceit passed over his face, for he instantly attributed her emotion to a revival of a passion for himself, which had long since been gracefully mellowed by time. She was by far too useful to him to risk the chance of offending her, and he therefore instantly determined to follow in the same

vein. He sighed deeply; and leaning towards her, took the hand which was resting on the edge of the seat.

“ My own Emily,” he began, in a voice of music; but she started up, and pushing back his hand with an impatient “ Hush!” she began, as if actuated by some impulse she could not resist, and in one instant poured forth a torrent of lamentation, and confided to the ear of another the secret she had so long concealed within her breast. The next moment she bitterly regretted what she had done. The silence of her companion was to her an indication of his inability to help her; and in a tone of irritation, she was just beginning a speech which was to unsay all she had said, when Mr. Howard Montrose, for the second time, laid his hand upon hers: but this time it was with an air of profound respect, as if merely to arrest her attention. “ My dear Lady Brandesford,” he began; and seeing that

she sat down quietly to listen to him, he continued—

“Let me pray of you to calm yourself, and believe me, no one is more deeply interested for you than I am. Your fears have, I trust, exaggerated the evil; it may yet be warded off.”

“No, no,” sobbed the unhappy woman, soothed by the kindness of his manner. “There is no hope—no help for so monstrous an involvement. This is the last time, my dear Howard, I shall ever receive you at Brandesford; the next time you come to see me, it will be, I suppose, up five pair of stairs, in some foreign garret.” And she let her head and hands sink with a theatrical air, through which, however, shone an expression of intense grief.

Howard Montrose was too quick-sighted not to perceive that, in the first ebullition of sorrow, she had told him pretty nearly the truth; but as it really was of great im-

portance to him, he patiently endured a repetition of the whole story, and this time repeated with such quiet exactness, that he saw the details were far too familiar to her for the blow to have been as rapid in its progress as she would have had him believe. All the time she was speaking, he felt as if he had been for a long while standing upon a plank above a gulf, and that now he beheld the opposite end loosened, and knew it must give way beneath his feet. Lady Brandesford's house had always been to him a home; it was his favourite retreat when any other engagement bored him, or when he did not happen to have one, and its loss would be very serious to him. It was the only house where everything exactly suited him, and where he did not feel himself called upon to be more agreeable than he chose at the moment; he could bring as many people as he liked to shoot in the winter, and send them away

when he was tired of them; in short, the house was like his own, and though many others would have gladly opened their doors to him upon the same terms, he had never found any that was likely to afford him the same degree of comfort and amusement: the cook was perfect, the shooting was perfect, the stables were perfect, the country perfect for hunting, and the house well managed, and always full of agreeable people. Decidedly Brandesford Hall would be the most irreparable loss.

All these ideas floated through the active imagination of the selfish man with the rapidity of light. As he listened, he cast his eyes over the beauty of the scene before him, and a sigh, in which some, very little, sympathy mingled, escaped him, as he thought of what he should suffer were he the owner of so magnificent a place, and it was about to slide from his grasp.

Lady Brandesford still went on talking

and lamenting her hard fate, with almost frantic vehemence. Her hearer was now more than ever convinced that this was not the beginning of her difficulties, and he said, suddenly, but carelessly—

“But, my dear Lady Brandesford, have you no rich friends from whom you might borrow until you see what can be done?”

“No, no!” she exclaimed, quite thrown off her guard by the excitement of the moment—“I have exhausted all; no one in the world would lend me a farthing.”

“The world is very wide,” replied Howard Montrose; “although our world is not. Have you no rich, humble friends, people who want patronage, and are ready to buy it?”

“I know so few,” said Lady Brandesford, hesitatingly.

“But there are so many,” suggested Howard Montrose. “Now, for instance, some fat old woman with daughters, or some

millionaire with a red-faced son. Let me see—oh! there is Archibald Meredith, who always takes care to introduce himself as the son of a baronet, by bringing in every moment, ‘My father, Sir Ambrose,’ though his father is nothing but a retired jeweller. I saw him very attentive last night to Lady Rose—could you not encourage his devotion by borrowing a few thousands from him?’

“The monster!” said Lady Brandesford, with an air of disgust. “I have never spoken to him—Rose chose to patronize him because he picked her up one day she fell from her horse in the park—and then he is stingy and suspicious beyond all belief.”

“Ah! you have ascertained that,” exclaimed Howard Montrose, with a suppressed sneer. “The old diamond merchant weighing himself by his carats! No, perhaps he is too well informed—and Lady Rose, too, would be sure to thwart any plan of yours.”

“Certain,” replied Lady Brandesford, as

calmly as if she had not been speaking of her own child; “it would be useless to try.”

“Well, then, let me see who there is of the softer sex—why not undertake your pet widow?”

“Who do you mean?” said Lady Bransford, looking rather uneasily towards the dark side of the walk.

“Mrs. Conway,” answered her companion, coolly fixing his eyes upon her face; and seeing by the slight start, which she endeavoured to check, that he had exactly hit upon the mainspring of her past conduct with regard to her friend, and her present confidence towards himself, he continued, in the most easy tone imaginable, “Nothing can be more perfectly convenient. Here are these people, a good-looking widow, still young and enormously rich, with a beautiful daughter—you bring them out in town, and make her pay handsomely for it.”

“Ah! my dear Howard,” said Lady

Brandesford, affectionately, "your good nature makes everything seem easy—but there are such difficulties."

"I don't see them," said Howard, looking up at the moon.

"The mother might be managed—but the daughter, never."

"Is the fair Ellen, then, so very obstinate?" he inquired.

"No, no, gentle as a lamb; but her mother does nothing without consulting her, and to put such a secret into the power of a mere child!"

"Would be dangerous, I admit; added to which, as she is the probable heiress of her mother, she might object. Well, then, it seems to me the first thing we have to do is, get rid of Ellen."

"Exactly so," exclaimed Lady Brandesford, joyously; "and that is just what I wanted to consult you about."

"Thank you," said Howard Montrose;

and with a comic air he slightly raised his hat, as if in gratitude for the solution of the mystery.

“Now, how shall we set about it? You must manage it for me.”

“What shall I do?—persuade the girl to run away?” he asked, laughing; “and so disgust her mother for ever. My dear Emily, I would do so willingly, but you know I am not attractive to young ladies—I am too old for them, and too ugly,” he added, with a conceited air.

“No, no; do not attempt anything of that kind,” said Lady Brandesford, with a look of alarm; “it would bring us into such a terrible mess! You have no idea what these country people are.”

“Very religious?” inquired Howard.

“Very absurd!” replied the lady. “They talk of principles as if they really thought any one would believe them. They have nothing to do. The church is their theatre;

they attend it as regularly as we do the Opera, and talk of the text and the beautiful sermon from one Sunday to another."

"Not forgetting the parson, unless he should happen to be old and ugly," said Howard, with a laugh. "And the fair Ellen has all these prejudices?"

"And many more. She told me, the other day, that her duty was all she ever thought of."

"You should send her to preach, then, to Maria and Rose," suggested Howard, calmly.

"They hate her," replied Lady Brandesford, "quite enough already."

"What! their particular friend?" exclaimed Howard Montrose, with an incredulous air, admirably put on.

"My dear Howard, do be serious if you can," said the lady, beseechingly. "Never mind the girls; I have given them up long ago. What we must do is to marry Ellen, and get her out of the way."

"But if she is so very religious," said Howard, laughing again, in spite of his annoyance, "where are we to find her a husband? I, for one, don't know a man who has principles."

"Nor I," answered Lady Brandesford, involuntarily.

"Well, then, suppose we advertise. But that is so slow!—and I conclude she would insist upon every aspirant repeating his catechism, to show his religion. Religion is a perfect mania with some people."

"Oh, as to that, a season or two in town would soon settle Ellen's. I am not the least afraid, once she is married; but you see, my dear Howard, two things are necessary—a rich husband, who will not always have his eyes fixed upon Mrs. Conway's purse; and a proud one, who will keep his wife's relations and country friends at a distance. If we could manage this, then there is no saying how long we might go

on, for my pet widow, as you call her, is a perfect fool about money, and I can do anything with her. She is a good creature, but has all the vulgarities of a *bourgeoise*; and you have no idea what those women will do to get into society."

A pause of some minutes followed this speech, during which time Howard Montrose sat with his eyes bent upon the ground, his lips compressed, and in the attitude of one who is thinking deeply. His companion looked at him, and scarcely dared to breathe. That moment was a decisive one to her, for the scheme that was to emanate from the fertile brain of Howard must make or mar her fortune. Her heart trembled as she thought of the difficulties in her path, and once again her wandering glance took in all the beauties of art and nature by which she was surrounded, and a pang of terror and mortification followed. She sighed deeply and naturally; but as How-

ard Montrose turned his dark lustrous eyes upon her, a gleam of hope sprung up. She had never known him to fail in anything that he had undertaken.

“Emily,” he said, “you have often trusted me before; you may trust me now; but ask me no questions until the proper moment. We must find our game before we run it down. My plan is arranged; but be cautious, and, above all things, silent. Continue to scatter crumbs before your tame widow, but not in too great profusion; and, if you would take my advice, be markedly civil to the monster piony, ‘the son of Sir Ambrose.’ It would be just as well you had one daughter less upon your hands.”

“Anything—anything you desire,” said Lady Brandesford. “And you really have hopes?”

“Yes, really,” he replied.

“My dear Howard, how happy you have made me!”

Howard Montrose gracefully pressed to his lips the hand she extended towards him, and, rising, they proposed returning to the house. They re-entered it together, but separated immediately. Lady Brandesford went to her dressing-room to put on some fresh rouge, and Howard Montrose sauntered into the library, which had been converted into a green-room, just as the *tableaux* prepared for the evening were about to begin. Ellen, dressed as Amy Robsart, was sitting on a sofa a little apart, talking to her Leicester, who was looking down upon her with an air in which involuntary admiration was blended with ineffable disdain. Howard Montrose threw himself into a seat by her side, and poured forth a torrent of gentle and well-turned compliments upon her appearance; and his tone was so well-bred and refined, that it was evident he was not joking, but perfectly sincere in his expressions of the admiration she inspired. The

fine eyes of Leicester looked larger than usual as he listened and observed. Howard Montrose at the feet of a country girl! It was therefore the right thing to be civil to Ellen. As if by the touch of a wand, the supercilious and disagreeable expression of his countenance vanished, and, leaning forward over the back of the sofa, he was preparing to address her in the same vein, when they were summoned to appear in their parts. There was not a moment to spare, and all three persons rose and proceeded to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THUS it was that the moonlight walk had been the cause of the sought-for becoming the seeker, for it was during the moment of meditation in which the volubility of Lady Brandesford had permitted him to indulge, that Howard Montrose had decided that the very person they sought was beneath their roof, and that Sir Francis Riverston must become the husband of Ellen Conway. To have thawed the top of Mont Blanc would have appeared to others a task of about equal magnitude to that of inducing the

superb Sir Francis thus to throw himself away, but the difficulty was the least obstacle to Howard Montrose. Once convinced of the expediency of the measure, he never admitted a doubt of its success. He would have despised himself if he had done so. And so the next morning, at the archery meeting, he had secured the company of Sir Francis, by declaring he could not stand the heat and the vulgar crowd, and meant to pass his day upon the sofa under the tree, and look on at a distance upon the pastimes of the hour. Of course Sir Francis deemed it necessary to do exactly the same; and thus it was that these two gentlemen had taken possession of the very best place in the whole garden, and seemed in nowise inclined to give it up. But the brow of Sir Francis was clouded, and never having much to say, he now, after two or three small attempts, sunk into silence. "Noble Lord of Leicester," said Howard

Montrose, as if struck by so unusual an occurrence, “your meditations are deep this morning.”

“Oh! I was not thinking,” replied Sir Francis.

“What! not even of your beautiful Amy of last night? By heavens! you have more philosophy than I have.”

“Oh!” said Sir Francis, awkwardly—“Miss Conway—yes, I believe she is handsome.”

“Handsome! yes, handsome, pretty, beautiful—all in one. I never saw a more lovely creature, nor one who would do more honour to a high station. What a pity she is to marry that stupid fellow!”

“Is she going to be married?” said Sir Francis, with some appearance of interest.

“Why, so they say; it is a sin and a shame to have her buried in the country for ever. I only wish to God I was richer.”

“What would you do then?” asked Sir Francis, innocently.

“Marry her myself—take her to town—give her a fine house—fine jewels—fine horses—and fine friends. We should be the happiest and most *recherché* couple in England. But alas! my poverty dooms me for ever to the blessings of single blessedness.”

“I thought—that you thought—that single men were always the best received in London,” said Sir Francis, doubtfully.

“Received, perhaps, but not considered,” replied Howard Montrose. “There is a wide difference. A single man is for a time well received, because people don’t know how much they may get out of him. He is a bird of promise; but let him go on for two or three years without doing anything for the world, and it will soon fall off in its admiration. Anything is better than coming out year after year in the same character—it is better to commit a sin than incur a ridicule.”

"Ridicule!" repeated Sir Francis, drawing up his exquisite person. "I don't see how that is likely."

"Nothing more easily done, and nothing more impossible to undo," answered Howard, pitilessly. "Every one comes out into the world to do something, by which he hopes to make a good effect; therefore, if after a certain time it can be proved that he has done nothing, he becomes a useless unit in society, and degenerates into a bore, which is ridiculous enough."

"And you really think a married man does best in town?"

"Most certainly," was the reply—"that is, if he knows how to manage things. He must do everything himself—just allowing his wife to be of sufficient importance to add to his consequence, without detracting from it. Two suns cannot shine together. It is a great mistake allowing a woman to put you into the back-ground; they never

think of any one but themselves; they have their own plans and aims, and leave nothing to their husbands but the regret of having married them: it is all a man's own fault."

"I should think so," said Sir Francis, haughtily; and then, after a moment's silence, he continued: "Then, my dear Howard, you actually advise me to marry."

"Me! God forbid!" said Howard, with a well-feigned look of horror. "I never advise anything. I merely said what I should do if I could; but the fact is, your Amy has turned my head. Heavens! what eyes! what lips! what a form and carriage! Wait till she comes out in town!"

"She is coming out, then?" asked Sir Francis.

"Yes, Lady Brandesford has invited her to pass the season in London with her, unless she is married before."

"Oh! I dare say, with such a prospect in view, she may change her mind," said Sir

Francis, consequentially. “ These village girls always have some rustic admirer. I never knew one that had not.”

“ But Miss Conway is not a simple village girl: her father was a man of most excellent family, and they are dear friends of the Brandesfords, which insures their being the fashion in town. But there she is!—By Jove, how lovely!—she looks like a queen among all the other women. I really can’t take my eyes off her.” And Howard Montrose put up his glass, and with an air of intense delight continued to follow every movement of Ellen, who, in her large hat and green tunic, so prettily looped up on one side, was preparing her bow and arrows for the contest about to begin.

Sir Francis followed his eye, and closely watched the expression of his countenance. Howard Montrose was to him an oracle—a god, and he never questioned the infallibility of any of his opinions. He had fas-

tened his faith upon him, and to do as he did was all his ambition. He was one of the many who cannot think for themselves. The admiration with which his friend evidently regarded Ellen, had given a new turn to the ideas of Sir Francis. That such a man as Howard Montrose should think of admiring or marrying a simple Miss Conway, of Glyndon Cottage, showed him at once the extent of his power. If it was possible for Howard, why should it not be possible for him? He had never thought so much or so rapidly before, as he had done within the last hour, while listening to the words of his companion. A new era in fashionable life seemed opening to him; the accession of self-importance he felt was immense. What would he not do, when the whole world was at his feet, as the words of Howard led him to believe would instantly follow when he made his appearance as a married man. He smiled upon

all around, and actually glanced complacently towards Ellen, whom, until the day before, he had regarded with sovereign contempt. It was not that he was insensible to her beauty, but he thought so much more of his own, that it swallowed up every feeling. Now, however, that his mind had been directed towards the advantages that beauty might be the means of drawing towards him, it stood before his eyes in perfectly a new light. It was miraculous what a change had come over his spirit, from the few words uttered by his oracle; but, like most oracles, Howard Montrose knew how to speak to the purpose. He was seldom mistaken when he had studied a character, and had tact enough to distance any suspicion. Success, even in trifles, is never disagreeable, and Howard Montrose felt, as he marked the changing countenance of his friend, that he really deserved some credit for having imagined and executed a device

which promised so fairly. His eye danced with pleasure as he scanned the groups of fair archers passing to and fro with their friends; and he was upon the point of proposing to join them, in order to liberate his companion, who, he observed, kept strict watch over the corner where Ellen stood, when he was saved from the trouble by the appearance of Mr. Archibald Meredith, who came towards him, evidently with the intention of entering into conversation. This was a liberty which, at another time, he would have resented by a certain civil coldness which was provoking in the extreme; but at this moment the arrival of Mr. Archibald, "the son of Sir Ambrose," was most opportune, and shaking him warmly by the hand, he actually offered him a seat by his side. Sir Francis Riverston instantly rose, as if a reptile had touched him; for, notwithstanding the condescension of his patron, he could not bring himself to abide the contact of a crea-

ture like Mr. Archibald Meredith. Howard Montrose, however, had a double object to gain. He wanted to detach Sir Francis, in order that he might join Ellen while the impression in her favour was still upon his mind; and he wanted to toady the *millionaire*, in order to get him to take Lady Rose away from Brandesford Hall, she being the only person or thing connected with it to which he had a positive objection; for her selfish and domineering temper often rendered her thoroughly disagreeable. He enjoyed excessively the idea of her marriage with Mr. Archibald Meredith; and as he looked at him from head to foot as he took his place on the sofa by his side, he acknowledged that to fasten such a creature for life upon the haughty and self-conceited Rose Brandesford would be a pretty little revenge for the sundry annoyances she had caused him. The “son of Sir Ambrose,” as he was proverbially called, was the living

caricature of a fat fair man. His short, thick figure was crowned with an enormous head. He wore a narrow-brimmed hat and a flaxen wig, having discovered that the natural colour of his hair was a great deal too light and unbecoming to the red, round face with which nature had afflicted him. He had very fat, short hands; but he wore a great many brilliant rings; and his chains, pins, and shirt buttons were of endless and costly variety. His language and manner abounded in vulgarisms, but this, with his physical defects, constituted all his sins, for he was good-natured in the extreme—that real good nature springing from kindly feelings, which is about the most rare quality in the world. He would have done anything to serve a friend, and put himself to any inconvenience, could he have been sure it was the means of giving pleasure to another. His heart was thoroughly good, but he had a childlike sort of

way of proving his wish to be obliging, that made most people think him a fool. It was, however, far from being the case; but his riches had introduced him into a world where no good feeling is ever appreciated, and where the very weaknesses that may be induced by it are always branded with ridicule or stigmatised as crimes. He was like a child wandering through the world with untold treasures in his hand, and, unsuspicuously, he had already fallen among thieves. Although Mr. Howard Montrose had frequently met Mr. Archibald Meredith in the society of the Brandesfords, he had never yet interchanged words with him, so great was the disgust with which his appearance had inspired the fastidious man of the world. It was therefore a great delight to the *millionaire* when he beheld the favourable reception granted to his advances by the celebrated arbiter of fashion. He at once accepted the proffered place upon the sofa, but

sat down as far as he could from Howard Montrose, and gathered up the skirts of his coat, as if afraid they should derange the cushion upon which he was leaning; the abrupt withdrawal of Sir Francis Riverston left him, however, abundance of room on the opposite side.

“I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Montrose—so deeply indebted to you.”

“Not at all,” said Howard Montrose, with a slight bow; and seeing that his new acquaintance was very much at a loss how to proceed, he added, civilly, “It is cool and pleasant here.”

“Oh, very much so,” replied Mr. Archibald Meredith; and he suddenly unrolled the gold watch-chain he had been industriously twisting round his fingers from the moment he sat down.

“A pretty scene,” observed Howard Montrose.

“Oh! very pretty; I never saw one like it before,” was the reply.

"Never!" exclaimed Howard Montrose.

"Oh! never; we have had races and rural games at Wilstead Park—my father Sir Ambrose's place—but never archery. I must certainly get up a fête like this. Do you like archery, Mr. Montrose?"

"Why, yes," replied Howard, carelessly.

"Then I hope you will do us the honour to come to ours," said Mr. Archibald Meredith, bowing very civilly, like a child who had been carefully taught. "I am sure it would make my father Sir Ambrose so very happy."

"You are very good, my dear sir," replied Howard Montrose, with difficulty repressing a smile; but he was wrong in the supposition that his companion meant it as flattery, or to insinuate himself into his good graces. His mind was much too simple and straightforward; he would have given the same invitation to any one who had expressed a wish to share in what he had to offer. A

long pause ensued. Mr. Archibald Meredith had so evidently some communication to make, that Howard Montrose thought it better to wait, and let him make it in his own manner. It was a novel one; and versed as was Howard Montrose in the world and its ways, he could not refrain from laughing, when Mr. Archibald Meredith, blushing to a most painful intensity, and nearly twisting off the tassel of the cushion at his side, said, in a subdued voice, “Dear Mr. Montrose, I have something very particular to tell you.”

“Really!” said Howard.

“Yes, really—but you will not be angry?” said Mr. Meredith, hesitatingly.

“Can you suppose it? I shall be charmed to listen to anything that you wish to say,” replied Howard, in his sweetest tone.

“Well, then,” said Mr. Meredith, growing very red, and half turning away his face, “I will own to you that I am in love.”

"Well," said Howard, laughing, "is there anything so very extraordinary in that?"

"No," replied Archibald Meredith, hurriedly; "but then I am actually in love with Lady Rose Brandesford!" And he looked into the face of his companion as if he had made a confession of high treason. Howard Montrose merely smiled, as he answered, without betraying the least surprise, "I wish you joy of your taste—Lady Rose is very handsome."

"Oh, very! but I am so afraid of her; she looks so grand, that she terrifies me when she turns her head slowly round so—she is so beautiful—oh! if I dared to speak to her. Dear Mr. Montrose, do you think Lady Rose Brandesford would marry me?"

"Why, really," he replied, "the young lady could better answer the question than I."

"Oh, no!" said his companion, vigor-

ously continuing his attack upon the cushion in order to hide his confusion. “ You can tell me, if you like—you can do anything here and everywhere else, they say; so I want you to help me. Do make Lady Rose say ‘ Yes ! ’ ”

“ But has she yet said ‘ No ? ’ ” inquired Howard Montrose, rather anxiously, for that this willing victim should escape seemed to him a monstrous pity.

“ Oh, dear ! no,” replied Mr. Archibald Meredith, gathering a little courage; “ but she talked last night so much of disproportional marriages—misalliances, I think she called them, that I thought she meant it for me. Do you know, I could not sleep all night.”

“ Really,” said Howard Montrose, examining him as he would have done any other natural curiosity.

“ Positively,” was the reply, “ my heart was quite in a flutter all night—for you see

I have set my mind upon marrying a real lady, and Lady Rose would just suit me—and I am sure my father, Sir Ambrose, would be delighted; for, you see, he has often said to me, ‘Archie—he always calls me Archie—do you manage to get one of these great ladies to marry you, and then see if the house of Meredith won’t hold its head as high as the rest; and that’s what put it into my head, for you know ours isn’t much of a family, only we have lots of money; but, as my father, Sir Ambrose, says, that’s everything now-a-days, and every family must have a beginning, so you see I want to begin mine; and besides,’ he added, sentimentally, and again seizing the tassel he had for a few moments left in peace, “I really am very much in love with Lady Rose—I hadn’t one wr’k of sleep last night.”

“ Oh!” said Howard Montrose, slowly; and as the unfortunate victim of Lady

Rose raised his eyes, he caught those of his companion fixed upon him with such an expression of mirth, that he coloured again more furiously than ever, and by one powerful twist sent the crimson tassel rolling at his feet. Howard stooped quietly, and picked it up.

“Can’t you help me?” said the timid lover.

“You don’t want any help,” replied Howard.

“How—what do you mean? Do you think she would have me? Oh! Lady Rose! if I did but dare to ask!”

“You cannot expect she should ask you,” observed Howard; “take courage, and propose at once.”

“I don’t know how to manage it,” said Archibald, sheepishly.

“Oh! any way—offer her a flower—then talk of your flowers at Wilstead Park, and

offer to make her mistress of them ; or give her a pin, or a ring, or a chain—a chain is a very good thing, so much may be said about it.”

“ Oh ! that is very well for you, Mr. Montrose ; but if you knew how she alarms me : when she turns round and frowns, she looks so handsome. I do love her so, but she frightens me to death.”

“ That is a great proof that you are seriously in love,” observed Howard Montrose, gravely.

“ Yes, isn’t it ? Oh ! Mr. Montrose, it’s an awful thing to be in such a state.” And looking dreadfully conscious, Mr. Archibald Meredith turned again to his cushion ; but the supporting tassel was now in Howard Montrose’s hand, who, rather tired of his new acquaintance on finding that he was perfectly disposed to do what he wanted, said, in a decided tone, “ Take my advice,

and propose at once. Don't talk of your family; but say something pleasant, and give her a present."

"Just what I thought," said Archibald, with a grin of delight; "but I didn't know whether great ladies would be pleased or not. Look here what I had brought, upon the chance of her accepting me." And he produced out of his pocket a splendid diamond bracelet.

"Pooh!" said Howard, "all women are alike—all fond of trumpery and show. That will do, my friend, that will do—there is enough there to tempt half a dozen Lady Roses." And he closed the velvet-case, and gave it back with a patronising air.

"Then I'll go at once, and propose; if you say so, it must be right. Thank you, thank you, my dear friend." And starting up, Mr. Archibald Meredith wrung the hand of Mr. Howard Montrose with convulsive eagerness.

“Original,” muttered Howard Montrose, as his eye followed the shuffling movements of the enraptured lover, who was astehning across the lawn in quest of the object of his adoration; and then tired of attending to the business of others, he also rose, and went towards the house, intending to propose a sentimental ride through the woods to the pretty Lady Adeline Mowbray, at whose feet he had been the whole of the past season. He did not see Lady Brandesford again until dinner was announced. “What success, my dear Howard?” she whispered, as she lingered for a moment by his chair on entering the drawing-room.

“Merely that your daughter will become Lady Rose Meredith,” he replied, glancing at the superb bracelet which the young lady wore, “and Ellen Conway, Lady Riverston.”

“Impossible,” exclaimed Lady Brandesford, almost too loud for prudence.

“ You will see,” said Howard, rising, and offering his arm to Lady Adeline.

“ Incomparable man!” cried Lady Brandesford; and Howard Montrose smiled his sweetest smile, and passed on to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONCE again Glyndon Cottage is a blest abode; once more, to the eyes of Ellen, it is a paradise upon the earth. As in the days when, by the side of her beloved father, she bounded over its verdant turf, or lingered beneath the shade of its venerable oaks, she felt that in that one small spot were centred all her hopes and wishes—that she was happy, inexpressibly happy there, and, without trying to analyse the cause, she was contented with that heartfelt joy, and desired no wider field upon which

her thoughts or affections might range. Since the death of her father, Ellen had never felt as she did now; an aching void had gnawed her heart and oppressed her spirits, and the very beauties of her home had but augmented this feeling; they seemed all too bright for the state of her mind—the breath of the flowers all too heavy for her senses, for there was sickness at her heart, a suppressed but wearing feeling, which forbade her to rejoice and be glad. But now this sadness has passed away, hope has come back, and she looks upon the bright flowers with a face before whose radiance their glorious hue may well grow pale and dim, for a light is in her eyes—it plays upon her cheek, upon her lip, and irradiates every movement. Peaceful joy is embodied in her person, and diffused by her presence; the spirit of those who gaze upon her seems lightened in their breast. And yet Ellen knows nothing of this; she alone is uncon-

scious of the change that has taken place in her appearance; and although she feels that it is with a gladdened heart she looks upon all around, she has not thought upon the cause—she is contented with the impression, and quietly dreams away the day. Each morning she rises with a smile—a timid, joyous, childish smile, but no anxiety, no fear mingles with it; it is the first dawning of love—love with all its roses, and, to the eyes of Ellen, colouring all things with its hue.

Sir Francis Riverston came regularly every day to Glyndon Cottage. At first, Ellen had been more surprised than pleased by his visits: she had no idea that they were intended for her. She was not one of those young ladies always thinking, not only of marrying, but of making a good match; and had she even admitted the thought, the distance between herself and Sir Francis Riverston would have seemed immeasurably

too great for her to have contemplated the possibility of a union between them. No one ever thought more humbly of their own advantages than Ellen; and when at last it did strike her that the constant attentions of Sir Francis must have some meaning, her heart lifted itself up in thankfulness to Heaven for so great, so unexpected a blessing. Still, as nothing had yet been said upon the subject, poor Ellen scarcely ventured to hope; but she remembered the time when, at the first mention of her marriage with Frederick Lindsay, she had felt as if life were leaving her, and acknowledged to herself that now she had no such feeling. The only very definite sensation she experienced was a fear of being spoken to upon the subject of Sir Francis; and Mrs. Conway, who, in the extraordinary happiness with which the prospect of such a brilliant marriage occasioned, had not failed to ask counsel, wisely kept her observations to

herself, and allowed matters to take their own course. She could not, however, help smiling when she perceived the thousand little innocent stratagems by which Ellen endeavoured to conceal her feelings, but she made no remark, and the visits of Sir Francis were treated as matters of course. Each morning he made his appearance at Glyndon Cottage, for Ellen had suddenly discovered that the gaieties of Brandesford Hall were too much for her, and that she preferred remaining quietly at home. She appeared to have a great deal to do, but at a certain hour she always settled herself near the window with her drawing or her work; and anxiously did Mrs. Conway watch the glow of delight which overspread her cheek as the rapid step of horses announced the approach of Sir Francis Riverston. It was evident that his presence was happiness to her, but Mrs. Conway could have wished that his manner had betrayed somewhat less

of the security with which his heart was filled. She dreaded least the pride of Ellen should take alarm, but Ellen was far too much occupied by the delicious feeling of her new-born affection, and too little versed in the ways of men of the stamp of Sir Francis, to perceive how little of the humility of real love was mingled with what she felt to be the fascination of his manner. Her eye had led her heart captive; she already loved, and reason, for the time being, was lulled to sleep.

The air of Sir Francis was that of a conqueror. He had come to Glyndon to dazzle and to shine, not to make himself loved. He scarcely wished it, for no answering feeling would have been found in his breast. He chose that Ellen should marry him, because it suited his purpose at the time; but he had no desire that she should become attached to him further than was necessary for outward show. His selfishness was

apparent in every movement; he came daily mounted upon a splendid horse, or in an equipage as faultless as his person; and Ellen, called upon to approve and admire, had no thought but that all was meant for her gratification and pleasure. A deep sense of gratitude, and the devotion it inspires, were mingled with the love fast growing in her bosom; she began to think herself too much blest, and to tremble at her own happiness. In the humility of her heart, she asked herself what she had done to deserve so much. The feelings of Mrs. Conway were very nearly in the same exaggerated degree of joy. She, whose sole idea of bliss was occupying a position of worldly grandeur, looked upon the forthcoming marriage of her daughter as the perfection of all happiness, and congratulated herself upon having been the means of securing it. Her friendship with Lady Brandesford was the talisman; and deeply

did the infatuated woman vow that no sacrifice, no effort should ever be wanting on her part to show her sense of the inestimable value of such a friendship. Each day seemed to rivet her chains more closely. The two ladies were inseparable; and Lady Brandesford appeared to rejoice with more than a mother's joy at the prospects of her dear friend Ellen. She could afford now to call them her friends—they were become useful; and she forgot the day when, to make a character in the county, she played at condescension, and good-naturedly patronized "those poor dear Conways."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT one of the side windows of Brandesford Hall, which overlooked the road leading to Glyndon, Lady Rose Brandesford was standing. She was watching the movements of a servant, who, ready mounted, was leading about a beautiful brown horse, which she knew belonged to Sir Francis Riverston. She had seen the same preparations for an early ride on the two preceding days, and although knowing nothing of the destined course of Sir Francis, her mind misgave her. She watched until she saw him mount his

horse, and for the third time proceed towards the village of Glyndon. She then recollect ed that Ellen had suddenly made an excuse of slight indisposition, and had refused to leave home for several days. She needed no further confirmation of her suspicions. She turned from the window as his figure became lost in the distance, and a fiend-like expression settled itself upon her countenance, as she muttered through her half-closed teeth, “She shall suffer for this to the latest day she lives—never, never will I forgive it!” and, throwing herself into a chair, the proud, ungovernable Lady Rose burst into a passion of tears. She forgot the holy and indissoluble tie of the promise she had so lately made; she forgot that she was the affianced wife of another, and remembered only the mad passion with which she had long regarded Sir Francis, and the insupportable insult of his being thus carried off, before

her eyes, by a simple country girl. She forgot that Ellen was totally ignorant of the attachment she had, without the slightest encouragement from the object of it, chosen to form, and looked upon the poor girl, as she had long secretly felt her to be, as her most confirmed and deadly foe. Little did the gentle heart of Ellen imagine that in the bosom of her dear friend, Lady Rose Brandesford, there existed a feeling of animosity towards herself. Simple-minded and trusting, Ellen never suspected guile in others; and as the Ladies Brandesford always veiled their dislike beneath the civility of words which good manners required, it never occurred to her to look deeper. Her own heart had not changed, therefore why should theirs be altered towards the friend and companion of their childhood? It was, however, several years since one kindly feeling had lived in their breasts towards her. From the moment when,

emerging from the age of childhood, the beauty of Ellen had been too often the topic of admiration among their guests, Lady Maria and Lady Rose Brandesford had seen her but in one point of view, that of a rival, and a successful one; and their spiteful feelings settled down at once to invincible and jealous dislike. Lady Rose, who was many years junior to her sister, found herself the more immediately aggrieved by what she termed the “obstinacy of her mother’s having always that girl in the house.” The contrast between the delicate freshness of Ellen’s beauty, and her own stern and somewhat faded charms, rendered her still more unjust and acrimonious towards her unoffending friend; but she had too much tact not to be aware how odious such a feeling must appear, and therefore hitherto had cautiously refrained from betraying it. Now, however, in the solitude of her own dressing-room, she made amends

to herself for her long silence, and heaped upon the absent Ellen every invective she could devise, accusing her of having utterly destroyed the whole happiness of her life. It seemed rather unaccountable that Lady Rose should select for this display of passion the very morning when, by her own appointment, arrangements for her marriage with Mr. Archibald Meredith were to be discussed; but Lady Rose was one of those persons who, deeming themselves not accountable to any authority, either divine or human, give way to every impulse, and behold with fury the smallest opposition to their desires. Lady Rose was perfectly aware that her heart, or that which she was pleased to call her heart, was bestowed upon one while she was voluntarily about to plight her faith to another; but it made no difference in her intentions. She knew that she loathed the man she was about to marry, but she had not hesitated

to accept of his proposals. She also knew that all hope of a union between Sir Francis Riverston and herself was vain; the experience of several years had fully convinced her of this, and yet she as bitterly resented his idea of marrying another, as though he had thereby broken some solemn engagement towards herself. Lady Rose did not think it the least necessary to analyze any one of these feelings, to arrange them, or to reflect upon the inconsistency of some, and the impropriety of others; she merely chose to indulge them, and would have haughtily resented the right of any one to question them. The education of Lady Rose had been exactly such as fitted her for the part she was about to play. The world and worldly pursuits were her occupations, selfishness and an utter disregard of principle or the feelings of others her ruling passions, added to which a narrow heart and bad temper, filled up the measure of her character.

Irritated to madness by the sight of the tranquil and unsought-for success of Ellen, her chief object in marrying was to revenge herself upon her. The plan of so doing, she had not yet maturely considered; but once independent, she trusted to her own vicious heart for discovering some means of humbling and annoying her rival. Pang after pang assailed her as she reflected upon the extraordinary difference which fate seemed to have prepared in the future position of a person so nobly born as herself, and one whom she regarded as so totally insignificant as Ellen Conway. The wife of Sir Francis Riverston would naturally find herself placed far above all difficulty; she would be admired, sought after, worshipped, as one of the brightest stars of the fashionable world, and would, no doubt, become as insolent and overbearing as Lady Rose would have delighted to be; while she, whose lineage was as old as the country of

her birth, must humbly wait upon her former friend, and only enter the lists weighed down by a chain, which most persons would have deemed unsupportable. She must drag through society a being totally unfitted for it—a man whom, though she might call her husband, she should always regard as her most bitter foe. As such she already regarded him; but as wealth was only attainable through his means, she had resolved, at all hazards, to secure it. Wealth, she well knew, was one of the chief sources of power in the world, in which she longed to play something more than a second-rate part, and power she was determined to possess. There might be desperation in the means whereby she was about to acquire it, but desperation was in her heart. She had withered so long upon the sufferance only of the world, that, disappointed and vexed, she now looked upon that world as her enemy, and

longed to face it upon equal terms, and avenge the many slights she had received. A fresh spur to this feeling of discontent had been given by the visible defection of Sir Francis Riverston, and the innocent Ellen now took the place of the hated world before the eyes of the enraged Lady Rose. It was upon her head that all her plans of vengeance were to centre; she, the latest offender, must be the sacrifice for all; and the jealous heart of the spiteful woman could behold the poor girl, so unconscious of injuring her, in no other light than that of the author of all the neglect and contumely which Lady Rose felt had been her portion for so many years of servitude to the fashionable world. She actually writhed as she remembered the monotonous days and nights of her “going-out” life—the endless projects and plans which had all finished in disappointment—the forced gaiety with which she had endeavoured to veil her bitterness

of soul and weariness of body. What a host of odious recollections crowded upon her as she looked back upon her girlish days, now that she was about to close them!—what a life of fatigue and moral degradation! How interminable the going and coming, the dressing, dancing, flirting, and affecting happiness and joyousness of heart, when all was so cold and desolate within!—and then the early system of puffing off and pushing forward of a manœuvring mother, so long as the hope lasted of accomplishing the grand object in that way; and lastly, being suddenly abandoned by that mother, when the want of success made the result of such intrigues more than doubtful. The mind of Lady Rose was not one which would have recoiled, with the innate horror of a high soul, from the constant attempt to force attention from those who either haughtily held off or reluctantly advanced; the idea of making a good match had always been

impressed upon her in too coarse and business-like a form for this; but she could still feel the mortifications to which she had been continually subjected, and the ridiculous light in which the constant failure of such attempts had placed her. She felt humbled and laughed at, and that no one now cared for her, because she had not succeeded in making a great marriage. She had failed, utterly failed, in that which not only she had been taught was the first object in life, but also that which she had seen purchased at any price by numberless of her friends. She was not deficient in the powers of observation, and she had marked the wide difference made towards them by the families of those who had made good matches, and such as had done otherwise. She who could add to the family honours, and bring rank, riches, or distinction in her train, was sure of a good reception; her smallest wish was a law, her smallest act a subject of deep im-

portance and solicitude; no trouble was too great upon her account—no opportunity was ever omitted of extolling her virtues—no indulgence withheld from manifest transgressions or failings; in short, it had ever been made clear to the mind of Lady Rose that the exalted, the powerful, and the rich, could do no wrong; while those not possessed of such advantages were the legal and common property of the malevolent, whose energies could not remain dormant, and therefore selected them as proper subjects of dissection. And how were they dissected? Not with gentleness, mercy, or forbearance, but ruthlessly torn in pieces, hunted, followed, and persecuted with unrelenting barbarity; every feeling, every action, every word, tortured and perverted, until brought to bear the semblance of wrong; and, unable to be heard in their own defence, who was there to do battle in their cause? Had they even had, in more prosperous days, the

semblance of friends, the first breath of an adverse world had blown them out of sight; who would take part with the accused, the vilified, even though slander was visibly stamped on the brow of the accuser? It was enough that they were accused, that they were slighted; it was evident, therefore, that they were of no value to the world, whose ephemeral existence depends upon the applause of the vanity-seeking multitude. They were "of no use" to that world, and were therefore safe objects of censure—convenient pedestals upon which to exalt, by comparison, the statues of present idols.

Such were the principles of justice, affection, and honour, that Lady Rose had learned in that career of miscalled "gaiety" in which since her childhood she had moved. Such were the impressions given to her by intercourse with the world. Anything more noble or generous had been far too rare to

have attracted her attention, and her own heart had easily shaped its course upon that which seemed natural to those by whom she was surrounded. She, too, had been amongst the sufferers, and her “littleness had been ever in her sight.” The time for avenging her wrongs was now at hand, and, bitter as was the sacrifice, it was willingly offered up upon the altar of her wounded pride. It was in this state of mind that Lady Rose Brandesford had encouraged and accepted the proposals of Mr. Archibald Meredith, but even in so doing she had acted with the fiend-like caution and calculation that she had seen practised by others. Self only was her object, and having no one in whom she could trust, she had boldly decided upon taking care of and acting for herself in a manner which would never have occurred to or have been entertained by a mind uncontaminated by the pollutions of a worldly and heartless sagacity. Poor Lady

Rose! as she sat in her dressing-room, impatiently watching a miniature clock upon the table by her side, what a multitude of miserable thoughts came thronging upon her mind! Not one pleasant reflection seemed to brighten the darkness around her; and her harassed and care-worn countenance, handsome although faded, too plainly showed that the struggle within was of no recent date. She sat for some time as if a prey to reflections of a bitter nature, for her face alternately bore the expression of sorrow and of disdain; till at last, as if to relieve herself from her own thoughts, she leaned forward and opened a large jewel case that lay upon the table before her. A magnificent *parure* of diamonds presented itself to her view, and it was with almost childish delight that she placed the brilliant wreath upon her dark hair, and turned to the looking-glass to study the effect produced. It was excellent—the style

of beauty of Lady Rose was exactly suited to splendour, and, one by one, she put on all the ornaments contained in the case, and as she stood before the glass and saw herself blazing with jewels, she actually smiled, and with real and heartfelt joy. She looked at and touched the sparkling ornaments with genuine and unaffected delight. They were the first tangible proofs of her existence having been of value to any one, and a sensation of pride thrilled through her as she thought how she had won them for herself. It was her own powers of mind and attractions of person, and not the result of family manœuvring, that had gained her this golden prize; and she felt more than ever her usual unholy presumption of not being accountable to any one for the use which she might make of that which she considered her own. This was one of the leading features in her character, and one which resulted from the constant contem-

plation of the indulgence of selfishness in others, until her mind had acquired a hardness, and her whole soul was imbued with an egotism which she falsely termed pride. As Lady Rose stood thus admiring her newly-acquired splendour, it might be supposed, and even hoped, that some feeling of gratitude arose towards the author of so much joy; but it would have been vain to look in that world-born and fashion-tainted breast for one feeling which could speak of the generous and true nobility of soul. She had sold herself and her high blood at a certain and regulated price, and she looked upon the whole affair as a bargain in which she from necessity had been forced to take the worst share, and therefore determined not to be over-reached in any of the details of arrangement. With her usual recklessness of all duties of obedience and respect, Lady Rose had not even consulted one of her family upon the subject of her marriage,

and she now waited in her dressing-room the result of the only communication she had made, and which showed the calm and deliberate study of self-interest which seemed inherent in her nature. Time, however, advanced, and she was still alone; but the striking of the clock at length aroused her attention. She hastily took off the diamond ornaments with which she was covered, and, replacing them in their case, began to pace up and down the room. As she passed the window, she paused, and looked out. Two persons were slowly riding towards the house, followed by two grooms. Lady Rose looked and looked again, and then she gnashed her teeth with rage—the riders were Sir Francis Riverston and Ellen Conway. They were evidently coming in to luncheon. Lady Rose hastily rang the bell—“Where is Mr. Sinclair?” she inquired, when the servant appeared.

“In the library, my lady, with Mr. Meredith,” was the reply.

"Desire Mr. Sinclair to come here instantly," said Lady Rose; "and let Sir Francis Riverston know that I shall not ride to-day to Eastwood, as I intended."

The servant withdrew; and with her hands strained across her breast, Lady Rose repressed the hysterical sob of passion that was struggling into birth. In a few moments, a low knock was heard at the door, and Mr. Sinclair, the humble adviser of the house of Brandesford on all matters of business, entered the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

As Mr. Sinclair entered the apartment of Lady Rose, Mr. Meredith was seen hurrying across the pleasure ground, to join Mr. Howard Montrose, who, as usual, was passing away the sunny hours of the morning beneath the shade of a large tree, from whence he could command a view of the drawing-room windows, and the movements of the persons within. From the moment when Mr. Archibald Meredith had first consulted Howard Montrose, he seemed to have formed a violent friendship for him. Howard Mon-

trose had seen many specimens of character in his intercourse with the world, but never before had he met with any one so childishly simple and straightforward as his new friend, who carried these most estimable qualities to such a point, that, in spite of the cold and worn-out heart of the man of the world, he could not help feeling a certain degree of interest for him. Mr. Meredith was by no means so great a fool as people might have imagined. He was very capable of forming an opinion, but from his superabundance of good nature, he was ever ready to forego his own decision, should it be opposed by others whom he respected or liked. The amenity with which his first confidential communications had been received by Howard Montrose, had positively endeared him to him; and he followed him about, whispering secrets into his ear, and asking for directions and advice, in a manner that was infinitely amusing, but which

he never suspected had anything in it either unusual or derogatory to his dignity. The affection of his own heart had annihilated all distance between them; and the sort of intimate and confiding tone in which he addressed him—always, from habit, calling him Mr. Montrose—had in it something irresistibly comic, from its thorough inconsistency. He seemed unable to divest himself of the original impression of Howard Montrose being a most superior and powerful individual; but the tenderness of his heart, and gratitude for the advice which he supposed had gained him the hand of Lady Rose, broke down the barrier of awe and wonder with which, to his eyes, he had once stood encircled, and he now approached without fear—familiarized by kindness.

“It is all right now,” he unceremoniously began, as—having reached the spot where Mr. Howard Montrose was sitting—he quietly placed himself by his side;—“quite

right. No more secrets or puttings off,—the deed is done."

"How do you mean?" asked Howard Montrose; "surely you are not married?"

"Not quite,—but all the same; I've been arranging the settlements, and I came to tell you all the particulars."

"Thank you!" said Howard; "but perhaps you had rather not,—some people do not like talking about such things."

"They are not like me, then," answered Mr. Meredith, bluntly. "I love to talk about everything; and I'm sure, when one has such a friend as you've been to me, Mr. Montrose, one can't say enough to them."

A slight bow was the only answer; but the alteration of the voice of the speaker showed how full was the heart whose gratitude was neither understood nor appreciated.

"When we are married," he continued,

"I hope you'll just consider our house as your own, and spend just as much time in it as ever you like."

Howard Montrose smiled,—it was so exactly the manner in which he made the houses of all his friends available. "I shall not fail," he said, "to pay my respects to you and Lady Rose."

Mr. Meredith grinned with delight at the words "you and Lady Rose," and continued, with increased *bonhomie* of manner, "Do, that's a good fellow. I'm sure Lady Rose will keep a gay house. I mean to let her have everything her own way, as I have about the settlements. Oh, I forgot! I have not told you yet about the settlements. I have been shut up these two hours with old Sinclair, the attorney, about them, though they need not have taken ten minutes. Now, you see, here is what she asked—two thousand a-year pin money, and four thousand jointure."

“ And you consented ?” inquired Howard Montrose.

“ Of course ! My father, Sir Ambrose, has his good thirty thousand a-year ; and what is four out of that ? But now listen to what I’ve done. You see, I know nothing about these things, but old Sinclair tells me that all settlements of great people mention the sum the lady is to have, in case anything should oblige her to separate from her husband. Now Lady Rose only asked eight thousand a-year .”

“ Impossible !” exclaimed Howard Montrose, actually starting.

“ Quite true,” replied Meredith, nodding his head ; “ and as I couldn’t bear she should think me stingy, I’ve made it ten. I always like to give more than I am asked for.”

Howard Montrose bent a scrutinizing look upon his companion, as if to ascertain whether it was really in sober seriousness

that he spoke; but there was gravity, and even feeling, upon the honest countenance that met his eye, and the speaker continued,—

“ I know nothing about these things; and Sinclair tells me it is all right, and always done.”

“ Scoundrel!” muttered Howard Montrose between his teeth; but Mr. Meredith went on without hearing him.

“ I must say at first I was a little hurt that Lady Rose should think me capable of leaving her, after having once made her my wife; but Sinclair says she had no such idea; and upon reflection I saw she could not. It was all nonsense! She must know how I love her, and how grateful I feel for her having accepted me. Of course she couldn’t think I should ever desert her; and Sinclair said it was a mere matter of form, so I signed it at once—just a rough draft of the settlement—for I want to write

to my father, Sir Ambrose, and tell him it's all signed and sealed."

" You have not, then, consulted Sir Ambrose upon the matter?" said Howard Montrose, whose heart suddenly unlocked what little of compunction was treasured in it, so deeply did he feel the unheard-of audacity with which the designing Lady Rose had imposed upon her simple-minded adorer.

" Oh no, it was of no use," replied Meredith, " for I know my father, Sir Ambrose, better than any one. He'll let me do what I like, and have what I like, even to his last penny, provided I make myself 'the fashion.' "

" The fashion!" echoed Howard Montrose, involuntarily.

" Yes," answered Mr. Meredith, with the greatest simplicity. " All he ever said to me was, ' Archie, we must get to the West End, and you must marry one of those fashionable ladies that go to court, and to

Almacks, and among dukes and duchesses. I'm tired of the city and its humdrum company.' And so, you see, this is the very thing for him, poor dear man; he shall come and live with us, and it will do his heart good to see his beautiful daughter-in-law in all her diamonds. Lady Rose is very fond of jewels. Lord bless her! she shall have the finest money can buy—anything, everything she likes! Oh! Mr. Montrose, I'm so happy! Was there ever such a friend as you've been to me? Only for you, I should never have dared to propose. But, just as you told me, it's just as easy to speak to a great lady as a nobody. Lady Rose understood in a minute. I had no trouble at all after the first word. But good bye, now—good bye," he continued, seizing and shaking the unresisting hand of Howard Montrose. "I must go now and see if Lady Rose chooses to ride. I only came to tell you about the settlements.

I was sure you'd approve of what I'd done, you're such a capital judge of everything; but then you've lived all your life in the fashionable world. Perhaps, in a few years, I shall know everything too—though I don't know that I'm very quick at learning." And with a good-humoured, happy laugh, the young *millionaire* shuffled back to the house.

Howard Montrose looked after him with an air of positive compassion. He was ungainly, awkward, and under-bred, it was true; but there was a truth and warmth of feeling about him, that to the worn out feelings and affections of the hackneyed man of the world was not without its charm. He actually felt more attracted towards this uncouth creature than he would willingly have avowed; and whatever remains of honourable sentiments were smouldering in his breast, were suddenly roused into fire by the baseness of the design which the mean

and heartless Lady Rose had not only conceived, but executed in so summary a manner. His first impulse was to confide to Lord and Lady Brandesford the gross imposition about to be practised in their name upon their unsuspecting guest ; but this impulse, upon reflection, gradually subsided. That nice feeling of honour inherent in the breast of an English gentleman, although it may never be totally extinct, will become, like all other good feelings, more a recollection than a sentiment, when constantly put in juxtaposition with the degrading ideas of self-interest and advancement, and the detestable endeavour to make use of those whom their generosity or unsuspecting nature offer as ready victims to the despoiler. The unprincipled selfishness of those who prey upon the finer qualities or weaknesses of their neighbours, soon brings the heart to that state of depravity which induces them to look upon the success

of their schemes as proofs of talent, and to glory in the superior subtlety of intellect by which they have accomplished their ends. The life of Howard Montrose had been too much spent among the calculations and intricacies of social policy for him long to persevere in the spontaneous resolution he had formed, of at least allowing his new friend only to be imposed upon to a moderate degree. A latent spark of fair and honourable feeling just started from his breast and expired. As he paused to reflect, the last glimmer died upon the air, and sophistry, with her thousand false hues, wrapped him as in a cloud of conventional excuses and worldly considerations. After all, what was it to him if Mr. Meredith chose to purchase that which he considered "fashion" at an exorbitant price? He had no more right to interfere with him upon this point than upon any other matter of business. His advice had never been

asked, and therefore his conscience was quite clear. Then, again, he considered his long friendship for the Brandesfords—the confidence they reposed in him—and asked himself whether he should be doing his duty towards them were he to interpose any obstacle which might lead to the breaking off of so rich a marriage for a daughter of their house. He considered their embarrassed circumstances, the uncertainty of their future position, and, above all, the delight of having the house freed from the presence of one who detracted so much from the agreeability of the family circle as Lady Rose, who was seldom for two days in tolerable good humour. This was the only point upon which Howard Montrose could derive any immediate or personal advantage from the proposed marriage; but it weighed heavily in the scale against the future peace and happiness of Mr. Meredith; and after due consideration, Howard Montrose returned to the house,

determined not to interfere with the affairs of others, and to let things take their course. All other feelings he set down as knight-errantry and nonsense, totally unworthy of a "man of the world."

CHAPTER XX.

A FEW weeks passed away, and the three great events which had been so skilfully prepared, and which were supposed so materially to affect the happiness of the house of Brandesford, now agitated it to its centre. The marriage of Lady Rose with Mr. Meredith had been duly announced, and also that of Sir Francis Riverston with the lovely child-like Ellen Conway. Her heart had surrendered from the first; and when, after duly fulfilling all the formalities of courtship, which he considered neces-

sary for keeping up the imposing effect of his dignity, Sir Francis, with the air of a conqueror but the words of a lover, had asked for her hand, Ellen had unhesitatingly granted his request, she felt that in the gentle whisper her lips scarcely dared to form, her whole soul was given. It was happiness so great, she could not at first believe that it was destined to be hers; and as the timid nursling flies back to the parent nest, poor Ellen had hurried to her mother's arms, there to hide her burning cheek, and to pour out her thankfulness to Him who had sent her so rich a blessing. Mrs. Conway, as she pressed her trembling child to her breast, felt for a moment how inestimable was the treasure from which she was about to part, although unable thoroughly to appreciate the full merits of a nature like that of Ellen, the gushing tenderness of whose gentle spirit required a more sympathetic return of feeling than

her mother could have bestowed. Worldly reasoning, however, filled up the void; and it was with a sensation of overweening pride that Mrs. Conway listened to an avowal which crowned all her most ambitious desires. She felt that the marriage was solely owing to her superior judgment, in selecting for her daughter the society where such things only are to be found. Of the more sterling qualities of heart or mind of her future son-in-law, Mrs. Conway was profoundly ignorant. She knew that he was very rich, very highly connected, and had an undoubted position in that world of fashion where it was her mad ambition to see her daughter enact a prominent part. She had a sort of confused idea that "persons of that kind" did not want principle, or seriousness, or even education; that they came into the world ready made for the place they were to fill, and

naturally endowed with a certain air and polish of manner, which was all that was necessary. Notwithstanding her constant sojourn at Brandesford Hall, the impressions of Mrs. Conway upon points connected with the position which she so blindly idolized, and which she imagined to be the sole thing necessary for perfect happiness, were singularly indistinct. One feeling, however, she shared in common with Mr. Archibald Meredith—that of unbounded gratitude towards the friend who had lent her a helping hand to complete her triumph. Her devotion to Lady Brandesford was fully equal to that which filled his bosom towards Howard Montrose; and if now and then a pang did thrill through her heart, as she remembered the closely held tenets of him who was no more, and his aversion to the glittering life it was her ambition to lead, it was soon softened and dispelled by

the self-complacent conviction she felt, as she repeated that no human being could desire more for their daughter than the brilliant fate which awaited Ellen. Alas! the false brilliancy had dazzled the eyes of her who should have scanned with a parent's heart every fibre of that to which she was about to confide the destinies of her child; but Mrs. Conway had no fears and no doubts, and sat smilingly looking upon Lady Brandesford, who was to her the dispenser of happiness, with a fanaticism of approval and admiration from which it would have been impossible to awaken her. Lady Brandesford, too, was charming, and would sigh, and smile, and press the hand of her dear friend with such eloquent silence, as if her heart was too full for words. The happiness of Mrs. Conway was at its height. Once more Lady Brandesford seemed young enough to begin life all over again. In the

bustle of company and congratulations, which now poured upon her from all sides, she found again the petty consequence and fancied importance to which she clung with incredible tenacity; and she resolved to magnify all the advantages of the alliance her daughter was about to form by every means in her power. Invitations without end were dispatched to every person of her acquaintance whose presence might add to the lustre of the hour.

It had been arranged, in compliance with the wish of Ellen, that the two marriages should take place upon the same day. The tender sentiment of early friendship still united her to the perfidious Lady Rose; and the latter had not only gracefully conceded to her request, but even stipulated that the ceremony which was to unite Sir Francis Riverston to her hated rival should take place before that which was to seal her own

destiny for life. Lady Rose shuddered as she made this demand, but she needed all the bitterness which such a sight must impart, to steel her heart against the aversion she felt towards the sacrifice she was about to make. In the meantime, the part which Mr. Archibald Meredith was called upon to play was anything but an agreeable one. Surrounded by a crowd of brilliant idlers, who looked upon him something in the light of a wild animal caught and tamed, he found himself almost alone. Notwithstanding the extreme importance of the case, the haughty and unfeeling Lady Rose could not persuade herself to be more than commonly civil to him; and her friends and companions, taking their tone from her, were considerably less so; but the good-natured man, attributing it to the fact of the manners of the great world being quite different to any with which he had been previously acquainted,

bore it all with the most unflinching equanimity,—consoling himself with the idea, that now that he was to be made a man of “fashion,” he should soon know all about it; for he implicitly believed that there were secrets of most marvellous import locked up in the bosoms of the initiated, which would be instantly revealed to him on his becoming “one of them.” So firmly was this idea rooted in his mind, that having heard of freemasonry, he actually was constantly watching for a sign whereby he might discover something to enlighten him as to the mystery by which he was surrounded; but no sign was given, and he continued in his uncomfortable solitude in the midst of that crowd, which had been gathered together with the mockery of doing him honour. Good feeling, however—which is the real foundation of that spontaneous good manner, which often stands in lieu of

a more polished address—came to the assistance of one whose heart, at least, was never in fault; and in the midst of many whose self-conceited natures would have led them to show their conscious superiority,—either by foolishly quizzing that which was unusual to their eyes, or marking the distance between themselves and the hapless individual who was the object of their ridicule by a cold and cutting neglect,—Mr. Archibald Meredith stood out with a dignity of simplicity which would have touched any heart not grown callous to all kindly feeling. Perceiving that no one wished for his conversation, he became silent, but not sullen, and received the somewhat fulsome attentions of the ever active Lady Brandesford with gratitude, but without eagerness. His happiness was to sit entranced by the commanding beauty of Lady Rose, or to steal after his dear friend, Howard Mon-

trose, whenever he could find an opportunity, in order to express his grateful feelings, and to talk of his beloved. He took, however, higher ground in the opinion of such as chose to consult their reason rather than their prejudice, when, upon the arrival of "his father, Sir Ambrose," who had been invited to be present at the marriage, the poor old man found himself still more out of place than his son. Then the kindness of heart of Mr. Archibald Meredith shone forth in a manner not to be overlooked. Some intercourse with the world had slightly softened the asperities of one who, not having received any previous education, had been suddenly called upon to appear in a character for which nature had never intended him; and Mr. Archibald Meredith was not very remarkably different from many who had been placed in a similar situation ; but "his father, Sir Ambrose,"

certainly *was* different from anything that had ever before graced one of the crimson sofas of the beautiful drawing-room of Brandesford Hall. In person he was a complete caricature of his son, allowing for the difference of age, and subtracting, on his side, a foot in height from their comparative stature. Sir Ambrose Meredith was very nearly as broad as he was long. He had neither hair nor wig, and his face was unshaded scarlet. Between his long white silk stockings and little bits of nankeen,—his huge spotted waistcoat, made as if a century ago—and his large silver buckles, it was difficult to discover any exact outline of figure. He said “yes, madame,” to all whose names he knew, and “my lord,” and “my lady,” to every one of whom he was doubtful,—sneezed very loud,—rubbed his hands at what he called “capital jokes,”—and always, after he had drunk his tea, turned

his cup upside down, placed it in the saucer, and laid his spoon reverentially on the inverted end of the cup. It was a habit which he had preserved from infancy, together with many similar eccentricities,—such as setting anything that happened to lie on the table quite straight before him,—winding up his watch regularly the moment he had finished his tea,—and always remarking “that he was sure the candles wanted snuffing.” Great was the amusement which these little peculiarities afforded, but the respect and affectionate care with which they were viewed by his son repressed all outward show of surprise. Mr. Archibald Meredith was not ashamed of being dutiful, nor was he the least aware how little necessary it was thought to include that virtue in the category of qualities requisite to become what he aspired to be—a man of “fashion.” It would have taken as long to convince

his simple and affectionate heart of such a fact, as it would to have remodelled the manners of an old man who had worked his way up from a book-stall in the city, to a magnificent house at the west end. The acuteness of Sir Ambrose Meredith had been always directed to the making of money, never to the improvement of his manners or appearance; and as his fortune had only lately become colossal, many years had passed over the head of his son, before it entered the mind of the old man to emerge from his counting-house in the city, and the all of modern education which Mr. Archibald had received, was what his father called "a year's polishing at the university of Oxford," from whence he was sent to travel, backed up by a few introductions he obtained from his college friends. The mind of Archibald suddenly became confused, and but one idea could he single

out from the maze of new impressions which entangled him the moment he had crossed the threshold of the great world. It was that false and vulgar view of the mystery he called "fashion," which extinguished at once all more rational aspirations, and to attain which, as it did not seem to him difficult of attainment, he indolently resolved to devote all his energies. Unfortunately it was also the weak point of Sir Ambrose, who sighed to think that his fine fortune should never be heard of beyond Bermondsey or St. Mary Axe, that he should never see his name in the long lists he delighted to read in the newspapers, or have an opera box to which people of distinction should come, and be remarked by the whole house. Too willingly would he have bought his way into the society to which he sought to belong; but he did not know how to set about it, and therefore

turned to his son, who in his eyes was a model of perfection, and encouraged him at all hazards to secure, by what he called a “fashionable” marriage, that position which it seemed so difficult otherwise to acquire. When first informed of the extravagant terms upon which the alliance of his son with Lady Rose had been concluded, it certainly did strike the business-like mind of Sir Ambrose, that there was a monstrous incongruity between the demand and the fortune of five thousand pounds which, at the death of her parents, was all that was to belong to the lady; but even as had been said by his son, not for a moment did he hesitate—his otherwise clear-seeing eyes were dazzled by the glare of rank, and the delusion of his worshipped idol “fashion,” and he consented not only to all that was asked, but came to Brandesford Hall loaded with costly presents for the bride elect, and

all her relations. A mine of wealth seemed suddenly to have cast up its treasures at the feet of the intriguing Lady Brandesford, for the third grand event, but that which more closely touched her interests, had also been accomplished. Upon the first hint of pecuniary distress, Mrs. Conway had generously made over to the manœuvring Countess the sum of forty thousand pounds, and received in return, through the skilful management of Mr. Sinclair, her ladyship's confidential man of business, security which was not worth one single farthing. This crowning event to the happiness of Lady Brandesford was, of course, not made known to the world. Howard Montrose merely smiled one of his most gentle smiles when he heard it from the smiling lips of the enraptured Countess. He thought of their conversation on "the orange-tree walk," and remembered with

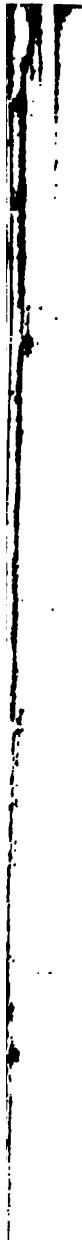
pleasure that the coverts at Brandesford Hall would be at his disposal at least a few years longer. No one else knew anything of the affair. Lord Brandesford never asked questions. Mr. Sinclair was silent as the tomb. Mrs. Conway far too humble and shy to talk of her own generosity. And so everything was quite safe. Lady Brandesford chose the moment when a whole host of her friends were present, to insist upon Mrs. Conway's passing the season in town with them, that she might be near her daughter; and Mrs. Conway, who looked upon her admission to the great world as the advent of all happiness, accepted, with a heart throbbing with pleasure, the delightful offer of her friend. Nothing could be more harmonious than the wedding party collected at Brandesford Hall, Lady Rose excepted; but she, with her usual tact, contrived so to dissemble as not to throw a gloom over the

rest. Ellen, blushing and trembling at her own happiness, would have preferred the retirement of Glyndon Cottage; but Sir Francis, who secretly winced at its unpretending humility, had asked her to accept of Lady Brandesford's offer, and remain at her house until the marriage took place, and Ellen, unused to oppose her own wishes to those of others, had consented. All now went joyously forward. The important affair of the *trousseaux* of the brides-elect was for many days the delight of a jury of fair ladies; and many a sigh of envy, of anticipation, and of regret, agitated the hearts of those whose lips smiled while they thought of the days that were gone, or longed for those which seemed as though they would never come. At length all was prepared, and the rural *fête* which was to celebrate the double marriage brought crowds from far and near to witness its

gaiety. The beautiful old parish church of Glyndon was hung with garlands of flowers; processions of young girls, all dressed in white, came forth from the village to welcome the brides and strew their path with fragrance; and, when the ceremony was concluded, the whole world seemed to have been invited to the wedding breakfast at Brandesford Hall. Then came the drinking of healths, the speeches of the beatified parties and their eulogists, and the formality of leave taking. Ellen, with her beautiful face bathed in tears, looked back from her bridal chariot one fond look at that dear mother, who, inflated with overweening pride, was standing tearless at the door, while Lady Rose looked back no more, but entered her carriage with a frown and the air of a captured queen. That evening there was a ball at Brandesford Hall. Lady Brandesford, all smiles, diamonds, and white satin,

looked twenty years younger than before; and as she sat upon her sofa, with Sir Ambrose Meredith on one side and Mrs. Conway upon the other, and they received the endless congratulations of the brilliant crowd before them, neither of the three felt the slightest compunction for the sacrifice they had made—the one to preserve, the others to acquire a reputation of that which they imagined to be, and were pleased to denote “Fashion.”

END OF VOL. I.



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