AYALA'S ANGEL

by

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

Author of "Doctor Thorne," "The Prime Minister," "Orley Farm,"

&c., &c.

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AYALA'S ANGEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO SISTERS.

When Egbert Dormer died he left his two daughters utterly penniless

upon the world, and it must be said of Egbert Dormer that nothing

else could have been expected of him. The two girls were both

pretty, but Lucy, who was twenty-one, was supposed to be simple and

comparatively unattractive, whereas Ayala was credited,--as her

somewhat romantic name might show,--with poetic charm and a taste for

romance. Ayala when her father died was nineteen.

We must begin yet a little earlier and say that there had been,--and

had died many years before the death of Egbert Dormer,--a clerk in

the Admiralty, by name Reginald Dosett, who, and whose wife, had been

conspicuous for personal beauty. Their charms were gone, but the

records of them had been left in various grandchildren. There had

been a son born to Mr. Dosett, who was also a Reginald and a clerk

in the Admiralty, and who also, in his turn, had been a handsome

man. With him, in his decadence, the reader will become acquainted.

There were also two daughters, whose reputation for perfect feminine

beauty had never been contested. The elder had married a city man of

wealth,--of wealth when he married her, but who had become enormously

wealthy by the time of our story. He had when he married been simply

Mister, but was now Sir Thomas Tringle, Baronet, and was senior

partner in the great firm of Travers and Treason. Of Traverses and

Treasons there were none left in these days, and Mr. Tringle was

supposed to manipulate all the millions with which the great firm in

Lombard Street was concerned. He had married old Mr. Dosett's eldest

daughter, Emmeline, who was now Lady Tringle, with a house at the top

of Queen's Gate, rented at Â£1,500 a year, with a palatial moor in

Scotland, with a seat in Sussex, and as many carriages and horses as

would suit an archduchess. Lady Tringle had everything in the world;

a son, two daughters, and an open-handed stout husband, who was said

to have told her that money was a matter of no consideration.

The second Miss Dosett, Adelaide Dosett, who had been considerably

younger than her sister, had insisted upon giving herself to Egbert

Dormer, the artist, whose death we commemorated in our first line.

But she had died before her husband. They who remembered the two

Miss Dosetts as girls were wont to declare that, though Lady Tringle

might, perhaps, have had the advantage in perfection of feature and

in unequalled symmetry, Adelaide had been the more attractive from

expression and brilliancy. To her Lord Sizes had offered his hand

and coronet, promising to abandon for her sake all the haunts of his

matured life. To her Mr. Tringle had knelt before he had taken the

elder sister. For her Mr. Program, the popular preacher of the day,

for a time so totally lost himself that he was nearly minded to go

over to Rome. She was said to have had offers from a widowed Lord

Chancellor and from a Russian prince. Her triumphs would have quite

obliterated that of her sister had she not insisted on marrying

Egbert Dormer.

Then there had been, and still was, Reginald Dosett, the son of old

Dosett, and the eldest of the family. He too had married, and was now

living with his wife; but to them had no children been born, luckily,

as he was a poor man. Alas, to a beautiful son it is not often that

beauty can be a fortune as to a daughter. Young Reginald Dosett,--he

is anything now but young,--had done but little for himself with his

beauty, having simply married the estimable daughter of a brother

clerk. Now, at the age of fifty, he had his Â£900 a year from his

office, and might have lived in fair comfort had he not allowed a

small millstone of debt to hang round his neck from his earlier

years. But still he lived creditably in a small but very genteel

house at Notting Hill, and would have undergone any want rather than

have declared himself to be a poor man to his rich relations the

Tringles.

Such were now the remaining two children of old Mr. Dosett,--Lady

Tringle, namely, and Reginald Dosett, the clerk in the Admiralty.

Adelaide, the beauty in chief of the family, was gone; and now

also her husband, the improvident artist, had followed his wife.

Dormer had been by no means a failing artist. He had achieved

great honour,--had at an early age been accepted into the Royal

Academy,--had sold pictures to illustrious princes and more

illustrious dealers, had been engraved and had lived to see his own

works resold at five times their original prices. Egbert Dormer might

also have been a rich man. But he had a taste for other beautiful

things besides a wife. The sweetest little phaeton that was to

cost nothing, the most perfect bijou of a little house at South

Kensington,--he had boasted that it might have been packed without

trouble in his brother-in-law Tringle's dining-room,--the simplest

little gem for his wife, just a blue set of china for his dinner

table, just a painted cornice for his studio, just satin hangings for

his drawing-room,--and a few simple ornaments for his little girls;

these with a few rings for himself, and velvet suits of clothing

in which to do his painting; these, with a few little dinner

parties to show off his blue china, were the first and last of his

extravagances. But when he went, and when his pretty things were

sold, there was not enough to cover his debts. There was, however, a

sweet savour about his name. When he died it was said of him that his

wife's death had killed him. He had dropped his pallette, refused

to finish the ordered portrait of a princess, and had simply turned

himself round and died.

Then there were the two daughters, Lucy and Ayala. It should be

explained that though a proper family intercourse had always been

maintained between the three families, the Tringles, the Dormers, and

the Dosetts, there had never been cordiality between the first and

the two latter. The wealth of the Tringles had seemed to convey with

it a fetid odour. Egbert Dormer, with every luxury around him which

money could purchase, had affected to despise the heavy magnificence

of the Tringles. It may be that he affected a fashion higher than

that which the Tringles really attained. Reginald Dosett, who was

neither brilliant nor fashionable, was in truth independent, and,

perhaps, a little thin-skinned. He would submit to no touch of

arrogance from Sir Thomas; and Sir Thomas seemed to carry arrogance

in his brow and in his paunch. It was there rather, perhaps, than in

his heart; but there are men to whom a knack of fumbling their money

in their pockets and of looking out from under penthouse brows over

an expanse of waistcoat, gives an air of overweening pride which

their true idiosyncracies may not justify. To Dosett had, perhaps,

been spoken a word or two which on some occasion he had inwardly

resented, and from thenceforward he had ever been ready to league

with Dormer against the "bullionaire," as they agreed to call Sir

Thomas. Lady Tringle had even said a word to her sister, Mrs. Dormer,

as to expenses, and that had never been forgiven by the artist. So

things were when Mrs. Dormer died first; and so they remained when

her husband followed her.

Then there arose a sudden necessity for action, which, for a while,

brought Reginald Dosett into connexion with Sir Thomas and Lady

Tringle. Something must be done for the poor girls. That the

something should come out of the pocket of Sir Thomas would have

seemed to be natural. Money with him was no object,--not at all.

Another girl or two would be nothing to him,--as regarded simple

expenditure. But the care of a human being is an important matter,

and so Sir Thomas knew. Dosett had not a child at all, and would be

the better for such a windfall. Dosett he supposed to be,--in his,

Dosett's way,--fairly well off. So he made this proposition. He would

take one girl and let Dosett take the other. To this Lady Tringle

added her proviso, that she should have the choice. To her nerves

affairs of taste were of such paramount importance! To this Dosett

yielded. The matter was decided in Lady Tringle's back drawing-room.

Mrs. Dosett was not even consulted in that matter of choice, having

already acknowledged the duty of mothering a motherless child. Dosett

had thought that the bullionaire should have said a word as to some

future provision for the penniless girl, for whom he would be able

to do so little. But Sir Thomas had said no such word, and Dosett,

himself, lacked both the courage and the coarseness to allude to the

matter. Then Lady Tringle declared that she must have Ayala, and so

the matter was settled. Ayala the romantic; Ayala the poetic! It was

a matter of course that Ayala should be chosen. Ayala had already

been made intimate with the magnificent saloons of the Tringles,

and had been felt by Lady Tringle to be an attraction. Her long

dark black locks, which had never hitherto been tucked up, which

were never curled, which were never so long as to be awkward, were

already known as being the loveliest locks in London. She sang as

though Nature had intended her to be a singing-bird,--requiring no

education, no labour. She had been once for three months in Paris,

and French had come naturally to her. Her father had taught her

something of his art, and flatterers had already begun to say that

she was born to be the one great female artist of the world. Her

hands, her feet, her figure were perfect. Though she was as yet but

nineteen, London had already begun to talk about Ayala Dormer. Of

course Lady Tringle chose Ayala, not remembering at the moment that

her own daughters might probably be superseded by their cousin.

And, therefore, as Lady Tringle said herself to Lucy with her

sweetest smile--Mrs. Dosett had chosen Lucy. The two girls were old

enough to know something of the meaning of such a choice. Ayala,

the younger, was to be adopted into immense wealth, and Lucy was to

be given up to comparative poverty. She knew nothing of her uncle

Dosett's circumstances, but the genteel house at Notting Hill,--No.

3, Kingsbury Crescent,--was known to her, and was but a poor affair

as compared even with the bijou in which she had hitherto lived. Her

aunt Dosett never rose to any vehicle beyond a four-wheeler, and

was careful even in thinking of that accommodation. Ayala would be

whirled about the park by a wire-wig and a pair of brown horses which

they had heard it said were not to be matched in London. Ayala would

be carried with her aunt and her cousin to the show-room of Madame

Tonsonville, the great French milliner of Bond Street, whereas she,

Lucy, might too probably be called on to make her own gowns. All the

fashion of Queen's Gate, something, perhaps, of the fashion of Eaton

Square, would be open to Ayala. Lucy understood enough to know that

Ayala's own charms might probably cause still more August gates to

be opened to her, whereas Aunt Dosett entered no gates. It was quite

natural that Ayala should be chosen. Lucy acknowledged as much to

herself. But they were sisters, and had been so near! By what a chasm

would they be dissevered, now so far asunder!

Lucy herself was a lovely girl, and knew her own loveliness. She

was fairer than Ayala, somewhat taller, and much more quiet in her

demeanour. She was also clever, but her cleverness did not show

itself so quickly. She was a musician, whereas her sister could only

sing. She could really draw, whereas her sister would rush away into

effects in which the drawing was not always very excellent. Lucy was

doing the best she could for herself, knowing something of French

and German, though as yet not very fluent with her tongue. The two

girls were, in truth, both greatly gifted; but Ayala had the gift of

showing her talent without thought of showing it. Lucy saw it all,

and knew that she was outshone; but how great had been the price of

the outshining!

The artist's house had been badly ordered, and the two girls were of

better disposition and better conduct than might have been expected

from such fitful training. Ayala had been the father's pet, and Lucy

the mother's. Parents do ill in making pets, and here they had done

ill. Ayala had been taught to think herself the favourite, because

the artist, himself, had been more prominent before the world than

his wife. But the evil had not been lasting enough to have made bad

feeling between the sisters. Lucy knew that her sister had been

preferred to her, but she had been self-denying enough to be aware

that some such preference was due to Ayala. She, too, admired Ayala,

and loved her with her whole heart. And Ayala was always good to

her,--had tried to divide everything,--had assumed no preference as a

right. The two were true sisters. But when it was decided that Lucy

was to go to Kingsbury Crescent the difference was very great. The

two girls, on their father's death, had been taken to the great red

brick house in Queen's Gate, and from thence, three or four days

after the funeral, Lucy was to be transferred to her Aunt Dosett.

Hitherto there had been little between them but weeping for their

father. Now had come the hour of parting.

The tidings had been communicated to Lucy, and to Lucy alone, by Aunt

Tringle,--"As you are the eldest, dear, we think that you will be

best able to be a comfort to your aunt," said Lady Tringle.

"I will do the best I can, Aunt Emmeline," said Lucy, declaring to

herself that, in giving such a reason, her aunt was lying basely.

"I am sure you will. Poor dear Ayala is younger than her cousins, and

will be more subject to them." So in truth was Lucy younger than her

cousins, but of that she said nothing. "I am sure you will agree with

me that it is best that we should have the youngest."

"Perhaps it is, Aunt Emmeline."

"Sir Thomas would not have had it any other way," said Lady Tringle,

with a little severity, feeling that Lucy's accord had hardly been

as generous as it should be. But she recovered herself quickly,

remembering how much it was that Ayala was to get, how much that Lucy

was to lose. "But, my dear, we shall see you very often, you know.

It is not so far across the park; and when we do have a few parties

again--"

"Oh, aunt, I am not thinking of that."

"Of course not. We can none of us think of it just now. But when

the time does come of course we shall always have you, just as if

you were one of us." Then her aunt gave her a roll of bank-notes, a

little present of twenty-five pounds, to begin the world with, and

told her that the carriage should take her to Kingsbury Crescent

on the following morning. On the whole Lucy behaved well and left

a pleasant impression on her aunt's mind. The difference between

Queen's Gate and Kingsbury Crescent,--between Queen's Gate and

Kingsbury Crescent for life,--was indeed great!

"I wish it were you, with all my heart," said Ayala, clinging to her

sister.

"It could not have been me."

"Why not!"

"Because you are so pretty and you are so clever."

"No!"

"Yes! If we were to be separated of course it would be so. Do not

suppose, dear, that I am disappointed."

"I am."

"If I can only like Aunt Margaret,"--Aunt Margaret was Mrs. Dosett,

with whom neither of the girls had hitherto become intimate, and who

was known to be quiet, domestic, and economical, but who had also

been spoken of as having a will of her own,--"I shall do better with

her than you would, Ayala."

"I don't see why."

"Because I can remain quiet longer than you. It will be very quiet.

I wonder how we shall see each other! I cannot walk across the park

alone."

"Uncle Reg will bring you."

"Not often, I fear. Uncle Reg has enough to do with his office."

"You can come in a cab."

"Cabs cost money, Ayey dear."

"But Uncle Thomas--"

"We had better understand one or two things, Ayala. Uncle Thomas will

pay everything for you, and as he is very rich things will come as

they are wanted. There will be cabs, and if not cabs, carriages.

Uncle Reg must pay for me, and he is very very kind to do so. But

as he is not rich, there will be no carriages, and not a great many

cabs. It is best to understand it all."

"But they will send for you."

"That's as they please. I don't think they will very often. I would

not for the world put you against Uncle Thomas, but I have a feeling

that I shall never get on with him. But you will never separate

yourself from me, Ayala!"

"Separate myself!"

"You will not--not be my sister because you will be one of these rich

ones?"

"Oh, I wish,--I wish that I were to be the poor one. I'm sure I

should like it best. I never cared about being rich. Oh, Lucy, can't

we make them change?"

"No, Ayey, my own, we can't make them change. And if we could, we

wouldn't. It is altogether best that you should be a rich Tringle and

that I should be a poor Dosett."

"I will always be a Dormer," said Ayala, proudly.

"And I will always be so too, my pet. But you should be a bright

Dormer among the Tringles, and I will be a dull Dormer among the

Dosetts. I shall begrudge nothing, if only we can see each other."

So the two girls were parted, the elder being taken away to Kingsbury

Crescent and the latter remaining with her rich relations at Queen's

Gate. Ayala had not probably realized the great difference of their

future positions. To her the attractions of wealth and the privations

of comparative poverty had not made themselves as yet palpably plain.

They do not become so manifest to those to whom the wealth falls,--at

any rate, not in early life,--as to the opposite party. If the other

lot had fallen to Ayala she might have felt it more keenly.

Lucy felt it keenly enough. Without any longing after the

magnificence of the Tringle mansion she knew how great was the fall

from her father's well-assorted luxuries and prettinesses down to the

plain walls, tables, and chairs of her Uncle Dosett's house. Her aunt

did not subscribe to Mudie's. The old piano had not been tuned for

the last ten years. The parlour-maid was a cross old woman. Her aunt

always sat in the dining-room through the greater part of the day,

and of all rooms the dining-room in Kingsbury Crescent was the

dingiest. Lucy understood very well to what she was going. Her father

and mother were gone. Her sister was divided from her. Her life

offered for the future nothing to her. But with it all she carried a

good courage. There was present to her an idea of great misfortune;

but present to her at the same time an idea also that she would do

her duty.

CHAPTER II.

LUCY WITH HER AUNT DOSETT.

For some days Lucy found herself to be absolutely crushed,--in the

first place, by a strong resolution to do some disagreeable duty,

and then by a feeling that there was no duty the doing of which was

within her reach. It seemed to her that her whole life was a blank.

Her father's house had been a small affair and considered to be poor

when compared with the Tringle mansion, but she now became aware that

everything there had in truth abounded. In one little room there

had been two or three hundred beautifully bound books. That Mudie's

unnumbered volumes should come into the house as they were wanted

had almost been as much a provision of nature as water, gas, and hot

rolls for breakfast. A piano of the best kind, and always in order,

had been a first necessary of life, and, like other necessaries, of

course, forthcoming. There had been the little room in which the

girls painted, joining their father's studio and sharing its light,

surrounded by every pretty female appliance. Then there had always

been visitors. The artists from Kensington had been wont to gather

there, and the artists' daughters, and perhaps the artists' sons.

Every day had had its round of delights,--its round of occupations,

as the girls would call them. There had been some reading, some

painting, some music,--perhaps a little needlework and a great deal

of talking.

How little do we know how other people live in the houses close to

us! We see the houses looking like our own, and we see the people

come out of them looking like ourselves. But a Chinaman is not more

different from the English John Bull than is No. 10 from No. 11.

Here there are books, paintings, music, wine, a little dilettanti

getting-up of subjects of the day, a little dilettanti thinking on

great affairs, perhaps a little dilettanti religion; few domestic

laws, and those easily broken; few domestic duties, and those easily

evaded; breakfast when you will, with dinner almost as little

binding, with much company and acknowledged aptitude for idle luxury.

That is life at No. 10. At No. 11 everything is cased in iron. There

shall be equal plenty, but at No. 11 even plenty is a bondage. Duty

rules everything, and it has come to be acknowledged that duty is to

be hard. So many hours of needlework, so many hours of books, so many

hours of prayer! That all the household shall shiver before daylight,

is a law, the breach of which by any member either augurs sickness or

requires condign punishment. To be comfortable is a sin; to laugh is

almost equal to bad language. Such and so various is life at No. 10

and at No. 11.

From one extremity, as far removed, to another poor Lucy had been

conveyed; though all the laws were not exactly carried out in

Kingsbury Crescent as they have been described at No. 11. The

enforced prayers were not there, nor the early hours. It was simply

necessary that Lucy should be down to breakfast at nine, and had

she not appeared nothing violent would have been said. But it was

required of her that she should endure a life which was altogether

without adornment. Uncle Dosett himself, as a clerk in the Admiralty,

had a certain position in the world which was sufficiently maintained

by decent apparel, a well-kept, slight, grey whisker, and an umbrella

which seemed never to have been violated by use. Dosett was popular

at his office, and was regarded by his brother clerks as a friend.

But no one was acquainted with his house and home. They did not

dine with him, nor he with them. There are such men in all public

offices,--not the less respected because of the quiescence of their

lives. It was known of him that he had burdens, though it was not

known what his burdens were. His friends, therefore, were intimate

with him as far as the entrance into Somerset House,--where his

duties lay,--and not beyond it. Lucy was destined to know the other

side of his affairs, the domestic side, which was as quiet as the

official side. The link between them, which consisted of a journey by

the Underground Railway to the Temple Station, and a walk home along

the Embankment and across the parks and Kensington Gardens, was the

pleasantest part of Dosett's life.

Mr. Dosett's salary has been said to be Â£900 per annum. What a fund

of comfort there is in the word! When the youth of nineteen enters

an office how far beyond want would he think himself should he ever

reach the pecuniary paradise of Â£900 a-year! How he would see all his

friends, and in return be seen of them! But when the income has been

achieved its capabilities are found to be by no means endless. And

Dosett in the earlier spheres of his married life had unfortunately

anticipated something of such comforts. For a year or two he had

spent a little money imprudently. Something which he had expected

had not come to him; and, as a result, he had been forced to

borrow, and to insure his life for the amount borrowed. Then,

too, when that misfortune as to the money came,--came from the

non-realization of certain claims which his wife had been supposed

to possess,--provision had also to be made for her. In this way an

assurance office eat up a large fraction of his income, and left him

with means which in truth were very straitened. Dosett at once gave

up all glories of social life, settled himself in Kingsbury Crescent,

and resolved to satisfy himself with his walk across the park and

his frugal dinner afterwards. He never complained to any one, nor

did his wife. He was a man small enough to be contented with a thin

existence, but far too great to ask any one to help him to widen it.

Sir Thomas Tringle never heard of that Â£175 paid annually to the

assurance office, nor had Lady Tringle, Dosett's sister, even heard

of it. When it was suggested to him that he should take one of the

Dormer girls, he consented to take her and said nothing of the

assurance office.

Mrs. Dosett had had her great blow in life, and had suffered more

perhaps than her husband. This money had been expected. There had

been no doubt of the money,--at any rate on her part. It did not

depend on an old gentleman with or without good intentions, but

simply on his death. There was to be ever so much of it, four or five

hundred a-year, which would last for ever. When the old gentleman

died, which took place some ten years after Dosett's marriage, it

was found that the money, tied tight as it had been by half-a-dozen

lawyers, had in some fashion vanished. Whither it had gone is little

to our purpose, but it had gone. Then there came a great crash upon

the Dosetts, which she for a while had been hardly able to endure.

But when she had collected herself together after the crash, and

had made up her mind, as had Dosett also, to the nature of the life

which they must in future lead, she became more stringent in it even

than he. He could bear and say nothing; but she, in bearing, found

herself compelled to say much. It had been her fault,--the fault of

people on her side,--and she would fain have fed her husband with

the full flowery potato while she ate only the rind. She told him,

unnecessarily, over and over again, that she had ruined him by her

marriage. No such idea was ever in his head. The thing had come, and

so it must be. There was food to eat, potatoes enough for both, and a

genteel house in which to live. He could still be happy if she would

not groan. A certain amount of groaning she did postpone while in his

presence. The sewing of seams, and the darning of household linen,

which in his eyes amounted to groaning, was done in his absence.

After their genteel dinner he would sleep a little, and she would

knit. He would have his glass of wine, but would make his bottle of

port last almost for a week. This was the house to which Lucy Dormer

was brought when Mr. Dosett had consented to share with Sir Thomas

the burden left by the death of the improvident artist.

When a month passed by Lucy began to think that time itself would

almost drive her mad. Her father had died early in September. The

Tringles had then, of course, been out of town, but Sir Thomas

and his wife had found themselves compelled to come up on such an

occasion. Something they knew must be done about the girls, and they

had not chosen that that something should be done in their absence.

Mr. Dosett was also enjoying his official leave of absence for

the year, but was enjoying it within the economical precincts of

Kingsbury Crescent. There was but seldom now an excursion for him or

his wife to the joys of the country. Once, some years ago, they had

paid a visit to the palatial luxuries of Glenbogie, but the delights

of the place had not paid for the expense of the long journey. They,

therefore, had been at hand to undertake their duties. Dosett and

Tringle, with a score of artists, had followed poor Dormer to his

grave in Kensal Green, and then Dosett and Tringle had parted again,

probably not to see each other for another term of years.

"My dear, what do you like to do with your time?" Mrs. Dosett said to

her niece, after the first week. At this time Lucy's wardrobe was not

yet of a nature to need much work over its ravages. The Dormer girls

had hardly known where their frocks had come from when they wanted

frocks,--hardly with more precision than the Tringle girls. Frocks

had come--dark, gloomy frocks, lately, alas! And these, too, had now

come a second time. Let creditors be ever so unsatisfied, new raiment

will always be found for mourning families. Everything about Lucy was

nearly new. The need of repairing would come upon her by degrees, but

it had not come as yet. Therefore there had seemed, to the anxious

aunt, to be a necessity for some such question as the above.

"I'll do anything you like, aunt," said Lucy.

"It is not for me, my dear. I get through a deal of work, and am

obliged to do so." She was, at this time, sitting with a sheet in her

lap, which she was turning. Lucy had, indeed, once offered to assist,

but her assistance had been rejected. This had been two days since,

and she had not renewed the proposal as she should have done. This

had been mainly from bashfulness. Though the work would certainly be

distasteful to her, she would do it. But she had not liked to seem to

interfere, not having as yet fallen into ways of intimacy with her

aunt. "I don't want to burden you with my task-work," continued Mrs.

Dosett, "but I am afraid you seem to be listless."

"I was reading till just before you spoke," said Lucy, again turning

her eyes to the little volume of poetry, which was one of the few

treasures which she had brought away with her from her old home.

"Reading is very well, but I do not like it as an excuse, Lucy."

Lucy's anger boiled within her when she was told of an excuse, and

she declared to herself that she could never like her aunt. "I am

quite sure that for young girls, as well as for old women, there

must be a great deal of waste time unless there be needle and thread

always about. And I know, too, unless ladies are well off, they

cannot afford to waste time any more than gentlemen."

In the whole course of her life nothing so much like scolding as

this had ever been addressed to her. So at least thought Lucy at

that moment. Mrs. Dosett had intended the remarks all in good part,

thinking them to be simply fitting from an aunt to a niece. It was

her duty to give advice, and for the giving of such advice some day

must be taken as the beginning. She had purposely allowed a week to

run by, and now she had spoken her word,--as she thought in good

season.

To Lucy it was a new and most bitter experience. Though she was

reading the "Idylls of the King," or pretending to read them, she

was, in truth, thinking of all that had gone from her. Her mind had,

at that moment, been intent upon her mother, who, in all respects,

had been so different from this careful, sheet-darning housewife of a

woman. And in thinking of her mother there had no doubt been regrets

for many things of which she would not have ventured to speak as

sharing her thoughts with the memory of her mother, but which were

nevertheless there to add darkness to the retrospective. Everything

behind had been so bright, and everything behind had gone away from

her! Everything before was so gloomy, and everything before must last

for so long! After her aunt's lecture about wasted time Lucy sat

silent for a few minutes, and then burst into uncontrolled tears.

"I did not mean to vex you," said her aunt.

"I was thinking of my--darling, darling mamma," sobbed Lucy.

"Of course, Lucy, you will think of her. How should you not? And of

your father. Those are sorrows which must be borne. But sorrows such

as those are much lighter to the busy than to the idle. I sometimes

think that the labourers grieve less for those they love than we do

just because they have not time to grieve."

"I wish I were a labourer then," said Lucy, through her tears.

"You may be if you will. The sooner you begin to be a labourer the

better for yourself and for those about you."

That Aunt Dosett's voice was harsh was not her fault,--nor that in

the obduracy of her daily life she had lost much of her original

softness. She had simply meant to be useful, and to do her duty; but

in telling Lucy that it would be better that the labouring should be

commenced at once for the sake of "those about you,"--who could only

be Aunt Dosett herself,--she had seemed to the girl to be harsh,

selfish, and almost unnatural. The volume of poetry fell from her

hand, and she jumped up from the chair quickly. "Give it me at once,"

she said, taking hold of the sheet,--which was not itself a pleasant

object; Lucy had never seen such a thing at the bijou. "Give it me at

once," she said, and clawed the long folds of linen nearly out of her

aunt's lap.

"I did not mean anything of the kind," said Aunt Dosett. "You should

not take me up in that way. I am speaking only for your good, because

I know that you should not dawdle away your existence. Leave the

sheet."

Lucy did leave the sheet, and then, sobbing violently, ran out of the

room up to her own chamber. Mrs. Dosett determined that she would

not follow her. She partly forgave the girl because of her sorrows,

partly reminded herself that she was not soft and facile as had been

her sister-in-law, Lucy's mother; and then, as she continued her

work, she assured herself that it would be best to let her niece

have her cry out upstairs. Lucy's violence had astonished her for a

moment, but she had taught herself to think it best to allow such

little ebullitions to pass off by themselves.

Lucy, when she was alone, flung herself upon her bed in absolute

agony. She thought that she had misbehaved, and yet how cruel,--how

harsh had been her aunt's words! If she, the quiet one, had

misbehaved, what would Ayala have done? And how was she to find

strength with which to look forward to the future? She struggled hard

with herself for a resolution. Should she determine that she would

henceforward darn sheets morning, noon, and night till she worked

her fingers to the bone? Perhaps there had been something of truth

in that assertion of her aunt's that the labourers have no time to

grieve. As everything else was shut out from her, it might be well

for her to darn sheets. Should she rush down penitent and beg her

aunt to allow her to commence at once?

She would have done it as far as the sheets were concerned, but she

could not do it as regarded her aunt. She could put herself into

unison with the crumpled soiled linen, but not with the hard woman.

Oh, how terrible was the change! Her father and her mother who had

been so gentle to her! All the sweet prettinesses of her life! All

her occupations, all her friends, all her delights! Even Ayala

was gone from her! How was she to bear it? She begrudged Ayala

nothing,--no, nothing. But yet it was hard! Ayala was to have

everything. Aunt Emmeline,--though they had not hitherto been very

fond of Aunt Emmeline,--was sweetness itself as compared with this

woman. "The sooner you begin to labour the better for yourself and

those about you." Would it not have been fitter that she should have

been sent at once to some actual poor-house in which there would have

been no mistake as to her position?

That it should all have been decided for her, for her and Ayala, not

by any will of their own, not by any concert between themselves, but

simply by the fantasy of another! Why should she thus be made a slave

to the fantasy of any one! Let Ayala have her uncle's wealth and her

aunt's palaces at her command, and she would walk out simply a pauper

into the world,--into some workhouse, so that at least she need not

be obedient to the harsh voice and the odious common sense of her

Aunt Dosett! But how should she take herself to some workhouse? In

what way could she prove her right to be admitted even then? It

seemed to her that the same decree which had admitted Ayala into the

golden halls of the fairies had doomed her not only to poverty, but

to slavery. There was no escape for her from her aunt and her aunt's

sermons. "Oh, Ayala, my darling,--my own one; oh, Ayala, if you did

but know!" she said to herself. What would Ayala think, how would

Ayala bear it, could she but guess by what a gulf was her heaven

divided from her sister's hell! "I will never tell her," she said to

herself. "I will die, and she shall never know."

As she lay there sobbing all the gilded things of the world were

beautiful in her eyes. Alas, yes, it was true. The magnificence of

the mansion at Queen's Gate, the glories of Glenbogie, the closely

studied comforts of Merle Park, as the place in Sussex was called,

all the carriages and horses, Madame Tonsonville and all the

draperies, the seats at the Albert Hall into which she had been

accustomed to go with as much ease as into her bed-room, the box at

the opera, the pretty furniture, the frequent gems, even the raiment

which would make her pleasing to the eyes of men whom she would like

to please--all these things grew in her eyes and became beautiful.

No. 3, Kingsbury Crescent, was surely, of all places on the earth's

surface, the most ugly. And yet,--yet she had endeavoured to do her

duty. "If it had been the workhouse I could have borne it," she said

to herself; "but not to be the slave of my Aunt Dosett!" Again she

appealed to her sister, "Oh, Ayala, if you did but know it!" Then she

remembered herself, declaring that it might have been worse to Ayala

than even to her. "If one had to bear it, it was better for me," she

said, as she struggled to prepare herself for her uncle's dinner.

CHAPTER III.

LUCY'S TROUBLES.

The evening after the affair with the sheet went off quietly, as did

many days and many evenings. Mrs. Dosett was wise enough to forget

the little violence and to forget also the feeling which had been

displayed. When Lucy first asked for some household needlework, which

she did with a faltering voice and shame-faced remembrance of her

fault, her aunt took it all in good part and gave her a task somewhat

lighter as a beginning than the handling of a sheet. Lucy sat at it

and suffered. She went on sitting and suffering. She told herself

that she was a martyr at every stitch she made. As she occupied the

seat opposite to her aunt's accustomed chair she would hardly speak

at all, but would keep her mind always intent on Ayala and the joys

of Ayala's life. That they who had been born together, sisters, with

equal fortunes, who had so closely lived together, should be sundered

so utterly one from the other; that the one should be so exalted and

the other so debased! And why? What justice had there been? Could it

be from heaven or even from earth that the law had gone forth for

such a division of the things of the world between them?

"You have got very little to say to a person?" said Aunt Dosett, one

morning. This, too, was a reproach. This, too, was scolding. And yet

Aunt Dosett had intended to be as pleasant as she knew how.

"I have very little to say," replied Lucy, with repressed anger.

"But why?"

"Because I am stupid," said Lucy. "Stupid people can't talk. You

should have had Ayala."

"I hope you do not envy Ayala her fortune, Lucy?" A woman with any

tact would not have asked such a question at such a time. She should

have felt that a touch of such irony might be natural, and that

unless it were expressed loudly, or shown actively, it might be left

to be suppressed by affection and time. But she, as she had grown

old, had taught herself to bear disappointment, and thought it wise

to teach Lucy to do the same.

"Envy!" said Lucy, not passionately, but after a little pause for

thought. "I sometimes think it is very hard to know what envy is."

"Envy, hatred, and malice," said Mrs. Dosett, hardly knowing what she

meant by the use of the well-worn words.

"I do know what hatred and malice are," said Lucy. "Do you think I

hate Ayala?"

"I am sure you do not."

"Or that I bear her malice?"

"Certainly not."

"If I had the power to take anything from her, would I do it? I love

Ayala with my whole heart. Whatever be my misery I would rather bear

it than let Ayala have even a share of it. Whatever good things she

may have I would not rob her even of a part of them. If there be joy

and sorrow to be divided between us I would wish to have the sorrow

so that she might have the joy. That is not hatred and malice." Mrs.

Dosett looked at her over her spectacles. This was the girl who had

declared that she could not speak because she was too stupid! "But,

when you ask me whether I envy her, I hardly know," continued Lucy.

"I think one does covet one's neighbour's house, in spite of the

tenth commandment, even though one does not want to steal it."

Mrs. Dosett repented herself that she had given rise to any

conversation at all. Silence, absolute silence, the old silence which

she had known for a dozen years before Lucy had come to her, would

have been better than this. She was very angry, more angry than she

had ever yet been with Lucy; and yet she was afraid to show her

anger. Was this the girl's gratitude for all that her uncle was doing

for her,--for shelter, food, comfort, for all that she had in the

world? Mrs. Dosett knew, though Lucy did not, of the little increased

pinchings which had been made necessary by the advent of another

inmate in the house; so many pounds of the meat in the week, and so

much bread, and so much tea and sugar! It had all been calculated.

In genteel houses such calculation must often be made. And when by

degrees,--degrees very quick,--the garments should become worn which

Lucy had brought with her, there must be something taken from the

tight-fitting income for that need. Arrangements had already been

made of which Lucy knew nothing, and already the two glasses of port

wine a day had been knocked off from poor Mr. Dosett's comforts. His

wife had sobbed in despair when he had said that it should be so. He

had declared gin and water to be as supporting as port wine, and the

thing had been done. Lucy inwardly had been disgusted by the gin and

water, knowing nothing of its history. Her father, who had not always

been punctual in paying his wine-merchant's bills, would not have

touched gin and water, would not have allowed it to contaminate his

table! Everything in Mr. Dosett's house was paid for weekly.

And now Lucy, who had been made welcome to all that the genteel house

could afford, who had been taken in as a child, had spoken of her

lot as one which was all sorrowful. Bad as it is,--this living in

Kingsbury Crescent,--I would rather bear it myself than subject Ayala

to such misery! It was thus that she had, in fact, spoken of her new

home when she had found it necessary to defend her feelings towards

her sister. It was impossible that her aunt should be altogether

silent under such treatment. "We have done the best for you that is

in our power, Lucy," she said, with a whole load of reproach in her

tone.

"Have I complained, aunt?"

"I thought you did."

"Oh, no! You asked me whether I envied Ayala. What was I to say?

Perhaps I should have said nothing, but the idea of envying Ayala was

painful to me. Of course she--"

"Well?"

"I had better say nothing more, aunt. If I were to pretend to be

cheerful I should be false. It is as yet only a few weeks since papa

died." Then the work went on in silence between them for the next

hour.

And the work went on in solemn silence between them through the

winter. It came to pass that the sole excitement of Lucy's life

came from Ayala's letters,--the sole excitement except a meeting

which took place between the sisters one day. When Lucy was taken to

Kingsbury Crescent Ayala was at once carried down to Glenbogie, and

from thence there came letters twice a week for six weeks. Ayala's

letters, too, were full of sorrow. She, too, had lost her mother,

her father, and her sister. Moreover, in her foolish petulance she

said things of her Aunt Emmeline, and of the girls, and of Sir

Thomas, which ought not to have been written of those who were

kind to her. Her cousin Tom, too, she ridiculed,--Tom Tringle, the

son-and-heir,--saying that he was a lout who endeavoured to make eyes

at her. Oh, how distasteful, how vulgar they were after all that

she had known. Perhaps the eldest girl, Augusta, was the worst. She

did not think that she could put up with the assumed authority of

Augusta. Gertrude was better, but a simpleton. Ayala declared herself

to be sad at heart. But then the sweet scenery of Glenbogie, and the

colour of the moors, and the glorious heights of Ben Alchan, made

some amends. Even in her sorrow she would rave about the beauties of

Glenbogie. Lucy, as she read the letters, told herself that Ayala's

grief was a grief to be borne, a grief almost to be enjoyed. To sit

and be sad with a stream purling by you, how different from the

sadness of that dining-room in the Crescent. To look out upon the

glories of a mountain, while a tear would now and again force itself

into the eye, how much less bitter than the falling of salt drops

over a tattered towel.

Lucy, in her answers, endeavoured to repress the groans of her

spirit. In the first place she did acknowledge that it did not become

her to speak ill of those who were, in truth, her benefactors; and

then she was anxious not to declare to Ayala her feeling of the

injustice by which their two lots had been defined to them. Though

she had failed to control herself once or twice in speaking to her

aunt she did control herself in writing her letters. She would never,

never, write a word which should make Ayala unnecessarily unhappy. On

that she was determined. She would say nothing to explain to Ayala

the unutterable tedium of that downstairs parlour in which they

passed their lives, lest Ayala should feel herself to be wounded by

the luxurious comforts around her.

It was thus she wrote. Then there came a time in which they were to

meet,--just at the beginning of November. The Tringles were going to

Rome. They generally did go somewhere. Glenbogie, Merle Park, and the

house in Queen's Gate, were not enough for the year. Sir Thomas was

to take them to Rome, and then return to London for the manipulation

of the millions in Lombard Street. He generally did remain nine

months out of the twelve in town, because of the millions, making his

visits at Merle Park very short; but Lady Tringle found that change

of air was good for the girls. It was her intention now to remain at

Rome for two or three months.

The party from Scotland reached Queen's Gate late one Saturday

evening, and intended to start early on the Monday. To Ayala, who had

made it quite a matter of course that she should see her sister, Lady

Tringle had said that in that case a carriage must be sent across.

It was awkward, because there were no carriages in London. She had

thought that they had all intended to pass through London just as

though they were not stopping. Sunday, she had thought, was not to

be regarded as being a day at all. Then Ayala flashed up. She had

flashed up some times before. Was it supposed that she was not going

to see Lucy? Carriage! She would walk across Kensington Gardens, and

find the house out all by herself. She would spend the whole day with

Lucy, and come back alone in a cab. She was strong enough, at any

rate, to have her way so far, that a carriage, wherever it came from,

was sent for Lucy about three in the afternoon, and did take her back

to Kingsbury Crescent after dinner.

Then at last the sisters were together in Ayala's bed-room. "And now

tell me about everything," said Ayala.

But Lucy was resolved that she would not tell anything. "I am so

wretched!" That would have been all; but she would not tell her

wretchedness. "We are so quiet in Kingsbury Crescent," she said; "you

have so much more to talk of."

"Oh, Lucy, I do not like it."

"Not your aunt?"

"She is not the worst, though she sometimes is hard to bear. I

can't tell you what it is, but they all seem to think so much of

themselves. In the first place they never will say a word about

papa."

"Perhaps that is from feeling, Ayey."

"No, it is not. One would know that. But they look down upon papa,

who had more in his little finger than they have with all their

money."

"Then I should hold my tongue."

"So I do,--about him; but it is very hard. And then Augusta has a way

with me, as though she had a right to order me. I certainly will not

be ordered by Augusta. You never ordered me."

"Dear Ayey!"

"Augusta is older than you,--of course, ever so much. They make her

out twenty-three at her last birthday, but she is twenty-four. But

that is not difference enough for ordering,--certainly between

cousins. I do hate Augusta."

"I would not hate her."

"How is one to help one's-self? She has a way of whispering to

Gertrude, and to her mother, when I am there, which almost kills me.

'If you'll only give me notice I'll go out of the room at once,' I

said the other day, and they were all so angry."

"I would not make them angry if I were you, Ayey."

"Why not?"

"Not Sir Thomas, or Aunt Emmeline."

"I don't care a bit for Sir Thomas. I am not sure but he is the most

good-natured, though he is so podgy. Of course, when Aunt Emmeline

tells me anything I do it."

"It is so important that you should be on good terms with them."

"I don't see it at all," said Ayala, flashing round.

"Aunt Emmeline can do so much for you. We have nothing of our

own,--you and I."

"Am I to sell myself because they have got money! No, indeed! No one

despises money so much as I do. I will never be other to them than if

I had the money, and they were the poor relations."

"That will not do, Ayey."

"I will make it do. They may turn me out if they like. Of course, I

know that I should obey my aunt, and so I will. If Sir Thomas told

me anything I should do it. But not Augusta." Then, while Lucy was

thinking how she might best put into soft words advice which was so

clearly needed, Ayala declared another trouble. "But there is worse

still."

"What is that?"

"Tom!"

"What does Tom do?"

"You know Tom, Lucy?"

"I have seen him."

"Of all the horrors he is the horridest."

"Does he order you about?"

"No; but he--"

"What is it, Ayey?"

"Oh! Lucy, he is so dreadful. He--"

"You don't mean that he makes love to you?"

"He does. What am I to do, Lucy?"

"Do they know it?"

"Augusta does, I'm sure; and pretends to think that it is my fault.

I am sure that there will be a terrible quarrel some day. I told him

the day before we left Glenbogie that I should tell his mother. I did

indeed. Then he grinned. He is such a fool. And when I laughed he

took it all as kindness. I couldn't have helped laughing if I had

died for it."

"But he has been left behind."

"Yes, for the present. But he is to come over to us some time after

Christmas, when Uncle Tringle has gone back."

"A girl need not be bothered by a lover unless she chooses, Ayey."

"But it will be such a bother to have to talk about it. He looks at

me, and is such an idiot. Then Augusta frowns. When I see Augusta

frowning I am so angry that I feel like boxing her ears. Do you know,

Lucy, that I often think that it will not do, and that I shall have

to be sent away. I wish it had been you that they had chosen."

Such was the conversation between the girls. Of what was said

everything appertained to Ayala. Of the very nature of Lucy's life

not a word was spoken. As Ayala was talking Lucy was constantly

thinking of all that might be lost by her sister's imprudence. Even

though Augusta might be disagreeable, even though Tom might be a

bore, it should all be borne,--borne at any rate for a while,--seeing

how terrible would be the alternative. The alternative to Lucy seemed

to be Kingsbury Crescent and Aunt Dosett. It did not occur to her to

think whether in any possible case Ayala would indeed be added to the

Crescent family, or what in that case would become of herself, and

whether they two might live with Aunt Dosett, and whether in that

case life would not be infinitely improved. Ayala had all that money

could do for her, and would have such a look-out into the world from

a wealthy house as might be sure at last to bring her some such

husband as would be desirable. Ayala, in fact, had everything before

her, and Lucy had nothing. Wherefore it became Lucy's duty to warn

Ayala, so that she should bear with much, and throw away nothing. If

Ayala could only know what life might be, what life was at Kingsbury

Crescent, then she would be patient, then she would softly make a

confidence with her aunt as to Tom's folly, then she would propitiate

Augusta. Not care for money! Ayala had not yet lived in an ugly room

and darned sheets all the morning. Ayala had never sat for two hours

between the slumbers of Uncle Dosett and the knitting of Aunt Dosett.

Ayala had not been brought into contact with gin and water.

"Oh, Ayala!" she said, as they were going down to dinner together,

"do struggle; do bear it. Tell Aunt Emmeline. She will like you to

tell her. If Augusta wants you to go anywhere, do go. What does it

signify? Papa and mamma are gone, and we are alone." All this she

said without a word of allusion to her own sufferings. Ayala made a

half promise. She did not think she would go anywhere for Augusta's

telling; but she would do her best to satisfy Aunt Emmeline. Then

they went to dinner, and after dinner Lucy was taken home without

further words between them.

Ayala wrote long letters on her journey, full of what she saw, and

full of her companions. From Paris she wrote, and then from Turin,

and then again on their immediate arrival at Rome. Her letters were

most imprudent as written from the close vicinity of her aunt and

cousin. It was such a comfort that that oaf Tom had been left behind.

Uncle Tringle was angry because he did not get what he liked to eat.

Aunt Emmeline gave that courier such a terrible life, sending for him

every quarter of an hour. Augusta would talk first French and then

Italian, of which no one could understand a word. Gertrude was so

sick with travelling that she was as pale as a sheet. Nobody seemed

to care for anything. She could not get her aunt to look at the

Campanile at Florence, or her cousins to know one picture from

another. "As for pictures, I am quite sure that Mangle's angels would

do as well as Raffael's." Mangle was a brother academician whom their

father had taught them to despise. There was contempt, most foolish

contempt, for all the Tringles; but, luckily, there had been no

quarrelling. Then it seemed that both in Paris and in Florence Ayala

had bought pretty things, from which it was to be argued that her

uncle had provided her liberally with money. One pretty thing had

been sent from Paris to Lucy, which could not have been bought for

less than many franks. It would not be fair that Ayala should take so

much without giving something in return.

Lucy knew that she too should give something in return. Though

Kingsbury Crescent was not attractive, though Aunt Dosett was not to

her a pleasant companion, she had begun to realise the fact that it

behoved her to be grateful, if only for the food she ate, and for the

bed on which she slept. As she thought of all that Ayala owed she

remembered also her own debts. As the winter went on she struggled to

pay them. But Aunt Dosett was a lady not much given to vacillation.

She had become aware at first that Lucy had been rough to her, and

she did not easily open herself to Lucy's endearments. Lucy's life at

Kingsbury Crescent had begun badly, and Lucy, though she understood

much about it, found it hard to turn a bad beginning to a good

result.

CHAPTER IV.

ISADORE HAMEL.

It was suggested to Lucy before she had been long in Kingsbury

Crescent that she should take some exercise. For the first week she

had hardly been out of the house; but this was attributed to her

sorrow. Then she had accompanied her aunt for a few days during the

half-hour's marketing which took place every morning, but in this

there had been no sympathy. Lucy would not interest herself in

the shoulder of mutton which must be of just such a weight as to

last conveniently for two days,--twelve pounds,--of which, it was

explained to her, more than one-half was intended for the two

servants, because there was always a more lavish consumption in the

kitchen than in the parlour. Lucy would not appreciate the fact that

eggs at a penny a piece, whatever they might be, must be used for

puddings, as eggs with even a reputation of freshness cost twopence.

Aunt Dosett, beyond this, never left the house on week-days except

for a few calls which were made perhaps once a month, on which

occasion the Sunday gloves and the Sunday silk dress were used. On

Sunday they all went to church. But this was not enough for exercise,

and as Lucy was becoming pale she was recommended to take to walking

in Kensington Gardens.

It is generally understood that there are raging lions about the

metropolis, who would certainly eat up young ladies whole if young

ladies were to walk about the streets or even about the parks by

themselves. There is, however, beginning to be some vacillation as

to the received belief on this subject as regards London. In large

continental towns, such as Paris and Vienna, young ladies would be

devoured certainly. Such, at least, is the creed. In New York and

Washington there are supposed to be no lions, so that young ladies

go about free as air. In London there is a rising doubt, under which

before long, probably, the lions will succumb altogether. Mrs. Dosett

did believe somewhat in lions, but she believed also in exercise. And

she was aware that the lions eat up chiefly rich people. Young ladies

who must go about without mothers, brothers, uncles, carriages, or

attendants of any sort, are not often eaten or even roared at. It

is the dainty darlings for whom the roarings have to be feared. Mrs.

Dosett, aware that daintiness was no longer within the reach of her

and hers, did assent to these walkings in Kensington Gardens. At some

hour in the afternoon Lucy would walk from the house by herself, and

within a quarter of an hour would find herself on the broad gravel

path which leads down to the Round Pond. From thence she would go by

the back of the Albert Memorial, and then across by the Serpentine

and return to the same gate, never leaving Kensington Gardens. Aunt

Dosett had expressed some old-fashioned idea that lions were more

likely to roar in Hyde Park than within the comparatively retired

purlieus of Kensington.

Now the reader must be taken back for a few moments to the bijou, as

the bijou was before either the artist or his wife had died. In those

days there had been a frequent concourse of people in the artist's

house. Society there had not consisted chiefly of eating and

drinking. Men and women would come in and out as though really for

a purpose of talking. There would be three or four constantly with

Dormer in his studio, helping him but little perhaps in the real

furtherance of his work, though discussing art subjects in a manner

calculated to keep alive art-feeling among them. A novelist or two of

a morning might perhaps aid me in my general pursuit, but would, I

think, interfere with the actual tally of pages. Egbert Dormer did

not turn out from his hand so much work as some men that I know, but

he was overflowing with art up to his ears;--and with tobacco, so

that, upon the whole, the bijou was a pleasant rendezvous.

There had come there of late, quite of late, a young sculptor, named

Isadore Hamel. Hamel was an Englishman, who, however, had been

carried very early to Rome and had been bred there. Of his mother

question never was made, but his father had been well known as an

English sculptor resident at Rome. The elder Hamel had been a man of

mark, who had a fine suite of rooms in the city and a villa on one

of the lakes, but who never came to England. English connections

were, he said, to him abominable, by which he perhaps meant that the

restrictions of decent life were not to his taste. But his busts

came, and his groups in marble, and now and again some great work for

some public decoration: so that money was plentiful with him, and

he was a man of note. It must be acknowledged of him that he spared

nothing in bringing up his son, giving him such education as might

best suit his future career as an artist, and that money was always

forthcoming for the lad's wants and fantasies.

Then young Hamel also became a sculptor of much promise; but early in

life differed from his father on certain subjects of importance. The

father was wedded to Rome and to Italy. Isadore gradually expressed

an opinion that the nearer a man was to his market the better for

him, that all that art could do for a man in Rome was as nothing

to the position which a great artist might make for himself in

London,--that, in fact, an Englishman had better be an Englishman. At

twenty-six he succeeded in his attempt, and became known as a young

sculptor with a workshop at Brompton. He became known to many both

by his work and his acquirements; but it may not be surprising that

after a year he was still unable to live, as he had been taught to

live, without drawing upon his father. Then his father threw his

failure in his teeth, not refusing him money indeed, but making the

receipt of it unpleasant to him.

At no house had Isadore Hamel been made so welcome as at Dormer's.

There was a sympathy between them both on that great question of

art, whether to an artist his art should be a matter to him of more

importance than all the world besides. So said Dormer,--who simply

died because his wife died, who could not have touched his brush if

one of his girls had been suffering, who, with all his genius, was

but a faineant workman. His art more than all the world to him!

No, not to him. Perhaps here and again to some enthusiast, and him

hardly removed from madness! Where is the painter who shall paint a

picture after his soul's longing though he shall get not a penny for

it,--though he shall starve as he put his last touch to it, when he

knows that by drawing some duchess of the day he shall in a fortnight

earn a ducal price? Shall a wife and child be less dear to him than

to a lawyer,--or to a shoemaker; or the very craving of his hunger

less obdurate? A man's self, and what he has within him and his

belongings, with his outlook for this and other worlds,--let that

be the first, and the work, noble or otherwise, be the second.

To be honest is greater than to have painted the San Sisto, or

to have chiselled the Apollo; to have assisted in making others

honest,--infinitely greater. All of which were discussed at great

length at the bijou, and the bijouites always sided with the

master of the house. To an artist, said Dormer, let his art be

everything,--above wife and children, above money, above health,

above even character. Then he would put out his hand with his

jewelled finger, and stretch forth his velvet-clad arm, and soon

after lead his friend away to the little dinner at which no luxury

had been spared. But young Hamel agreed with the sermons, and not the

less because Lucy Dormer had sat by and listened to them with rapt

attention.

Not a word of love had been spoken to her by the sculptor when her

mother died, but there had been glances and little feelings of which

each was half conscious. It is so hard for a young man to speak of

love, if there be real love,--so impossible that a girl should do so!

Not a word had been spoken, but each had thought that the other must

have known. To Lucy a word had been spoken by her mother,--"Do not

think too much of him till you know," the mother had said,--not

quite prudently. "Oh, no! I will think of him not at all," Lucy had

replied. And she had thought of him day and night. "I wonder why Mr.

Hamel is so different with you?" Ayala had said to her sister. "I am

sure he is not different with me," Lucy had replied. Then Ayala had

shaken her full locks and smiled.

Things came quickly after that. Mrs. Dormer had sickened and died.

There was no time then for thinking of that handsome brow, of

that short jet black hair, of those eyes so full of fire and

thoughtfulness, of that perfect mouth, and the deep but yet soft

voice. Still even in her sorrow this new god of her idolatry was not

altogether forgotten. It was told to her that he had been summoned

off to Rome by his father, and she wondered whether he was to find

his home at Rome for ever. Then her father was ill, and in his

illness Hamel came to say one word of farewell before he started.

"You find me crushed to the ground," the painter said. Something the

young man whispered as to the consolation which time would bring.

"Not to me," said Dormer. "It is as though one had lost his eyes. One

cannot see without his eyes." It was true of him. His light had been

put out.

Then, on the landing at the top of the stairs, there had been one

word between Lucy and the sculptor. "I ought not to have intruded on

you perhaps," he said; "but after so much kindness I could hardly go

without a word."

"I am sure he will be glad that you have come."

"And you?"

"I am glad too,--so that I may say good-bye." Then she put out her

hand, and he held it for a moment as he looked into her eyes. There

was not a word more, but it seemed to Lucy as though there had been

so many words.

Things went on quickly. Egbert Dormer died, and Lucy was taken away

to Kingsbury Crescent. When once Ayala had spoken about Mr. Hamel,

Lucy had silenced her. Any allusion to the idea of love wounded her,

as though it was too impossible for dreams, too holy for words. How

should there be words about a lover when father and mother were both

dead? He had gone to his old and natural home. He had gone, and of

course he would not return. To Ayala, when she came up to London

early in November, to Ayala, who was going to Rome, where Isadore

Hamel now was, Isadore Hamel's name was not mentioned. But through

the long mornings of her life, through the long evenings, through the

long nights, she still thought of him,--she could not keep herself

from thinking. To a girl whose life is full of delights her lover

need not be so very much,--need not, at least, be everything.

Though he be a lover to be loved at all points, her friends will be

something, her dancing, her horse, her theatre-going, her brothers

and sisters, even her father and mother. But Lucy had nothing. The

vision of Isadore Hamel had passed across her life, and had left with

her the only possession that she had. It need hardly be said that

she never alluded to that possession at Kingsbury Crescent. It was

not a possession from which any enjoyment could come except that of

thinking of it. He had passed away from her, and there was no point

of life at which he could come across her again. There was no longer

that half-joint studio. If it had been her lot to be as was Ayala,

she then would have been taken to Rome. Then again he would have

looked into her eyes and taken her hand in his. Then perhaps--.

But now, even though he were to come back to London, he would know

nothing of her haunts. Even in that case nothing would bring them

together. As the idea was crossing her mind,--as it did cross it

so frequently,--she saw him turning from the path on which she was

walking, making his way towards the steps of the Memorial.

Though she saw no more than his back she was sure that it was Isadore

Hamel. For a moment there was an impulse on her to run after him and

to call his name. It was then early in January, and she was taking

her daily walk through Kensington Gardens. She had walked there daily

now for the last two months and had never spoken a word or been

addressed,--had never seen a face that she had recognised. It had

seemed to her that she had not an acquaintance in the world except

Uncle Reg and Aunt Dosett. And now, almost within reach of her hand,

was the one being in all the world whom she most longed to see. She

did stand, and the word was formed within her lips; but she could not

speak it. Then came the thought that she would run after him, but the

thought was expelled quickly. Though she might lose him again and for

ever she could not do that. She stood almost gasping till he was out

of sight, and then she passed on upon her usual round.

She never omitted her walks after that, and always paused a moment

as the path turned away to the Memorial. It was not that she thought

that she might meet him there,--there rather than elsewhere,--but

there is present to us often an idea that when some object has passed

from us that we have desired then it may be seen again. Day after

day, and week after week, she did not see him. During this time there

came letters from Ayala, saying that their return to England was

postponed till the first week in February,--that she would certainly

see Lucy in February,--that she was not going to be hurried through

London in half-an-hour because her aunt wished it; and that she would

do as she pleased as to visiting her sister. Then there was a word

or two about Tom,--"Oh, Tom--that idiot Tom!" And another word or

two about Augusta. "Augusta is worse than ever. We have not spoken

to each other for the last day or two." This came but a day or two

before the intended return of the Tringles.

No actual day had been fixed. But on the day before that on which

Lucy thought it probable that the Tringles might return to town she

was again walking in the Gardens. Having put two and two together,

as people do, she felt sure that the travellers could not be away

more than a day or two longer. Her mind was much intent upon Ayala,

feeling that the imprudent girl was subjecting herself to great

danger, knowing that it was wrong that she and Augusta should be

together in the house without speaking,--thinking of her sister's

perils,--when, of a sudden, Hamel was close before her! There was no

question of calling to him now,--no question of an attempt to see him

face to face. She had been wandering along the path with eyes fixed

upon the ground, when her name was sharply called, and they two were

close to each other. Hamel had a friend with him, and it seemed to

Lucy at once, that she could only bow to him, only mutter something,

and then pass on. How can a girl stand and speak to a gentleman in

public, especially when that gentleman has a friend with him? She

tried to look pleasant, bowed, smiled, muttered something, and was

passing on. But he was not minded to lose her thus immediately. "Miss

Dormer," he said, "I have seen your sister at Rome. May I not say a

word about her?"

Why should he not say a word about Ayala? In a minute he had left

his friend, and was walking back along the path with Lucy. There was

not much that he had to say about Ayala. He had seen Ayala and the

Tringles, and did manage to let it escape him that Lady Tringle

had not been very gracious to himself when once, in public, he had

claimed acquaintance with Ayala. But at that he simply smiled. Then

he had asked of Lucy where she lived. "With my uncle, Mr. Dosett,"

said Lucy, "at Kingsbury Crescent." Then, when he asked whether he

might call, Lucy, with many blushes, had said that her aunt did not

receive many visitors,--that her uncle's house was different from

what her father's had been.

"Shall I not see you at all, then?" he asked.

She did not like to ask him after his own purposes of life, whether

he was now a resident in London, or whether he intended to return to

Rome. She was covered with bashfulness, and dreaded to seem even to

be interested in his affairs. "Oh, yes," she said; "perhaps we may

meet some day."

"Here?" he asked.

"Oh, no; not here! It was only an accident." As she said this she

determined that she must walk no more in Kensington Gardens. It would

be dreadful, indeed, were he to imagine that she would consent to

make an appointment with him. It immediately occurred to her that the

lions were about, and that she must shut herself up.

"I have thought of you every day since I have been back," he said,

"and I did not know where to hear of you. Now that we have met am I

to lose you again!" Lose her! What did he mean by losing her? She,

too, had found a friend,--she who had been so friendless! Would it

not be dreadful to her, also, to lose him? "Is there no place where I

may ask of you?"

"When Ayala is back, and they are in town, perhaps I shall sometimes

be at Lady Tringle's," said Lucy, resolved that she would not tell

him of her immediate abode. This was, at any rate, a certain address

from where he might commence further inquiries, should he wish to

make inquiry; and as such he accepted it. "I think I had better go

now," said Lucy, trembling at the apparent impropriety of her present

conversation.

He knew that it was intended that he should leave her, and he went.

"I hope I have not offended you in coming so far."

"Oh, no." Then again she gave him her hand, and again there was the

same look as he took his leave.

When she got home, which was before the dusk, having resolved that

she must, at any rate, tell her aunt that she had met a friend, she

found that her uncle had returned from his office. This was a most

unusual occurrence. Her uncle, she knew, left Somerset House exactly

at half-past four, and always took an hour and a quarter for his

walk. She had never seen him in Kingsbury Crescent till a quarter

before six. "I have got letters from Rome," he said, in a solemn

voice.

"From Ayala?"

"One from Ayala, for you. It is here. And I have had one from my

sister, also; and one, in the course of the day, from your uncle

in Lombard Street. You had better read them!" There was something

terribly tragic in Uncle Dosett's voice as he spoke.

And so must the reader read the letters; but they must be delayed for

a few chapters.

CHAPTER V.

AT GLENBOGIE.

We must go back to Ayala's life during the autumn and winter. She was

rapidly whirled away to Glenbogie amidst the affectionate welcomings

of her aunt and cousins. All manner of good things were done for her,

as to presents and comforts. Young as she was, she had money given to

her, which was not without attraction; and though she was, of course,

in the depth of her mourning, she was made to understand that even

mourning might be made becoming if no expense were spared. No expense

among the Tringles ever was spared, and at first Ayala liked the

bounty of profusion. But before the end of the first fortnight there

grew upon her a feeling that even bank notes become tawdry if you are

taught to use them as curl-papers. It may be said that nothing in the

world is charming unless it be achieved at some trouble. If it rained

"'64 Leoville,"--which I regard as the most divine of nectars,--I

feel sure that I should never raise it to my lips. Ayala did not

argue the matter out in her mind, but in very early days she began to

entertain a dislike to Tringle magnificence. There had been a good

deal of luxury at the bijou, but always with a feeling that it ought

not to be there,--that more money was being spent than prudence

authorised,--which had certainly added a savour to the luxuries. A

lovely bonnet, is it not more lovely because the destined wearer

knows that there is some wickedness in achieving it? All the bonnets,

all the claret, all the horses, seemed to come at Queen's Gate and at

Glenbogie without any wickedness. There was no more question about

them than as to one's ordinary bread and butter at breakfast. Sir

Thomas had a way,--a merit shall we call it or a fault?--of pouring

out his wealth upon the family as though it were water running in

perpetuity from a mountain tarn. Ayala the romantic, Ayala the

poetic, found very soon that she did not like it.

Perhaps the only pleasure left to the very rich is that of thinking

of the deprivations of the poor. The bonnets, and the claret, and the

horses, have lost their charm; but the Gladstone, and the old hats,

and the four-wheeled cabs of their neighbours, still have a little

flavour for them. From this source it seemed to Ayala that the

Tringles drew much of the recreation of their lives. Sir Thomas

had his way of enjoying this amusement, but it was a way that did

not specially come beneath Ayala's notice. When she heard that

Break-at-last, the Huddersfield manufacturer, had to sell his

pictures, and that all Shoddy and Stuffgoods' grand doings for

the last two years had only been a flash in the pan, she did not

understand enough about it to feel wounded; but when she heard her

aunt say that people like the Poodles had better not have a place

in Scotland than have to let it, and when Augusta hinted that Lady

Sophia Smallware had pawned her diamonds, then she felt that her

nearest and dearest relatives smelt abominably of money.

Of all the family Sir Thomas was most persistently the kindest to

her, though he was a man who did not look to be kind. She was pretty,

and though he was ugly himself he liked to look at things pretty. He

was, too, perhaps, a little tired of his own wife and daughters,--who

were indeed what he had made them, but still were not quite to his

taste. In a general way he gave instructions that Ayala should

be treated exactly as a daughter, and he informed his wife that

he intended to add a codicil to his will on her behalf. "Is that

necessary?" asked Lady Tringle, who began to feel something like

natural jealousy. "I suppose I ought to do something for a girl if

I take her by the hand," said Sir Thomas, roughly. "If she gets a

husband I will give her something, and that will do as well." Nothing

more was said about it, but when Sir Thomas went up to town the

codicil was added to his will.

Ayala was foolish rather than ungrateful, not understanding the

nature of the family to which she was relegated. Before she had been

taken away she had promised Lucy that she would be "obedient" to her

aunt. There had hardly been such a word as obedience known at the

bijou. If any were obedient, it was the mother and the father to the

daughters. Lucy, and Ayala as well, had understood something of this;

and therefore Ayala had promised to be obedient to her aunt. "And to

Uncle Thomas," Lucy had demanded, with an imploring embrace. "Oh,

yes," said Ayala, dreading her uncle at that time. She soon learned

that no obedience whatsoever was exacted from Sir Thomas. She had to

kiss him morning and evening, and then to take whatever presents he

made her. An easy uncle he was to deal with, and she almost learned

to love him. Nor was Aunt Emmeline very exigeant, though she was

fantastic and sometimes disagreeable. But Augusta was the great

difficulty. Lucy had not told her to obey Augusta, and Augusta she

would not obey. Now Augusta demanded obedience.

"You never ordered me," Ayala had said to Lucy when they met in

London as the Tringles were passing through. At the bijou there had

been a republic, in which all the inhabitants and all the visitors

had been free and equal. Such republicanism had been the very

mainspring of life at the bijou. Ayala loved equality, and she

specially felt that it should exist among sisters. Do anything for

Lucy? Oh, yes, indeed, anything; abandon anything; but for Lucy as a

sister among sisters, not for an elder as from a younger! And if she

were not bound to serve Lucy then certainly not Augusta. But Augusta

liked to be served. On one occasion she sent Ayala upstairs, and on

another she sent Ayala down-stairs. Ayala went, but determined to

be equal with her cousin. On the morning following, in the presence

of Aunt Emmeline and of Gertrude, in the presence also of two other

ladies who were visiting at the house, she asked Augusta if she would

mind running upstairs and fetching her scrap-book! She had been

thinking about it all the night and all the morning, plucking up her

courage. But she had been determined. She found a great difficulty in

saying the words, but she said them. The thing was so preposterous

that all the ladies in the room looked aghast at the proposition. "I

really think that Augusta has got something else to do," said Aunt

Emmeline. "Oh, very well," said Ayala, and then they were all silent.

Augusta, who was employed on a silk purse, sat still and did not say

a word.

Had a great secret, or rather a great piece of news which pervaded

the family, been previously communicated to Ayala, she would not

probably have made so insane a suggestion. Augusta was engaged to

be married to the Honourable Septimus Traffick, the member for Port

Glasgow. A young lady who is already half a bride is not supposed

to run up and down stairs as readily as a mere girl. For running up

and down stairs at the bijou Ayala had been proverbial. They were a

family who ran up and down with the greatest alacrity. "Oh, papa, my

basket is out on the seat"--for there had been a seat in the two-foot

garden behind the house. Papa would go down in two jumps and come up

with three skips, and there was the basket, only because his girl

liked him to do something for her. But for him Ayala would run about

as though she were a tricksy Ariel. Had the important matrimonial

news been conveyed to Ariel, with a true girl's spirit she would have

felt that during the present period Augusta was entitled to special

exemption from all ordering. Had she herself been engaged she would

have run more and quicker than ever,--would have been excited thereto

by the peculiar vitality of her new prospects; but to even Augusta

she would be subservient, because of her appreciation of bridal

importance. She, however, had not been told till that afternoon.

"You should not have asked Augusta to go up stairs," said Aunt

Emmeline, in a tone of mitigated reproach.

"Oh! I didn't know," said Ayala.

"You had meant to say that because she had sent you you were to send

her. There is a difference, you know."

"I didn't know," said Ayala, beginning to think that she would fight

her battle if told of such differences as she believed to exist.

"I had meant to tell you before, but I may as well tell you now,

Augusta is engaged to be married to the Honourable Mr. Septimus

Traffick. He is second son of Lord Boardotrade, and is in the House."

"Dear me!" said Ayala, acknowledging at once within her heart that

the difference alleged was one against which she need not rouse

herself to the fight. Aunt Emmeline had, in truth, intended to insist

on that difference--and another; but her courage had failed her.

"Yes, indeed. He is a man very much thought of just now in public

life, and Augusta's mind is naturally much occupied. He writes all

those letters in The Times about supply and demand."

"Does he, aunt?" Ayala did feel that if Augusta's mind was entirely

occupied with supply and demand she ought not to be made to go

upstairs to fetch a scrap-book. But she had her doubts about

Augusta's mind. Nevertheless, if the forthcoming husband were true,

that might be a reason. "If anybody had told me before I wouldn't

have asked her," she said.

Then Lady Tringle explained that it had been thought better not to

say anything heretofore as to the coming matrimonial hilarities

because of the sadness which had fallen upon the Dormer family. Ayala

accepted this as an excuse, and nothing further was said as to the

iniquity of her request to her cousin. But there was a general

feeling among the women that Ayala, in lieu of gratitude, had

exhibited an intention of rebelling.

On the next day Mr. Traffick arrived, whose coming had probably

made it necessary that the news should be told. Ayala was never so

surprised in her life as when she saw him. She had never yet had a

lover of her own, had never dreamed of a lover, but she had her own

idea as to what a lover ought to be. She had thought that Isadore

Hamel would be a very nice lover--for her sister. Hamel was young,

handsome, with a great deal to say on such a general subject as art,

but too bashful to talk easily to the girl he admired. Ayala had

thought that all that was just as it should be. She was altogether

resolved that Hamel and her sister should be lovers, and was

determined to be devoted to her future brother-in-law. But the

Honourable Septimus Traffick! It was a question to her whether her

Uncle Tringle would not have been better as a lover.

And yet there was nothing amiss about Mr. Traffick. He was very much

like an ordinary hard-working member of the House of Commons, over

perhaps rather than under forty years of age. He was somewhat bald,

somewhat grey, somewhat fat, and had lost that look of rosy plumpness

which is seldom, I fear, compatible with hard work and late hours. He

was not particularly ugly, nor was he absurd in appearance. But he

looked to be a disciple of business, not of pleasure, nor of art. "To

sit out on the bank of a stream and have him beside one would not be

particularly nice," thought Ayala to herself. Mr. Traffick no doubt

would have enjoyed it very well if he could have spared the time; but

to Ayala it seemed that such a man as that could have cared nothing

for love. As soon as she saw him, and realised in her mind the fact

that Augusta was to become his wife, she felt at once the absurdity

of sending Augusta on a message.

Augusta that evening was somewhat more than ordinarily kind to her

cousin. Now that the great secret was told, her cousin no doubt

would recognise her importance. "I suppose you had not heard of him

before?" she said to Ayala.

"I never did."

"That's because you have not attended to the debates."

"I never have. What are debates?"

"Mr. Traffick is very much thought of in the House of Commons on all

subjects affecting commerce."

"Oh!"

"It is the most glorious study which the world affords."

"The House of Commons. I don't think it can be equal to art."

Then Augusta turned up her nose with a double turn,--first as against

painters, Mr. Dormer having been no more, and then at Ayala's

ignorance in supposing that the House of Commons could have been

spoken of as a study. "Mr. Traffick will probably be in the

government some day," she said.

"Has not he been yet?" asked Ayala.

"Not yet."

"Then won't he be very old before he gets there?" This was a terrible

question. Young ladies of five-and-twenty, when they marry gentlemen

of four-and-fifty, make up their minds for well-understood and

well-recognised old age. They see that they had best declare their

purpose, and they do declare it. "Of course, Mr. Walker is old enough

to be my father, but I have made up my mind that I like that better

than anything else." Then the wall has been jumped, and the thing can

go smoothly. But at forty-five there is supposed to be so much of

youth left that the difference of age may possibly be tided over and

not made to appear abnormal. Augusta Tringle had determined to tide

it over in this way. The forty-five had been gradually reduced to

"less than forty,"--though all the Peerages were there to give the

lie to the assertion. She talked of her lover as Septimus, and was

quite prepared to sit with him beside a stream if only half-an-hour

for the amusement could be found. When, therefore, Ayala suggested

that if her lover wanted to get into office he had better do so

quickly, lest he should be too old, Augusta was not well pleased.

"Lord Boardotrade was much older when he began," said Augusta. "His

friends, indeed, tell Septimus that he should not push himself

forward too quickly. But I don't think that I ever came across any

one who was so ignorant of such things as you are, Ayala."

"Perhaps he is not so old as he looks," said Ayala. After this it may

be imagined that there was not close friendship between the cousins.

Augusta's mind was filled with a strong conception as to Ayala's

ingratitude. The houseless, penniless orphan had been taken in, and

had done nothing but make herself disagreeable. Young! No doubt she

was young. But had she been as old as Methuselah she could not have

been more insolent. It did not, however, matter to her, Augusta.

She was going away; but it would be terrible to her mamma and to

Gertrude! Thus it was that Augusta spoke of her cousin to her mother.

And then there came another trouble, which was more troublesome to

Ayala even than the other. Tom Tringle, who was in the house in

Lombard Street, who was the only son, and heir to the title and no

doubt to much of the wealth, had chosen to take Ayala's part and to

enlist himself as her special friend. Ayala had, at first, accepted

him as a cousin, and had consented to fraternise with him. Then, on

some unfortunate day, there had been some word or look which she had

failed not to understand, and immediately she had become afraid of

Tom. Tom was not like Isadore Hamel,--was very far, indeed, from that

idea of a perfect lover which Ayala's mind had conceived; but he was

by no means a lout, or an oaf, or an idiot, as Ayala in her letters

to her sister had described him. He had been first at Eton and then

at Oxford, and having spent a great deal of money recklessly, and

done but little towards his education, had been withdrawn and put

into the office. His father declared of him now that he would do

fairly well in the world. He had a taste for dress, and kept four or

five hunters which he got but little credit by riding. He made a fuss

about his shooting, but did not shoot much. He was stout and awkward

looking,--very like his father, but without that settled air which

age gives to heavy men. In appearance he was not the sort of lover

to satisfy the preconceptions of such a girl as Ayala. But he was

good-natured and true. At last he became to her terribly true. His

love, such as it seemed at first, was absurd to her. "If you make

yourself such a fool, Tom, I'll never speak to you again," she had

said, once. Even after that she had not understood that it was

more than a stupid joke. But the joke, while it was considered as

such, was very distasteful to her; and afterwards, when a certain

earnestness in it was driven in upon her, it became worse than

distasteful.

She repudiated his love with such power as she had, but she could not

silence him. She could not at all understand that a young man, who

seemed to her to be an oaf, should really be in love,--honestly in

love with her. But such was the case. Then she became afraid lest

others should see it,--afraid, though she often told herself that she

would appeal to her aunt for protection. "I tell you I don't care a

bit about you, and you oughtn't to go on," she said. But he did go

on, and though her aunt did not see it Augusta did.

Then Augusta spoke a word to her in scorn. "Ayala," she said, "you

should not encourage Tom."

Encourage him! What a word from one girl to another! What a world

of wrong there was in the idea which had created the word! What an

absence of the sort of feeling which, according to Ayala's theory

of life, there should be on such a matter between two sisters, two

cousins, or two friends! Encourage him! When Augusta ought to have

been the first to assist her in her trouble! "Oh, Augusta," she said,

turning sharply round, "what a spiteful creature you are."

"I suppose you think so, because I do not choose to approve."

"Approve of what! Tom is thoroughly disagreeable. Sometimes he makes

my life such a burden to me that I think I shall have to go to my

aunt. But you are worse. Oh!" exclaimed Ayala, shuddering as she

thought of the unwomanly treachery of which her cousin was guilty

towards her.

Nothing more came of it at Glenbogie. Tom was required in Lombard

Street, and the matter was not suspected by Aunt Emmeline,--as far,

at least, as Ayala was aware. When he was gone it was to her as

though there would be a world of time before she would see him again.

They were to go to Rome, and he would not be at Rome till January.

Before that he might have forgotten his folly. But Ayala was quite

determined that she would never forget the ill offices of Augusta.

She did hate Augusta, as she had told her sister. Then, in this frame

of mind, the family was taken to Rome.

CHAPTER VI.

AT ROME.

During her journeying and during her sojourn at Rome Ayala did enjoy

much; but even these joys did not come to her without causing some

trouble of spirit. At Glenbogie everybody had known that she was a

dependent niece, and that as such she was in truth nobody. On that

morning when she had ordered Augusta to go upstairs the two visitors

had stared with amazement,--who would not have stared at all had

they heard Ayala ordered in the same way. But it came about that in

Rome Ayala was almost of more importance than the Tringles. It was

absolutely true that Lady Tringle and Augusta and Gertrude were asked

here and there because of Ayala; and the worst of it was that the

fact was at last suspected by the Tringles themselves. Sometimes they

would not always be asked. One of the Tringle girls would only be

named. But Ayala was never forgotten. Once or twice an effort was

made by some grand lady, whose taste was perhaps more conspicuous

than her good-nature, to get Ayala without burdening herself with any

of the Tringles. When this became clear to the mind of Augusta,--of

Augusta, engaged as she was to the Honourable Septimus Traffick,

Member of Parliament,--Augusta's feelings were--such as may better

be understood than described! "Don't let her go, mamma," she said to

Lady Tringle one morning.

"But the Marchesa has made such a point of it."

"Bother the Marchesa! Who is the Marchesa? I believe it is all

Ayala's doing because she expects to meet that Mr. Hamel. It is

dreadful to see the way she goes on."

"Mr. Hamel was a very intimate friend of her father's."

"I don't believe a bit of it."

"He certainly used to be at his house. I remember seeing him."

"I daresay; but that doesn't justify Ayala in running after him as

she does. I believe that all this about the Marchesa is because of

Mr. Hamel." This was better than believing that Ayala was to be asked

to sing, and that Ayala was to be fÃªted and admired and danced with,

simply because Ayala was Ayala, and that they, the Tringles, in spite

of Glenbogie, Merle Park, and Queen's Gate, were not wanted at all.

But when Aunt Emmeline signified to Ayala that on that particular

morning she had better not go to the Marchesa's picnic, Ayala simply

said that she had promised;--and Ayala went.

At this time no gentleman of the family was with them. Sir Thomas

had gone, and Tom Tringle had not come. Then, just at Christmas, the

Honourable Septimus Traffick came for a short visit,--a very short

visit, no more than four or five days, because Supply and Demand were

requiring all his services in preparation for the coming Session

of Parliament. But for five halcyon days he was prepared to devote

himself to the glories of Rome under the guidance of Augusta. He

did not of course sleep at the Palazzo Ruperti, where it delighted

Lady Tringle to inform her friends in Rome that she had a suite of

apartments "au premiÃ¨re," but he ate there and drank there and almost

lived there; so that it became absolutely necessary to inform the

world of Rome that it was Augusta's destiny to become in course of

time the Honourable Mrs. Traffick, otherwise the close intimacy

would hardly have been discreet,--unless it had been thought, as the

ill-natured Marchesa had hinted, that Mr. Traffick was Lady Tringle's

elder brother. Augusta, however, was by no means ashamed of her

lover. Perhaps she felt that when it was known that she was about

to be the bride of so great a man then doors would be open for her

at any rate as wide as for her cousin. At this moment she was very

important to herself. She was about to convey no less a sum than

Â£120,000 to Mr. Traffick, who, in truth, as younger son of Lord

Boardotrade, was himself not well endowed. Considering her own

position and her future husband's rank and standing, she did not

know how a young woman could well be more important. She was very

important at any rate to Mr. Traffick. She was sure of that. When,

therefore, she learned that Ayala had been asked to a grand ball at

the Marchesa's, that Mr. Traffick was also to be among the guests,

and that none of the Tringles had been invited,--then her anger

became hot.

She must have been very stupid when she took it into her head to be

jealous of Mr. Traffick's attention to her cousin; stupid, at any

rate, when she thought that her cousin was laying out feminine lures

for Mr. Traffick. Poor Ayala! We shall see much of her in these

pages, and it may be well to declare of her at once that her ideas

at this moment about men,--or rather about a possible man,--were

confined altogether to the abstract. She had floating in her young

mind some fancies as to the beauty of love. That there should be a

hero must of course be necessary. But in her day-dreams this hero was

almost celestial,--or, at least, Ã¦thereal. It was a concentration

of poetic perfection to which there was not as yet any appanage of

apparel, of features, or of wealth. It was a something out of heaven

which should think it well to spend his whole time in adoring her

and making her more blessed than had ever yet been a woman upon the

earth. Then her first approach to a mundane feeling had been her

acknowledgment to herself that Isadore Hamel would do as a lover for

Lucy. Isadore Hamel was certainly very handsome,--was possessed of

infinite good gifts; but even he would by no means have come up to

her requirements for her own hero. That hero must have wings tinged

with azure, whereas Hamel had a not much more Ã¦therealised than

ordinary coat and waistcoat. She knew that heroes with azure wings

were not existent save in the imagination, and, as she desired a real

lover for Lucy, Hamel would do. But for herself her imagination was

too valuable then to allow her to put her foot upon earth. Such as

she was, must not Augusta have been very stupid to have thought that

Ayala should become fond of her Mr. Traffick!

Her cousin Tom had come to her, and had been to her as a Newfoundland

dog is when he jumps all over you just when he has come out of a

horsepond. She would have liked Tom had he kept his dog-like gambols

at a proper distance. But when he would cover her with muddy water

he was abominable. But this Augusta had not understood. With Mr.

Traffick there would be no dog-like gambols; and, as he was not harsh

to her, Ayala liked him. She had liked her uncle. Such men were, to

her thinking, more like dogs than lovers. She sang when Mr. Traffick

asked her, and made a picture for him, and went with him to the

Coliseum, and laughed at him about Supply and Demand. She was very

pretty, and perhaps Mr. Traffick did like to look at her.

"I really think you were too free with Mr. Traffick last night,"

Augusta said to her one morning.

"Free! How free?"

"You were--laughing at him."

"Oh, he likes that," said Ayala. "All that time we were up at the top

of St. Peter's I was quizzing him about his speeches. He lets me say

just what I please."

This was wormwood. In the first place there had been a word or two

between the lovers about that going up of St. Peter's, and Augusta

had refused to join them. She had wished Septimus to remain down with

her,--which would have been tantamount to preventing any of the party

from going up; but Septimus had persisted on ascending. Then Augusta

had been left for a long hour alone with her mother. Gertrude had no

doubt gone up, but Gertrude had lagged during the ascent. Ayala had

skipped up the interminable stairs and Mr. Traffick had trotted after

her with admiring breathless industry. This itself, with the thoughts

of the good time which Septimus might be having at the top, was very

bad. But now to be told that she, Ayala, should laugh at him; and

that he, Septimus, should like it! "I suppose he takes you to be a

child," said Augusta; "but if you are a child you ought to conduct

yourself."

"I suppose he does perceive the difference," said Ayala.

She had not in the least known what the words might convey,--had

probably meant nothing. But to Augusta it was apparent that Ayala

had declared that her lover, her Septimus, had preferred her extreme

youth to the more mature charms of his own true love,--or had,

perhaps, preferred Ayala's raillery to Augusta's serious demeanour.

"You are the most impertinent person I ever knew in my life," said

Augusta, rising from her chair and walking slowly out of the room.

Ayala stared after her, not above half comprehending the cause of the

anger.

Then came the very serious affair of the ball. The Marchesa had asked

that her dear little friend Ayala Dormer might be allowed to come

over to a little dance which her own girls were going to have. Her

own girls were so fond of Ayala! There would be no trouble. There

was a carriage which would be going somewhere else, and she would be

fetched and taken home. Ayala at once declared that she intended to

go, and her Aunt Emmeline did not refuse her sanction. Augusta was

shocked, declaring that the little dance was to be one of the great

balls of the season, and pronouncing the whole to be a falsehood; but

the affair was arranged before she could stop it.

But Mr. Traffick's affair in the matter came more within her range.

"Septimus," she said, "I would rather you would not go to that

woman's party." Septimus had been asked only on the day before the

party,--as soon, indeed, as his arrival had become known to the

Marchesa.

"Why, my own one?"

"She has not treated mamma well,--nor yet me."

"Ayala is going." He had no right to call her Ayala. So Augusta

thought.

"My cousin is behaving badly in the matter, and mamma ought not to

allow her to go. Who knows anything about the Marchesa Baldoni?"

"Both he and she are of the very best families in Rome," said Mr.

Traffick, who knew everything about it.

"At any rate they are behaving very badly to us, and I will take it

as a favour that you do not go. Asking Ayala, and then asking you, as

good as from the same house, is too marked. You ought not to go."

Perhaps Mr. Traffick had on some former occasion felt some little

interference with his freedom of action. Perhaps he liked the

acquaintance of the Marchesa. Perhaps he liked Ayala Dormer. Be that

as it might, he would not yield. "Dear Augusta, it is right that I

should go there, if it be only for half-an-hour." This he said in a

tone of voice with which Augusta was already acquainted, which she

did not love, and which, when she heard it, would make her think of

her Â£120,000. When he had spoken he left her, and she began to think

of her Â£120,000.

They both went, Ayala and Mr. Traffick,--and Mr. Traffick, instead

of staying half-an-hour, brought Ayala back at three o'clock in the

morning. Though Mr. Traffick was nearly as old as Uncle Tringle, yet

he could dance. Ayala had been astonished to find how well he could

dance, and thought that she might please her cousin Augusta by

praising the juvenility of her lover at luncheon the next day. She

had not appeared at breakfast, but had been full of the ball at

lunch. "Oh, dear, yes, I dare say there were two hundred people

there."

"That is what she calls a little dance," said Augusta, with scorn.

"I suppose that is the Italian way of talking about it," said Ayala.

"Italian way! I hate Italian ways."

"Mr. Traffick liked it very much. I'm sure he'll tell you so. I had

no idea he would care to dance."

Augusta only shook herself and turned up her nose. Lady Tringle

thought it necessary to say something in defence of her daughter's

choice. "Why should not Mr. Traffick dance like any other gentleman?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought that a man who makes so many speeches

in Parliament would think of something else. I was very glad he did,

for he danced three times with me. He can waltz as lightly as--" As

though he were young, she was going to say, but then she stopped

herself.

"He is the best dancer I ever danced with," said Augusta.

"But you almost never do dance," said Ayala.

"I suppose I may know about it as well as another," said Augusta,

angrily.

The next day was the last of Mr. Traffick's sojourn in Rome, and on

that day he and Augusta so quarrelled that, for a certain number of

hours, it was almost supposed in the family that the match would be

broken off. On the afternoon of the day after the dance Mr. Traffick

was walking with Ayala on the Pincian, while Augusta was absolutely

remaining behind with her mother. For a quarter-of-an-hour,--the

whole day, as it seemed to Augusta,--there was a full two hundred

yards between them. It was not that the engaged girl could not bear

the severance, but that she could not endure the attention paid to

Ayala. On the next morning "she had it out," as some people say, with

her lover. "If I am to be treated in this way you had better tell me

so at once," she said.

"I know no better way of treating you," said Mr. Traffick.

"Dancing with that chit all night, turning her head, and then walking

with her all the next day! I will not put up with such conduct."

Mr. Traffick valued Â£120,000 very highly, as do most men, and would

have done much to keep it; but he believed that the best way of

making sure of it would be by showing himself to be the master. "My

own one," he said, "you are really making an ass of yourself."

"Very well! Then I will write to papa, and let him know that it must

be all over."

For three hours there was terrible trouble in the apartments in the

Palazzo Ruperti, during which Mr. Traffick was enjoying himself by

walking up and down the Forum, and calculating how many Romans could

have congregated themselves in the space which is supposed to have

seen so much of the world's doings. During this time Augusta was

very frequently in hysterics; but, whether in hysterics or out of

them, she would not allow Ayala to come near her. She gave it to be

understood that Ayala had interfered fatally, foully, damnably, with

all her happiness. She demanded, from fit to fit, that telegrams

should be sent over to bring her father to Italy for her protection.

She would rave about Septimus, and then swear that, under no

consideration whatever, would she ever see him again. At the end

of three hours she was told that Septimus was in the drawing-room.

Lady Tringle had sent half-a-dozen messengers after him, and at last

he was found looking up at the Arch of Titus. "Bid him go," said

Augusta. "I never want to behold him again." But within two minutes

she was in his arms, and before dinner she was able to take a stroll

with him on the Pincian.

He left, like a thriving lover, high in the good graces of his

beloved; but the anger which had fallen on Ayala had not been

removed. Then came a rumour that the Marchesa, who was half English,

had called Ayala Cinderella, and the name had added fuel to the fire

of Augusta's wrath. There was much said about it between Lady Tringle

and her daughter, the aunt really feeling that more blame was being

attributed to Ayala than she deserved. "Perhaps she gives herself

airs," said Lady Tringle, "but really it is no more."

"She is a viper," said Augusta.

Gertrude rather took Ayala's part, telling her mother, in private,

that the accusation about Mr. Traffick was absurd. "The truth is,"

said Gertrude, "that Ayala thinks herself very clever and very

beautiful, and Augusta will not stand it." Gertrude acknowledged

that Ayala was upsetting and ungrateful. Poor Lady Tringle, in her

husband's absence, did not know what to do about her niece.

Altogether, they were uncomfortable after Mr. Traffick went and

before Tom Tringle had come. On no consideration whatsoever would

Augusta speak to her cousin. She declared that Ayala was a viper, and

would give no other reason. In all such quarrelings the matter most

distressing is that the evil cannot be hidden. Everybody at Rome who

knew the Tringles, or who knew Ayala, was aware that Augusta Tringle

would not speak to her cousin. When Ayala was asked she would shake

her locks, and open her eyes, and declare that she knew nothing about

it. In truth she knew very little about it. She remembered that

passage-at-arms about the going upstairs at Glenbogie, but she could

hardly understand that for so small an affront, and one so distant,

Augusta would now refuse to speak to her. That Augusta had always

been angry with her, and since Mr. Traffick's arrival more angry than

ever, she had felt; but that Augusta was jealous in respect to her

lover had never yet at all come home to Ayala. That she should have

wanted to captivate Mr. Traffick,--she with her high ideas of some

transcendental, more than human, hero!

But she had to put up with it, and to think of it. She had sense

enough to know that she was no more than a stranger in her aunt's

family, and that she must go if she made herself unpleasant to them.

She was aware that hitherto she had not succeeded with her residence

among them. Perhaps she might have to go. Some things she would

bear, and in them she would endeavour to amend her conduct. In other

matters she would hold her own, and go, if necessary. Though her

young imagination was still full of her unsubstantial hero,--though

she still had her castles in the air altogether incapable of

terrestrial foundation,--still there was a common sense about her

which told her that she must give and take. She would endeavour to

submit herself to her aunt. She would be kind,--as she had always

been kind,--to Gertrude. She would in all matters obey her uncle. Her

misfortune with the Newfoundland dog had almost dwindled out of her

mind. To Augusta she could not submit herself. But then Augusta,

as soon as the next session of Parliament should be over, would be

married out of the way. And, on her own part, she did think that her

aunt was inclined to take her part in the quarrel with Augusta.

Thus matters were going on in Rome when there came up another and a

worse cause for trouble.

CHAPTER VII.

TOM TRINGLE IN EARNEST.

Tom Tringle, though he had first appeared to his cousin Ayala as a

Newfoundland dog which might perhaps be pleasantly playful, and then,

as the same dog, very unpleasant because dripping with muddy water,

was nevertheless a young man with so much manly truth about him as to

be very much in love. He did not look like it; but then perhaps the

young men who do fall most absolutely into love do not look like it.

To Ayala her cousin Tom was as unloveable as Mr. Septimus Traffick.

She could like them both well enough while they would be kind to

her. But as to regarding cousin Tom as a lover,--the idea was so

preposterous to her that she could not imagine that any one else

should look upon it as real. But with Tom the idea had been real,

and was, moreover, permanent. The black locks which would be shaken

here and there, the bright glancing eyes which could be so joyous and

could be so indignant, the colour of her face which had nothing in it

of pink, which was brown rather, but over which the tell-tale blood

would rush with a quickness which was marvellous to him, the lithe

quick figure which had in it nothing of the weight of earth, the

little foot which in itself was a perfect joy, the step with all the

elasticity of a fawn,--these charms together had mastered him. Tom

was not romantic or poetic, but the romance and poetry of Ayala had

been divine to him. It is not always like to like in love. Titania

loved the weaver Bottom with the ass's head. Bluebeard, though a

bad husband, is supposed to have been fond of his last wife. The

Beauty has always been beloved by the Beast. To Ayala the thing

was monstrous;--but it was natural. Tom Tringle was determined to

have his way, and when he started for Rome was more intent upon his

love-making than all the glories of the Capitol and the Vatican.

When he first made his appearance before Ayala's eyes he was bedecked

in a manner that was awful to her. Down at Glenbogie he had affected

a rough attire, as is the custom with young men of ample means when

fishing, shooting, or the like, is supposed to be the employment

then in hand. The roughness had been a little overdone, but it had

added nothing to his own uncouthness. In London he was apt to run a

little towards ornamental gilding, but in London his tastes had been

tempered by the ill-natured criticism of the world at large. He had

hardly dared at Queen's Gate to wear his biggest pins; but he had

taken upon himself to think that at Rome an Englishman might expose

himself with all his jewelry. "Oh, Tom, I never saw anything so

stunning," his sister Gertrude said to him. He had simply frowned

upon her, and had turned himself to Ayala, as though Ayala, being

an artist, would be able to appreciate something beautiful in art.

Ayala had looked at him and had marvelled, and had ventured to hope

that, with his Glenbogie dress, his Glenbogie manners and Glenbogie

propensities would be changed.

At this time the family at Rome was very uncomfortable. Augusta would

not speak to her cousin, and had declared to her mother and sister

her determination never to speak to Ayala again. For a time Aunt

Emmeline had almost taken her niece's part, feeling that she might

best bring things back to a condition of peace in this manner. Ayala,

she had thought, might thus be decoyed into a state of submission.

Ayala, so instigated, had made her attempt. "What is the matter,

Augusta," she had said, "that you are determined to quarrel with me?"

Then had followed a little offer that bygones should be bygones.

"I have quarrelled with you," said Augusta, "because you do not know

how to behave yourself." Then Ayala had flashed forth, and the little

attempt led to a worse condition than ever, and words were spoken

which even Aunt Emmeline had felt to be irrevocable, irremediable.

"Only that you are going away I would not consent to live here," said

Ayala. Then Aunt Emmeline had asked her where she would go to live

should it please her to remove herself. Ayala had thought of this for

a moment, and then had burst into tears. "If I could not live I could

die. Anything would be better than to be treated as she treats me."

So the matters were when Tom came to Rome with all his jewelry.

Lady Tringle had already told herself that, in choosing Ayala, she

had chosen wrong. Lucy, though not so attractive as Ayala, was

pretty, quiet, and ladylike. So she thought now. And as to Ayala's

attractions, they were not at all of a nature to be serviceable to

such a family as hers. To have her own girls outshone, to be made

to feel that the poor orphan was the one person most worthy of note

among them, to be subjected to the caprices of a pretty, proud,

ill-conditioned minx;--thus it was that Aunt Emmeline was taught

to regard her own charity and good-nature towards her niece. There

was, she said, no gratitude in Ayala. Had she said that there was no

humility she would have been more nearly right. She was entitled, she

thought, to expect both gratitude and humility, and she was sorry

that she had opened the Paradise of her opulent home to one so little

grateful and so little humble as Ayala. She saw now her want of

judgment in that she had not taken Lucy.

Tom, who was not a fool, in spite of his trinkets, saw the state of

the case, and took Ayala's part at once. "I think you are quite

right," he said to her, on the first occasion on which he had

contrived to find himself alone with her after his arrival.

"Right about what?"

"In not giving up to Augusta. She was always like that when she was a

child, and now her head is turned about Traffick."

"I shouldn't grudge her her lover if she would only let me alone."

"I don't suppose she hurts you much?"

"She sets my aunt against me, and that makes me unhappy. Of course I

am wretched."

"Oh, Ayala, don't be wretched."

"How is one to help it? I never said an ill-natured word to her,

and now I am so lonely among them!" In saying this,--in seeking to

get one word of sympathy from her cousin, she forgot for a moment

his disagreeable pretensions. But, no sooner had she spoken of her

loneliness, than she saw that ogle in his eye of which she had spoken

with so much ludicrous awe in her letters from Glenbogie to her

sister.

"I shall always take your part," said he.

"I don't want any taking of parts."

"But I shall. I am not going to see you put upon. You are more to me,

Ayala, than any of them." Then he looked at her, whereupon she got up

and ran away.

But she could not always run away, nor could she always refuse when

he asked her to go with him about the show-places of the city. To

avoid starting alone with him was within her power; but she found

herself compelled to join herself to Gertrude and her brother in

some of those little excursions which were taken for her benefit. At

this time there had come to be a direct quarrel between Lady Tringle

and the Marchesa, which, however, had arisen altogether on the part

of Augusta. Augusta had forced her mother to declare that she was

insulted, and then there was no more visiting between them. This had

been sad enough for Ayala, who had struck up an intimacy with the

Marchesa's daughters. But the Marchesa had explained to her that

there was no help for it. "It won't do for you to separate yourself

from your aunt," she had said. "Of course we shall be friends, and

at some future time you shall come and see us." So there had been a

division, and Ayala would have been quite alone had she declined the

proffered companionship of Gertrude.

Within the walls and arches and upraised terraces of the Coliseum

they were joined one day by young Hamel, the sculptor, who had not,

as yet, gone back to London,--and had not, as yet, met Lucy in the

gardens at Kensington; and with him there had been one Frank Houston,

who had made acquaintance with Lady Tringle, and with the Tringles

generally, since they had been at Rome. Frank Houston was a young man

of family, with a taste for art, very good-looking, but not specially

well off in regard to income. He had heard of the good fortune of

Septimus Traffick in having prepared for himself a connection with so

wealthy a family as the Tringles, and had thought it possible that a

settlement in life might be comfortable for himself. What few soft

words he had hitherto been able to say to Gertrude had been taken

in good part, and when, therefore, they met among the walls of the

Coliseum, she had naturally straggled away to see some special wonder

which he had a special aptitude for showing. Hamel remained with

Ayala and Tom, talking of the old days at the bijou, till he found

himself obliged to leave them. Then Tom had his opportunity.

"Ayala," he said, "all this must be altered."

"What must be altered?"

"If you only knew, Ayala, how much you are to me."

"I wish you wouldn't, Tom. I don't want to be anything to anybody in

particular."

"What I mean is, that I won't have them sit upon you. They treat

you as--as,--well, as though you had only half a right to be one of

them."

"No more I have. I have no right at all."

"But that's not the way I want it to be. If you were my wife--"

"Tom, pray don't."

"Why not? I'm in earnest. Why ain't I to speak as I think? Oh, Ayala,

if you knew how much I think of you."

"But you shouldn't. You haven't got a right."

"I have got a right."

"But I don't want it, Tom, and I won't have it." He had carried her

away now to the end of the terrace, or ruined tier of seats, on which

they were walking, and had got her so hemmed into a corner that she

could not get away from him. She was afraid of him, lest he should

put out his hand to take hold of her,--lest something even more

might be attempted. And yet his manner was manly and sincere, and

had it not been for his pins and his chains she could not but have

acknowledged his goodness to her, much as she might have disliked his

person. "I want to get out," she said. "I won't stay here any more."

Mr. Traffick, on the top of St. Peter's, had been a much pleasanter

companion.

"Don't you believe me when I tell you that I love you better than

anybody?" pleaded Tom.

"No."

"Not believe me? Oh, Ayala!"

"I don't want to believe anything. I want to get out. If you go on,

I'll tell my aunt."

Tell her aunt! There was a want of personal consideration to himself

in this way of receiving his addresses which almost angered him. Tom

Tringle was not in the least afraid of his mother,--was not even

afraid of his father as long as he was fairly regular at the office

in Lombard Street. He was quite determined to please himself in

marriage, and was disposed to think that his father and mother would

like him to be settled. Money was no object. There was, to his

thinking, no good reason why he should not marry his cousin. For her

the match was so excellent that he hardly expected she would reject

him when she could be made to understand that he was really in

earnest. "You may tell all the world," he said proudly. "All I want

is that you should love me."

"But I don't. There are Gertrude and Mr. Houston, and I want to go to

them."

"Say one nice word to me, Ayala."

"I don't know how to say a nice word. Can't you be made to understand

that I don't like it?"

"Ayala."

"Why don't you let me go away?"

"Ayala,--give me--one--kiss." Then Ayala did go away, escaping by

some kid-like manoeuvre among the ruins, and running quickly, while

he followed her, joined herself to the other pair of lovers, who

probably were less in want of her society than she of theirs. "Ayala,

I am quite in earnest," said Tom, as they were walking home, "and I

mean to go on with it."

Ayala thought that there was nothing for it but to tell her aunt.

That there would be some absurdity in such a proceeding she did

feel,--that she would be acting as though her cousin were a naughty

boy who was merely teasing her. But she felt also the peculiar danger

of her own position. Her aunt must be made to understand that she,

Ayala, was innocent in the matter. It would be terrible to her to

be suspected even for a moment of a desire to inveigle the heir.

That Augusta would bring such an accusation against her she thought

probable. Augusta had said as much even at Glenbogie. She must

therefore be on the alert, and let it be understood at once

that she was not leagued with her cousin Tom. There would be an

absurdity;--but that would be better than suspicion.

She thought about it all that afternoon, and in the evening she came

to a resolution. She would write a letter to her cousin and persuade

him if possible to desist. If he should again annoy her after that

she would appeal to her aunt. Then she wrote and sent her letter,

which was as follows;--

DEAR TOM,

You don't know how unhappy you made me at the Coliseum

to-day. I don't think you ought to turn against me when

you know what I have to bear. It is turning against me

to talk as you did. Of course it means nothing; but you

shouldn't do it. It \_never never\_ could mean anything. I

hope you will be good-natured and kind to me, and then I

shall be so much obliged to you. If you won't say anything

more like that I will forget it altogether.

Your affectionate cousin,

AYALA.

The letter ought to have convinced him. Those two underscored nevers

should have eradicated from his mind the feeling which had been

previously produced by the assertion that he had "meant nothing."

But he was so assured in his own meanings that he paid no attention

whatever to the nevers. The letter was a delight to him because it

gave him the opportunity of a rejoinder,--and he wrote his rejoinder

on a scented sheet of note-paper and copied it twice;--

DEAREST AYALA,

Why do you say that it means nothing? It means everything.

No man was ever more in earnest in speaking to a lady than

I am with you. Why should I not be in earnest when I am so

deeply in love? From the first moment in which I saw you

down at Glenbogie I knew how it was going to be with me.

As for my mother I don't think she would say a word. Why

should she? But I am not the sort of man to be talked out

of my intentions in such a matter as this. I have set my

heart upon having you and nothing will ever turn me off.

Dearest Ayala, let me have one look to say that you will

love me, and I shall be the happiest man in England. I

think you so beautiful! I do, indeed. The governor has

always said that if I would settle down and marry there

should be lots of money. What could I do better with it

than make my darling look as grand as the best of them.

Yours, always meaning it,

Most affectionately,

T. TRINGLE.

It almost touched her,--not in the way of love but of gratitude. He

was still to her like Bottom with the ass's head, or the Newfoundland

dog gambolling out of the water. There was the heavy face, and there

were the big chains and the odious rings, and the great hands and

the clumsy feet,--making together a creature whom it was impossible

even to think of with love. She shuddered as she remembered the

proposition which had been made to her in the Coliseum.

And now by writing to him she had brought down upon herself this

absolute love-letter. She had thought that by appealing to him as

"Dear Tom," and by signing herself his affectionate cousin, she might

have prevailed. If he could only be made to understand that it could

never mean anything! But now, on the other hand, she had begun to

understand that it did \_mean\_ a great deal. He had sent to her a

regular offer of marriage! The magnitude of the thing struck her at

last. The heir of all the wealth of her mighty uncle wanted to make

her his wife!

But it was to her exactly as though the heir had come to her wearing

an ass's head on his shoulders. Love him! Marry him!--or even touch

him? Oh, no. They might ill-use her; they might scold her; they might

turn her out of the house; but no consideration would induce her to

think of Tom Tringle as a lover.

And yet he was in earnest, and honest, and good. And some

answer,--some further communication must be made to him. She

did recognise some nobility in him, though personally he was so

distasteful to her. Now his appeal to her had taken the guise of an

absolute offer of marriage he was entitled to a discreet and civil

answer. Romantic, dreamy, poetic, childish as she was, she knew as

much as that. "Go away, Tom, you fool, you," would no longer do for

the occasion. As she thought of it all that night it was borne in

upon her more strongly than ever that her only protection would be in

telling her aunt, and in getting her aunt to make Tom understand that

there must be no more of it. Early on the following morning she found

herself in her aunt's bedroom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOUT.

"Aunt Emmeline, I want you to read this letter." So it was that Ayala

commenced the interview. At this moment Ayala was not on much better

terms with her aunt than she was with her cousin Augusta. Ayala was

a trouble to her,--Lady Tringle,--who was altogether perplexed with

the feeling that she had burdened herself with an inmate in her house

who was distasteful to her and of whom she could not rid herself.

Ayala had turned out on her hands something altogether different

from the girl she had intended to cherish and patronise. Ayala

was independent; superior rather than inferior to her own girls;

more thought of by others; apparently without any touch of that

subservience which should have been produced in her by her position.

Ayala seemed to demand as much as though she were a daughter of the

house, and at the same time to carry herself as though she were more

gifted than the daughters of the house. She was less obedient even

than a daughter. All this Aunt Emmeline could not endure with a

placid bosom. She was herself kind of heart. She acknowledged her

duty to her dead sister. She wished to protect and foster the orphan.

She did not even yet wish to punish Ayala by utter desertion. She

would protect her in opposition to Augusta's more declared malignity;

but she did wish to be rid of Ayala, if she only knew how.

She took her son's letter and read it, and as a matter of course

misunderstood the position. At Glenbogie something had been whispered

to her about Tom and Ayala, but she had not believed much in it.

Ayala was a child, and Tom was to her not much more than a boy. But

now here was a genuine love-letter,--a letter in which her son had

made a distinct proposition to marry the orphan. She did not stop to

consider why Ayala had brought the letter to her, but entertained at

once an idea that the two young people were going to vex her very

soul by a lamentable love affair. How imprudent she had been to let

the two young people be together in Rome, seeing that the matter had

been whispered to her at Glenbogie! "How long has this been going

on?" she asked, severely.

"He used to tease me at Glenbogie, and now he is doing it again,"

said Ayala.

"There must certainly be put an end to it. You must go away."

Ayala knew at once that her aunt was angry with her, and was

indignant at the injustice. "Of course there must be put an end to

it, Aunt Emmeline. He has no right to annoy me when I tell him not."

"I suppose you have encouraged him."

This was too cruel to be borne! Encouraged him! Ayala's anger was

caused not so much by a feeling that her aunt had misappreciated the

cause of her coming as that it should have been thought possible that

she should have "encouraged" such a lover. It was the outrage to her

taste rather than to her conduct which afflicted her. "He is a lout,"

she said; "a stupid lout!" thus casting her scorn upon the mother as

well as on the son, and, indeed, upon the whole family. "I have not

encouraged him. It is untrue."

"Ayala, you are very impertinent."

"And you are very unjust. Because I want to put a stop to it I come

to you, and you tell me that I encourage him. You are worse than

Augusta."

This was too much for the good nature even of Aunt Emmeline. Whatever

may have been the truth as to the love affair, however innocent Ayala

may have been in that matter, or however guilty Tom, such words

from a niece to her aunt,--from a dependent to her superior,--were

unpardonable. The extreme youthfulness of the girl, a peculiar look

of childhood which she still had with her, made the feeling so much

the stronger. "You are worse than Augusta!"

And this was said to her who was specially conscious of her

endeavours to mitigate Augusta's just anger. She bridled up, and

tried to look big and knit her brows. At that moment she could not

think what must be the end of it, but she felt that Ayala must be

crushed. "How dare you speak to me like that, 'Miss'?" she said.

"So you are. It is very cruel. Tom will go on saying all this

nonsense to me, and when I come to you you say I encourage him! I

never encouraged him. I despise him too much. I did not think my own

aunt could have told me that I encouraged any man. No, I didn't. You

drive me to it, so that I have got to be impertinent."

"You had better go to your room," said the aunt. Then Ayala, lifting

her head as high as she knew how, walked towards the door. "You had

better leave that letter with me." Ayala considered the matter for

a moment, and then handed the letter a second time to her aunt. It

could be nothing to her who saw the letter. She did not want it.

Having thus given it up she stalked off in silent disdain and went to

her chamber.

Aunt Emmeline, when she was left alone, felt herself to be enveloped

in a cloud of doubt. The desirableness of Tom as a husband first

forced itself upon her attention, and the undesirableness of Ayala as

a wife for Tom. She was perplexed at her own folly in not having seen

that danger of this kind would arise when she first proposed to take

Ayala into the house. Aunts and uncles do not like the marriage of

cousins, and the parents of rich children do not, as a rule, approve

of marriages with those which are poor. Although Ayala had been so

violent, Lady Tringle could not rid herself of the idea that her

darling boy was going to throw himself away. Then her cheeks became

red with anger as she remembered that her Tom had been called a

lout,--a stupid lout. There was an ingratitude in the use of such

language which was not alleviated even by the remembrance that it

tended against that matrimonial danger of which she was so much

afraid. Ayala was behaving very badly. She ought not to have coaxed

Tom to be her lover, and she certainly ought not to have called Tom a

lout. And then Ayala had told her aunt that she was unjust and worse

than Augusta! It was out of the question that such a state of things

should be endured. Ayala must be made to go away.

Before the day was over Lady Tringle spoke to her son, and was

astonished to find that the "lout" was quite in earnest,--so much

in earnest that he declared his purpose of marrying his cousin in

opposition to his father and mother, in opposition even to Ayala

herself. He was so much in earnest that he would not be roused to

wrath even when he was told that Ayala had called him a lout. And

then grew upon the mother a feeling that the young man had never been

so little loutish before. For there had been, even in her maternal

bosom, a feeling that Tom was open to the criticism expressed on him.

Tom had been a hobble-de-hoy, one of those overgrown lads who come

late to their manhood, and who are regarded by young ladies as louts.

Though he had spent his money only too freely when away, his sisters

had sometimes said that he could not say "bo to a goose" at home. But

now,--now Tom was quite an altered young man. When his own letter was

shown to him he simply said that he meant to stick to it. When it was

represented to him that his cousin would be quite an unfit wife for

him he assured his mother that his own opinion on that matter was

very different. When his father's anger was threatened he declared

that his father would have no right to be angry with him if he

married a lady. At the word "lout" he simply smiled. "She'll come to

think different from that before she's done with me," he said, with a

smile. Even the mother could not but perceive that the young man had

been much improved by his love.

But what was she to do? Two or three days went on, during which there

was no reconciliation between her and Ayala. Between Augusta and

Ayala no word was spoken. Messages were taken to her by Gertrude,

the object of which was to induce her to ask her aunt's pardon. But

Ayala was of opinion that her aunt ought to ask her pardon, and could

not be beaten from it. "Why did she say that I encouraged him?" she

demanded indignantly of Gertrude. "I don't think she did encourage

him," said Gertrude to her mother. This might possibly be true, but

not the less had she misbehaved. And though she might not yet have

encouraged her lover it was only too probable that she might do so

when she found that her lover was quite in earnest.

Lady Tringle was much harassed. And then there came an additional

trouble. Gertrude informed her mother that she had engaged herself

to Mr. Francis Houston, and that Mr. Houston was going to write to

her father with the object of proposing himself as a son-in-law. Mr.

Houston came also to herself, and told her, in the most natural tone

in the world, that he intended to marry her daughter. She had not

known what to say. It was Sir Thomas who managed all matters of

money. She had an idea that Mr. Houston was very poor. But then so

also had been Mr. Traffick, who had been received into the family

with open arms. But then Mr. Traffick had a career, whereas Mr.

Houston was lamentably idle. She could only refer Mr. Houston to Sir

Thomas, and beg him not to come among them any more till Sir Thomas

had decided. Upon this Gertrude also got angry, and shut herself up

in her room. The apartments Ruperti were, therefore, upon the whole,

an uncomfortable home to them.

Letters upon letters were written to Sir Thomas, and letters upon

letters came. The first letter had been about Ayala. He had been

much more tender towards Ayala than her aunt had been. He talked

of calf-love, and said that Tom was a fool; but he had not at once

thought it necessary to give imperative orders for Tom's return. As

to Ayala's impudence, he evidently regarded it as nothing. It was not

till Aunt Emmeline had spoken out in her third letter that he seemed

to recognise the possibility of getting rid of Ayala altogether. And

this he did in answer to a suggestion which had been made to him. "If

she likes to change with her sister Lucy, and you like it, I shall

not object," said Sir Thomas. Then there came an order to Tom that

he should return to Lombard Street at once; but this order had been

rendered abortive by the sudden return of the whole family. Sir

Thomas, in his first letter as to Gertrude, had declared that the

Houston marriage would not do at all. Then, when he was told that

Gertrude and Mr. Houston had certainly met each other more than once

since an order had been given for their separation, he desired the

whole family to come back at once to Merle Park.

The proposition as to Lucy had arisen in this wise. Tom being in the

same house with Ayala, of course had her very much at advantage, and

would carry on his suit in spite of any abuse which she might lavish

upon him. It was quite in vain that she called him lout. "You'll

think very different from that some of these days, Ayala," he said,

more seriously.

"No, I shan't; I shall think always the same."

"When you know how much I love you, you'll change."

"I don't want you to love me," she said; "and if you were anything

that is good you wouldn't go on after I have told you so often. It is

not manly of you. You have brought me to all manner of trouble. It is

your fault, but they make me suffer."

After that Ayala again went to her aunt, and on this occasion the

family misfortune was discussed in more seemly language. Ayala was

still indignant, but she said nothing insolent. Aunt Emmeline was

still averse to her niece, but she abstained from crimination. They

knew each as enemies, but recognised the wisdom of keeping the peace.

"As for that, Aunt Emmeline," Ayala said, "you may be quite sure that

I shall never encourage him. I shall never like him well enough."

"Very well. Then we need say no more about that, my dear. Of course,

it must be unpleasant to us all, being in the same house together."

"It is very unpleasant to me, when he will go on bothering me like

that. It makes me wish that I were anywhere else."

Then Aunt Emmeline began to think about it very seriously. It was

very unpleasant. Ayala had made herself disagreeable to all the

ladies of the family, and only too agreeable to the young gentleman.

Nor did the manifest favour of Sir Thomas do much towards raising

Ayala in Lady Tringle's estimation. Sir Thomas had only laughed when

Augusta had been requested to go upstairs for the scrap-book. Sir

Thomas had been profuse with his presents even when Ayala had been

most persistent in her misbehaviour. And then all that affair of the

Marchesa, and even Mr. Traffick's infatuation! If Ayala wished that

she were somewhere else would it not be well to indulge her wish!

Aunt Emmeline certainly wished it. "If you think so, perhaps some

arrangement can be made," said Aunt Emmeline, very slowly.

"What arrangement?"

"You must not suppose that I wish to turn you out?"

"But what arrangement?"

"You see, Ayala, that unfortunately we have not all of us hit it off

nicely; have we?"

"Not at all, Aunt Emmeline. Augusta is always angry with me. And

you,--you think that I have encouraged Tom."

"I am saying nothing about that, Ayala."

"But what arrangement is it, Aunt Emmeline?" The matter was one of

fearful import to Ayala. She was prudent enough to understand that

well. The arrangement must be one by which she would be banished from

all the wealth of the Tringles. Her coming among them had not been a

success. She had already made them tired of her by her petulance and

independence. Young as she was she could see that, and comprehend the

material injury she had done herself by her folly. She had been very

wrong in telling Augusta to go upstairs. She had been wrong in the

triumph of her exclusive visits to the Marchesa. She had been wrong

in walking away with Mr. Traffick on the Pincian. She could see that.

She had not been wrong in regard to Tom,--except in calling him a

lout; but whether wrong or right she had been most unfortunate. But

the thing had been done, and she must go.

At this moment the wealth of the Tringles seemed to be more to her

than it had ever been before,--and her own poverty and destitution

seemed to be more absolute. When the word "arrangement" was whispered

to her there came upon her a clear idea of all that which she was

to lose. She was to be banished from Merle Park, from Queen's Gate,

and from Glenbogie. For her there were to be no more carriages, and

horses, and pretty trinkets;--none of that abandon of the luxury

of money among which the Tringles lived. But she had done it for

herself, and she would not say a word in opposition to the fate which

was before her. "What arrangement, aunt?" she said again, in a voice

which was intended to welcome any arrangement that might be made.

Then her aunt spoke very softly. "Of course, dear Ayala, we do not

wish to do less than we at first intended. But as you are not happy

here--" Then she paused, almost ashamed of herself.

"I am not happy here," said Ayala, boldly.

"How would it be if you were to change,--with Lucy?"

The idea which had been present to Lady Tringle for some weeks past

had never struck Ayala. The moment she heard it she felt that she

was more than ever bound to assent. If the home from which she was

to be banished was good, then would that good fall upon Lucy. Lucy

would have the carriages and the horses and the trinkets, Lucy, who

certainly was not happy at Kingsbury Crescent. "I should be very

glad, indeed," said Ayala.

Her voice was so brave and decided that, in itself, it gave fresh

offence to her aunt. Was there to be no regret after so much

generosity? But she misunderstood the girl altogether. As the words

were coming from her lips,--"I should be very glad, indeed,"--Ayala's

heart was sinking with tenderness as she remembered how much after

all had been done for her. But as they wished her to go there should

be not a word, not a sign of unwillingness on her part.

"Then perhaps it can be arranged," said Lady Tringle.

"I don't know what Uncle Dosett may say. Perhaps they are very fond

of Lucy now."

"They wouldn't wish to stand in her way, I should think."

"At any rate, I won't. If you, and my uncles, and Aunt Margaret, will

consent, I will go whenever you choose. Of course I must do just as

I'm told."

Aunt Emmeline made a faint demur to this; but still the matter was

held to be arranged. Letters were written to Sir Thomas, and letters

came, and at last even Sir Thomas had assented. He suggested, in

the first place, that all the facts which would follow the exchange

should be explained to Ayala; but he was obliged after a while to

acknowledge that this would be inexpedient. The girl was willing; and

knew no doubt that she was to give up the great wealth of her present

home. But she had proved herself to be an unfit participator, and it

was better that she should go.

Then the departure of them all from Rome was hurried on by the

indiscretion of Gertrude. Gertrude declared that she had a right to

her lover. As to his having no income, what matter for that. Everyone

knew that Septimus Traffick had no income. Papa had income enough for

them all. Mr. Houston was a gentleman. Till this moment no one had

known of how strong a will of her own Gertrude was possessed. When

Gertrude declared that she would not consent to be separated from Mr.

Houston then they were all hurried home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EXCHANGE.

Such was the state of things when Mr. Dosett brought the three

letters home with him to Kingsbury Crescent, having been so much

disturbed by the contents of the two which were addressed to himself

as to have found himself compelled to leave his office two hours

before the proper time. The three letters were handed together by her

uncle to Lucy, and she, seeing the importance of the occasion, read

the two open ones before she broke the envelope of her own. That from

Sir Thomas came first, and was as follows;--

Lombard Street, January, 187--.

MY DEAR DOSETT,

I have had a correspondence with the ladies at Rome which

has been painful in its nature, but which I had better

perhaps communicate to you at once. Ayala has not got on

as well with Lady Tringle and the girls as might have been

wished, and they all think it will be better that she and

Lucy should change places. I chiefly write to give my

assent. Your sister will no doubt write to you. I may as

well mention to you, should you consent to take charge of

Ayala, that I have made some provision for her in my will,

and that I shall not change it. I have to add on my own

account that I have no complaint of my own to make against

Ayala.

Yours sincerely,

T. TRINGLE.

Lucy, when she had read this, proceeded at once to the letter from

her aunt. The matter to her was one of terrible importance, but the

importance was quite as great to Ayala. She had been allowed to go

up alone into her own room. The letters were of such a nature that

she could hardly have read them calmly in the presence of her Aunt

Dosett. It was thus that her Aunt Emmeline had written;--

Palazzo Ruperti, Rome, Thursday.

MY DEAR REGINALD,

I am sure you will be sorry to hear that we are in great

trouble here. This has become so bad that we are obliged

to apply to you to help us. Now you must understand that

I do not mean to say a word against dear Ayala;--only she

does not suit. It will occur sometimes that people who

are most attached to each other do not suit. So it has

been with dear Ayala. She is not happy with us. She has

not perhaps accommodated herself to her cousins quite as

carefully as she might have done. She is fully as sensible

of this as I am, and is, herself, persuaded that there had

better be a change.

Now, my dear Reginald, I am quite aware that when poor

Egbert died it was I who chose Ayala, and that you took

Lucy partly in compliance with my wishes. Now I write to

suggest that there should be a change. I am sure you will

give me credit for a desire to do the best I can for both

the poor dear girls. I did think that this might be best

done by letting Ayala come to us. I now think that Lucy

would do better with her cousins, and that Ayala would be

more attractive without the young people around her.

When I see you I will tell you everything. There has been

no great fault. She has spoken a word or two to me which

had been better unsaid, but I am well convinced that it

has come from hot temper and not from a bad heart. Perhaps

I had better tell you the truth. Tom has admired her. She

has behaved very well; but she could not bear to be spoken

to, and so there have been unpleasantnesses. And the girls

certainly have not got on well together. Sir Thomas quite

agrees with me that if you will consent there had better

be a change.

I will not write to dear Lucy herself because you and

Margaret can explain it all so much better,--if you will

consent to our plan. Ayala also will write to her sister.

But pray tell her from me that I will love her very dearly

if she will come to me. And indeed I have loved Ayala

almost as though she were my own, only we have not been

quite able to hit it off together.

Of course neither has Sir Thomas or have I any idea of

escaping from a responsibility. I should be quite unhappy

if I did not have one of poor dear Egbert's girls with me.

Only I do think that Lucy would be the best for us; and

Ayala thinks so too. I should be quite unhappy if I were

doing this in opposition to Ayala.

We shall be in England almost as soon as this letter, and

I should be so glad if this could be decided at once. If

a thing like this is to be done it is so much better for

all parties that it should be done quickly. Pray give my

best love to Margaret, and tell her that Ayala shall bring

everything with her that she wants.

Your most affectionate sister,

EMMELINE TRINGLE.

The letter, though it was much longer than her uncle's, going into

details, such as that of Tom's unfortunate passion for his cousin,

had less effect upon Lucy, as it did not speak with so much authority

as that from Sir Thomas. What Sir Thomas said would surely be done;

whereas Aunt Emmeline was only a woman, and her letter, unsupported,

might not have carried conviction. But, if Sir Thomas wished it,

surely it must be done. Then, at last, came Ayala's letter;--

Rome, Thursday.

DEAREST, DEAREST LUCY,

Oh, I have such things to write to you! Aunt Emmeline has

told it all to Uncle Reginald. You are to come and be the

princess, and I am to go and be the milkmaid at home. I am

quite content that it should be so because I know that it

will be the best. You ought to be a princess and I ought

to be a milkmaid.

It has been coming almost ever since the first day that I

came among them,--since I told Augusta to go upstairs for

the scrap-book. I felt from the very moment in which the

words were uttered that I had gone and done for myself.

But I am not a bit sorry, as you will come in my place.

Augusta will very soon be gone now, and Aunt Emmeline

is not bad at all if you will only not contradict her.

I always contradicted her, and I know that I have been a

fool. But I am not a bit sorry, as you are to come instead

of me.

But it is not only about Augusta and Aunt Emmeline. There

has been that oaf Tom. Poor Tom! I do believe that he is

the most good-natured fellow alive. And if he had not so

many chains I should not dislike him so very much. But he

will go on saying horrible things to me. And then he wrote

me a letter! Oh dear! I took the letter to Aunt Emmeline,

and that made the quarrel. She said that I had--encouraged

him! Oh, Lucy, if you will think of that! I was so angry

that I said ever so much to her,--till she sent me out of

the room. She had no business to say that I encouraged

him. It was shameful! But she has never forgiven me,

because I scolded her. So they have decided among them

that I am to be sent away, and that you are to come in my

place.

My own darling Lucy, it will be ever so much better. I

know that you are not happy in Kingsbury Crescent, and

that I shall bear it very much better. I can sit still and

mend sheets.

Poor Ayala, how little she knew herself!

And you will make a beautiful grand lady, quiescent and

dignified as a grand lady ought to be. At any rate it

would be impossible that I should remain here. Tom is bad

enough, but to be told that I encourage him is more than I

can bear.

I shall see you very soon, but I cannot help writing and

telling it to you all. Give my love to Aunt Dosett. If she

will consent to receive me I will endeavour to be good to

her. In the meantime good-bye.

Your most affectionate sister,

AYALA.

When Lucy had completed the reading of the letters she sat for a

considerable time wrapped in thought. There was, in truth, very much

that required thinking. It was proposed that the whole tenour of

her life should be changed, and changed in a direction which would

certainly suit her taste. She had acknowledged to herself that she

had hated the comparative poverty of her Uncle Dosett's life, hating

herself in that she was compelled to make such acknowledgment. But

there had been more than the poverty which had been distasteful to

her,--a something which she had been able to tell herself that she

might be justified in hating without shame. There had been to her an

absence of intellectual charm in the habits and manners of Kingsbury

Crescent which she had regarded as unfortunate and depressing. There

had been no thought of art delights. No one read poetry. No one heard

music. No one looked at pictures. A sheet to be darned was the one

thing of greatest importance. The due development of a leg of mutton,

the stretching of a pound of butter, the best way of repressing the

washerwoman's bills,--these had been the matters of interest. And

they had not been made the less irritating to her by her aunt's

extreme goodness in the matter. The leg of mutton was to be developed

in the absence of her uncle,--if possible without his knowledge. He

was to have his run of clean linen. Lucy did not grudge him anything,

but was sickened by that partnership in economy which was established

between her and her aunt. Undoubtedly from time to time she had

thought of the luxuries which had been thrown in Ayala's way. There

had been a regret,--not that Ayala should have them but that she

should have missed them. Money she declared that she despised;--but

the easy luxury of the bijou was sweet to her memory.

Now it was suggested to her suddenly that she was to exchange the

poverty for the luxury, and to return to a mode of life in which

her mind might be devoted to things of beauty. The very scenery of

Glenbogie,--what a charm it would have for her! Judging from her

uncle's manner, as well as she could during that moment in which he

handed to her the letter, she imagined that he intended to make no

great objection. Her aunt disliked her. She was sure that her aunt

disliked her in spite of the partnership. Only that there was one

other view of the case--how happy might the transfer be. Her uncle

was always gentle to her, but there could hardly as yet have grown up

any strong affection for her. To him she was grateful, but she could

not tell herself that to part from him would be a pang. There was,

however, another view of the case.

Ayala! How would it be with Ayala! Would Ayala like the partnership

and the economies? Would Ayala be cheerful as she sat opposite to

her aunt for four hours at a time! Ayala had said that she could sit

still and mend sheets, but was it not manifest enough that Ayala knew

nothing of the life of which she was speaking. And would she, Lucy,

be able to enjoy the glories of Glenbogie while she thought that

Ayala was eating out her heart in the sad companionship of Kingsbury

Crescent? For above an hour she sat and thought; but of one aspect

which the affair bore she did not think. She did not reflect that she

and Ayala were in the hands of Fate, and that they must both do as

their elders should require of them.

At last there came a knock at the door, and her aunt entered. She

would sooner that it should have been her uncle: but there was no

choice but that the matter should be now discussed with the woman

whom she did not love,--this matter that was so dreadful to herself

in all its bearings, and so dreadful to one for whom she would

willingly sacrifice herself if it were possible! She did not know

what she could say to create sympathy with Aunt Dosett. "Lucy," said

Aunt Dosett, "this is a very serious proposal."

"Very serious," said Lucy, sternly.

"I have not read the letters, but your uncle has told me about it."

Then Lucy handed her the two letters, keeping that from Ayala to

herself, and she sat perfectly still while her aunt read them both

slowly. "Your Aunt Emmeline is certainly in earnest," said Mrs.

Dosett.

"Aunt Emmeline is very good-natured, and perhaps she will change her

mind if we tell her that we wish it."

"But Sir Thomas has agreed to it."

"I am sure my uncle will give way if Aunt Emmeline will ask him.

He says he has no complaint to make against Ayala. I think it is

Augusta, and Augusta will be married, and will go away very soon."

Then there came a change, a visible change, over the countenance of

Aunt Dosett, and a softening of the voice,--so that she looked and

spoke as Lucy had not seen or heard her before. There are people

apparently so hard, so ungenial, so unsympathetic, that they who only

half know them expect no trait of tenderness, think that features

so little alluring cannot be compatible with softness. Lucy had

acknowledged her Aunt Dosett to be good, but believed her to be

incapable of being touched. But a word or two had now conquered

her. The girl did not want to leave her,--did not seize the first

opportunity of running from her poverty to the splendour of the

Tringles! "But, Lucy," she said, and came and placed herself nearer

to Lucy on the bed.

"Ayala--," said Lucy, sobbing.

"I will be kind to her,--perhaps kinder than I have been to you."

"You have been kind, and I have been ungrateful. I know it. But I

will do better now, Aunt Dosett. I will stay, if you will have me."

"They are rich and powerful, and you will have to do as they direct."

"No! Who are they that I should be made to come and go at their

bidding? They cannot make me leave you."

"But they can rid themselves of Ayala. You see what your uncle says

about money for Ayala."

"I hate money."

"Money is a thing which none of us can afford to hate. Do you think

it will not be much to your Uncle Reginald to know that you are both

provided for? Already he is wretched because there will be nothing to

come to you. If you go to your Aunt Emmeline, Sir Thomas will do for

you as he has done for Ayala. Dear Lucy, it is not that I want to

send you away." Then for the first time Lucy put her arm round her

aunt's neck. "But it had better be as is proposed, if your aunt still

wishes it, when she comes home. I and your Uncle Reginald would not

do right were we to allow you to throw away the prospects that are

offered you. It is natural that Lady Tringle should be anxious about

her son."

"She need not, in the least," said Lucy, indignantly.

"But you see what they say."

"It is his fault, not hers. Why should she be punished?"

"Because he is Fortune's favourite, and she is not. It is no good

kicking against the pricks, my dear. He is his father's son and heir,

and everything must give way to him."

"But Ayala does not want him. Ayala despises him. It is too hard that

she is to lose everything because a young man like that will go on

making himself disagreeable. They have no right to do it after having

accustomed Ayala to such a home. Don't you feel that, Aunt Dosett?"

"I do feel it."

"However it might have been arranged at first, it ought to remain

now. Even though Ayala and I are only girls, we ought not to be

changed about as though we were horses. If she had done anything

wrong,--but Uncle Tom says that she has done nothing wrong."

"I suppose she has spoken to her aunt disrespectfully."

"Because her aunt told her that she had encouraged this man. What

would you have a girl say when she is falsely accused like that?

Would you say it to me merely because some horrid man would come and

speak to me?" Then there came a slight pang of conscience as she

remembered Isadore Hamel in Kensington Gardens. If the men were not

thought to be horrid, then perhaps the speaking might be a sin worthy

of most severe accusation.

There was nothing more said about it that night, nor till the

following afternoon, when Mr. Dosett returned home at the usual

hour from his office. Then Lucy was closeted with him for a

quarter-of-an-hour in the drawing-room. He had been into the City and

seen Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas had been of opinion that it would be much

better that Lady Tringle's wishes should be obeyed. It was quite true

that he himself had no complaint to make against Ayala, but he did

think that Ayala had been pert; and, though it might be true that

Ayala had not encouraged Tom, there was no knowing what might grow

out of such a propensity on Tom's part. And then it could not be

pleasant to Lady Tringle or to himself that their son should be

banished out of their house. When something was hinted as to the

injustice of this, Sir Thomas endeavoured to put all that right by

declaring that, if Lady Tringle's wishes could be attended to in

this matter, provision would be made for the two girls. He certainly

would not strike Ayala's name out of his will, and as certainly would

not take Lucy under his wing as his own child without making some

provision for her. Looking at the matter in this light he did not

think that Mr. Dosett would be justified in robbing Lucy of the

advantages which were offered to her. With this view Mr. Dosett found

himself compelled to agree, and with these arguments he declared to

Lucy that it was her duty to submit herself to the proposed exchange.

Early in February all the Tringle family were in Queen's Gate, and

Lucy on her first visit to the house found that everyone, including

Ayala, looked upon the thing as settled. Ayala, who under these

circumstances was living on affectionate terms with all the Tringles,

except Tom, was quite radiant. "I suppose I had better go to-morrow,

aunt?" she said, as though it were a matter of most trivial

consequence.

"In a day or two, Ayala, it will be better."

"It shall be Monday, then. You must come over here in a cab, Lucy."

"The carriage shall be sent, my dear."

"But then it must go back with me, Aunt Emmeline."

"It shall, my dear."

"And the horses must be put up, because Lucy and I must change all

our things in the drawers." Lucy at the time was sitting in the

drawing-room, and Augusta, with most affectionate confidence, was

singing to her all the praises of Mr. Traffick. In this way it was

settled, and the change, so greatly affecting the fortunes of our two

sisters, was arranged.

CHAPTER X.

AYALA AND HER AUNT MARGARET.

Till the last moment for going Ayala seemed to be childish,

triumphant, and indifferent. But, till that last moment, she was

never alone with Lucy. It was the presence of her aunt and cousins

which sustained her in her hardihood. Tom was never there,--or

so rarely as not to affect her greatly. In London he had his own

lodgings, and was not encouraged to appear frequently till Ayala

should have gone. But Aunt Emmeline and Gertrude were perseveringly

gracious, and even Augusta had somewhat relaxed from her wrath. With

them Ayala was always good-humoured, but always brave. She affected

to rejoice at the change which was to be made. She spoke of Lucy's

coming and of her own going as an unmixed blessing. This she did so

effectually as to make Aunt Emmeline declare to Sir Thomas, with

tears in her eyes, that the girl was heartless. But when, at the

moment of parting, the two girls were together, then Ayala broke

down.

They were in the room, together, which one had occupied and the other

was to occupy, and their boxes were still upon the floor. Though less

than six months had passed since Ayala had come among the rich things

and Lucy had been among the poor, Ayala's belongings had become

much more important than her sister's. Though the Tringles had been

unpleasant they had been generous. Lucy was sitting upon the bed,

while Ayala was now moving about the room restlessly, now clinging

to her sister, and now sobbing almost in despair. "Of course I know,"

she said. "What is the use of telling stories about it any longer?"

"It is not too late yet, Ayala. If we both go to Uncle Tom he will

let us change it."

"Why should it be changed? If I could change it by lifting up my

little finger I could not do it. Why should it not be you as well

as me? They have tried me, and,--as Aunt Emmeline says,--I have not

suited."

"Aunt Dosett is not ill-natured, my darling."

"No, I dare say not. It is I that am bad. It is bad to like pretty

things and money, and to hate poor things. Or, rather, I do not

believe it is bad at all, because it is so natural. I believe it is

all a lie as to its being wicked to love riches. I love them, whether

it is wicked or not."

"Oh, Ayala!"

"Do not you? Don't let us be hypocritical, Lucy, now at the last

moment. Did you like the way in which they lived in Kingsbury

Crescent?"

Lucy paused before she answered. "I like it better than I did," she

said. "At any rate, I would willingly go back to Kingsbury Crescent."

"Yes,--for my sake."

"Indeed I would, my pet."

"And for your sake I would rather die than stay. But what is the good

of talking about it, Lucy. You and I have no voice in it, though

it is all about ourselves. As you say, we are like two tame birds,

who have to be moved from one cage into another just as the owner

pleases. We belong either to Uncle Tom or Uncle Dosett, just as they

like to settle it. Oh, Lucy, I do so wish that I were dead."

"Ayala, that is wicked."

"How can I help it, if I am wicked? What am I to do when I get there?

What am I to say to them? How am I to live? Lucy, we shall never see

each other."

"I will come across to you constantly."

"I meant to do so, but I didn't. They are two worlds, miles asunder.

Lucy, will they let Isadore Hamel come here?" Lucy blushed and

hesitated. "I am sure he will come."

Lucy remembered that she had given her friend her address at Queen's

Gate, and felt that she would seem to have done it as though she

had known that she was about to be transferred to the other uncle's

house. "It will make no difference if he does," she said.

"Oh, I have such a dream,--such a castle-in-the-air! If I could think

it might ever be so, then I should not want to die."

"What do you dream?" But Lucy, though she asked the question, knew

the dream.

"If you had a little house of your own, oh, ever so tiny; and if you

and he--?"

"There is no he."

"There might be. And, if you and he would let me have any corner for

myself, then I should be happy. Then I would not want to die. You

would, wouldn't you?"

"How can I talk about it, Ayala? There isn't such a thing. But

yet,--but yet; oh, Ayala, do you not know that to have you with me

would be better than anything?"

"No;--not better than anything;--second best. He would be best. I do

so hope that he may be 'he.' Come in." There was a knock at the door,

and Aunt Emmeline, herself, entered the room.

"Now, my dears, the horses are standing there, and the men are coming

up for the luggage. Ayala, I hope we shall see you very often. And

remember that, as regards anything that is unpleasant, bygones shall

be bygones." Then there was a crowd of farewell kisses, and in a few

minutes Ayala was alone in the carriage on her road up to Kingsbury

Crescent.

The thing had been done so quickly that hitherto there had hardly

been time for tears. To Ayala herself the most remarkable matter in

the whole affair had been Tom's persistence. He had, at last, been

allowed to bring them home from Rome, there having been no other

gentleman whose services were available for the occasion. He had been

watched on the journey very closely, and had had no slant in his

favour, as the young lady to whom he was devoted was quite as anxious

to keep out of his way as had been the others of the party to

separate them. But he had made occasion, more than once, sufficient

to express his intention. "I don't mean to give you up, you know," he

had said to her. "When I say a thing I mean it. I am not going to be

put off by my mother. And as for the governor he would not say a word

against it if he thought we were both in earnest."

"But I ain't in earnest," said Ayala; "or rather, I am very much in

earnest."

"So am I. That's all I've got to say just at present." From this

there grew up within her mind a certain respect for the "lout,"

which, however, made him more disagreeable to her than he might have

been had he been less persistent.

It was late in the afternoon, not much before dinner, when Ayala

reached the house in Kingsbury Crescent. Hitherto she had known

almost nothing of her Aunt Dosett, and had never been intimate even

with her uncle. They, of course, had heard much of her, and had been

led to suppose that she was much less tractable than the simple Lucy.

This feeling had been so strong that Mr. Dosett himself would hardly

have been led to sanction the change had it not been for that promise

from Sir Thomas that he would not withdraw the provision he had made

for Ayala, and would do as much for Lucy if Lucy should become an

inmate of his family. Mrs. Dosett had certainly been glad to welcome

any change, when a change was proposed to her. There had grown up

something of affection at the last moment, but up to that time she

had certainly disliked her niece. Lucy had appeared to her to be at

first idle and then sullen. The girl had seemed to affect a higher

nature than her own, and had been wilfully indifferent to the little

things which had given to her life whatever interest it possessed.

Lucy's silence had been a reproach to her, though she herself had

been able to do so little to abolish the silence. Perhaps Ayala might

be better.

But they were both afraid of Ayala,--as they had not been afraid of

Lucy before her arrival. They made more of preparation for her in

their own minds, and, as to their own conduct, Mr. Dosett was there

himself to receive her, and was conscious in doing so that there had

been something of failure in their intercourse with Lucy. Lucy had

been allowed to come in without preparation, with an expectation that

she would fall easily into her place, and there had been failure.

There had been no regular consultation as to this new coming, but

both Mr. and Mrs. Dosett were conscious of an intended effort.

Lady Tringle and Mr. Dosett had always been Aunt Emmeline and

Uncle Reginald, by reason of the nearness of their relationship.

Circumstances of closer intercourse had caused Sir Thomas to be Uncle

Tom. But Mrs. Dosett had never become more than Aunt Dosett to either

of the girls. This in itself had been matter almost of soreness to

her, and she had intended to ask Lucy to adopt the more endearing

form of her Christian name; but there had been so little endearment

between them that the moment for doing so had never come. She was

thinking of all this up in her own room, preparatory to the reception

of this other girl, while Mr. Dosett was bidding her welcome to

Kingsbury Crescent in the drawing-room below.

Ayala had been dissolved in tears during the drive round by

Kensington to Bayswater, and was hardly able to repress her sobs as

she entered the house. "My dear," said the uncle, "we will do all

that we can to make you happy here."

"I am sure you will; but--but--it is so sad coming away from Lucy."

"Lucy I am sure will be happy with her cousins." If Lucy's happiness

were made to depend on her cousins, thought Ayala, it would not be

well assured. "And my sister Emmeline is always good-natured."

"Aunt Emmeline is very good, only--"

"Only what?"

"I don't know. But it is such a sudden change, Uncle Reginald."

"Yes, it is a very great change, my dear. They are very rich and we

are poor enough. I should hardly have consented to this, for your

sake, but that there are reasons which will make it better for you

both."

"As to that," said Ayala, stoutly, "I had to come away. I didn't

suit."

"You shall suit us, my dear."

"I hope so. I will try. I know more now than I did then. I thought I

was to be Augusta's equal."

"We shall all be equal here."

"People ought to be equal, I think,--except old people and young

people. I will do whatever you and my aunt tell me. There are no

young people here, so there won't be any trouble of that kind."

"There will be no other young person, certainly. You shall go

upstairs now and see your aunt."

Then there was the interview upstairs, which consisted chiefly in

promises and kisses, and Ayala was left alone to unpack her boxes and

prepare for dinner. Before she began her operations she sat still for

a few moments, and with an effort collected her energies and made her

resolution. She had said to Lucy in her passion that she would that

she were dead. That that should have been wicked was not matter of

much concern to her. But she acknowledged to herself that it had been

weak and foolish. There was her life before her, and she would still

endeavour to be happy though there had been so much to distress her.

She had flung away wealth. She was determined to fling it away still

when it should present itself to her in the shape of her cousin Tom.

But she had her dreams,--her day-dreams,--those castles in the air

which it had been the delight of her life to construct, and in the

building of which her hours had never run heavy with her. Isadore

Hamel would, of course, come again, and would, of course, marry Lucy,

and then there would be a home for her after her own heart. With

Isadore as her brother, and her own own Lucy close to her, she would

not feel the want of riches and of luxury. If there were only some

intellectual charm in her life, some touch of art, some devotion

to things beautiful, then she could do without gold and silver and

costly raiment. Of course, Isadore would come; and then--then--in the

far distance, something else would come, something of which in her

castle-building she had not yet developed the form, of which she did

not yet know the bearing, or the manner of its beauty, or the music

of its voice; but as to which she was very sure that its form would

be beautiful and its voice full of music. It can hardly be said that

this something was the centre of her dreams, or the foundation of

her castles. It was the extreme point of perfection at which she

would arrive at last, when her thoughts had become sublimated by the

intensity of her thinking. It was the tower of the castle from which

she could look down upon the inferior world below,--the last point

of the dream in arranging which she would all but escape from earth

to heaven,--when in the moment of her escape the cruel waking back

into the world would come upon her. But this she knew,--that this

something, whatever might be its form or whatever its voice, would be

exactly the opposite of Tom Tringle.

She had fallen away from her resolution to her dreams for a time,

when suddenly she jumped up and began her work with immense energy.

Open went one box after another, and in five minutes the room was

strewed with her possessions. The modest set of drawers which was to

supply all her wants was filled with immediate haste. Things were

deposited in whatever nooks might be found, and every corner was

utilized. Her character for tidiness had never stood high. At the

bijou Lucy, or her mother, or the favourite maid, had always been at

hand to make good her deficiencies with a reproach which had never

gone beyond a smile or a kiss. At Glenbogie and even on the journey

there had been attendant lady's maids. But here she was all alone.

Everything was still in confusion when she was called to dinner. As

she went down she recalled to herself her second resolution. She

would be good;--whereby she intimated to herself that she would

endeavour to do what might be pleasing to her Aunt Dosett. She had

little doubt as to her uncle. But she was aware that there had been

differences between her aunt and Lucy. If Lucy had found it difficult

to be good how great would be the struggle required from her!

She sat herself down at table a little nearer to her aunt than her

uncle, because it was specially her aunt whom she wished to win, and

after a few minutes she put out her little soft hand and touched

that of Mrs. Dosett. "My dear," said that lady. "I hope you will be

happy."

"I am determined to be happy," said Ayala, "if you will let me love

you."

Mrs. Dosett was not beautiful, nor was she romantic. In appearance

she was the very reverse of Ayala. The cares of the world, the

looking after shillings and their results, had given her that look of

commonplace insignificance which is so frequent and so unattractive

among middle-aged women upon whom the world leans heavily. But there

was a tender corner in her heart which was still green, and from

which a little rill of sweet water could be made to flow when it

was touched aright. On this occasion a tear came to her eye as

she pressed her niece's hand; but she said nothing. She was sure,

however, that she would love Ayala much better than she had been able

to love Lucy.

"What would you like me to do?" asked Ayala, when her aunt

accompanied her that night to her bed room.

"To do, my dear? What do you generally do?"

"Nothing. I read a little and draw a little, but I do nothing useful.

I mean it to be different now."

"You shall do as you please, Ayala."

"Oh, but I mean it. And you must tell me. Of course things have to be

different."

"We are not rich like your uncle and aunt Tringle."

"Perhaps it is better not to be rich, so that one may have something

to do. But I want you to tell me as though you really cared for me."

"I will care for you," said Aunt Dosett, sobbing.

"Then first begin by telling me what to do. I will try and do it. Of

course I have thought about it, coming away from all manner of rich

things; and I have determined that it shall not make me unhappy. I

will rise above it. I will begin to-morrow and do anything if you

will tell me." Then Aunt Dosett took her in her arms and kissed her,

and declared that on the morrow they would begin their work together

in perfect confidence and love with each other.

"I think she will do better than Lucy," said Mrs. Dosett to her

husband that night.

"Lucy was a dear girl too," said Uncle Reginald.

"Oh, yes;--quite so. I don't mean to say a word against Lucy; but I

think that I can do better with Ayala. She will be more diligent."

Uncle Reginald said nothing to this, but he could not but think that

of the two Lucy would be the one most likely to devote herself to

hard work.

On the next morning Ayala went out with her aunt on the round to the

shopkeepers, and listened with profound attention to the domestic

instructions which were given to her on the occasion. When she came

home she knew much of which she had known nothing before. What was

the price of mutton, and how much mutton she was expected as one of

the family to eat per week; what were the necessities of the house in

bread and butter, how far a pint of milk might be stretched,--with a

proper understanding that her Uncle Reginald as head of the family

was to be subjected to no limits. And before their return from that

walk,--on the first morning of Ayala's sojourn,--Ayala had undertaken

always to call Mrs. Dosett Aunt Margaret for the future.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM TRINGLE COMES TO THE CRESCENT.

During the next three months, up to the end of the winter and through

the early spring, things went on without any change either in Queen's

Gate or Kingsbury Crescent. The sisters saw each other occasionally,

but not as frequently as either of them had intended. Lucy was not

encouraged in the use of cabs, nor was the carriage lent to her often

for the purpose of going to the Crescent. The reader may remember

that she had been in the habit of walking alone in Kensington

Gardens, and a walk across Kensington Gardens would carry her the

greater part of the distance to Kingsbury Crescent. But Lucy, in

her new circumstances, was not advised,--perhaps, I may say, was

not allowed,--to walk alone. Lady Tringle, being a lady of rank and

wealth, was afraid, or pretended to be afraid, of the lions. Poor

Ayala was really afraid of the lions. Thus it came to pass that the

intercourse was not frequent. In her daily life Lucy was quiet and

obedient. She did not run counter to Augusta, whose approaching

nuptials gave her that predominance in the house which is always

accorded to young ladies in her recognised position. Gertrude was at

this time a subject of trouble at Queen's Gate. Sir Thomas had not

been got to approve of Mr. Frank Houston, and Gertrude had positively

refused to give him up. Sir Thomas was, indeed, considerably troubled

by his children. There had been a period of disagreeable obstinacy

even with Augusta before Mr. Traffick had been taken into the bosom

of the family. Now Gertrude had her own ideas, and so also had

Tom. Tom had become quite a trouble. Sir Thomas and Lady Tringle,

together, had determined that Tom must be weaned; by which they meant

that he must be cured of his love. But Tom had altogether refused to

be weaned. Mr. Dosett had been requested to deny him admittance to

the house in Kingsbury Crescent, and as this request had been fully

endorsed by Ayala herself orders had been given to the effect to the

parlour-maid. Tom had called more than once, and had been unable to

obtain access to his beloved. But yet he resolutely refused to be

weaned. He told his father to his face that he intended to marry

Ayala, and abused his mother roundly when she attempted to interfere.

The whole family was astounded by his perseverance, so that there had

already sprung up an idea in the minds of some among the Tringles

that he would be successful at last. Augusta was very firm, declaring

that Ayala was a viper. But Sir Thomas, himself, began to inquire,

within his own bosom, whether Tom should not be allowed to settle

down in the manner desired by himself. In no consultation held at

Queen's Gate on the subject was there the slightest expression of an

opinion that Tom might be denied the opportunity of settling down as

he wished through any unwillingness on the part of Ayala.

When things were in this position, Tom sought an interview one

morning with his father in Lombard Street. They rarely saw each other

at the office, each having his own peculiar branch of business. Sir

Thomas manipulated his millions in a little back room of his own,

while Tom, dealing probably with limited thousands, made himself

useful in an outer room. They never went to, or left, the office

together, but Sir Thomas always took care to know that his son

was or was not on the premises. "I want to say a word or two, Sir,

about--about the little affair of mine," said Tom.

"What affair?" said Sir Thomas, looking up from his millions.

"I think I should like to--marry."

"The best thing you can do, my boy; only it depends upon who the

young lady may be."

"My mind is made up about that, Sir; I mean to marry my cousin. I

don't see why a young man isn't to choose for himself." Then Sir

Thomas preached his sermon, but preached it in the manner which men

are wont to use when they know that they are preaching in vain. There

is a tone of refusal, which, though the words used may be manifestly

enough words of denial, is in itself indicative of assent. Sir Thomas

ended the conference by taking a week to think over the matter, and

when the week was over gave way. He was still inclined to think that

marriages with cousins had better be avoided; but he gave way, and at

last promised that if Tom and Ayala were of one mind an income should

be forthcoming.

For the carrying out of this purpose it was necessary that the door

of Uncle Dosett's house should be unlocked, and with the object of

turning the key Sir Thomas himself called at the Admiralty. "I find

my boy is quite in earnest about this," he said to the Admiralty

clerk.

"Oh; indeed."

"I can't say I quite like it myself." Mr. Dosett could only shake his

head. "Cousins had better be cousins, and nothing more."

"And then you would probably expect him to get money?"

"Not at all," said Sir Thomas, proudly. "I have got money enough for

them both. It isn't an affair of money. To make a long story short,

I have given my consent; and, therefore, if you do not mind, I shall

be glad if you will allow Tom to call at the Crescent. Of course,

you may have your own views; but I don't suppose you can hope to do

better for the girl. Cousins do marry, you know, very often." Mr.

Dosett could only say that he could not expect to do anything for the

girl nearly so good, and that, as far as he was concerned, his nephew

Tom should be made quite welcome at Kingsbury Crescent. It was not,

he added, in his power to answer for Ayala. As to this, Sir Thomas

did not seem to have any doubts. The good things of the world, which

it was in his power to offer, were so good, that it was hardly

probable that a young lady in Ayala's position should refuse them.

"My dear," said Aunt Margaret, the next morning, speaking in her most

suasive tone, "your Cousin Tom is to be allowed to call here."

"Tom Tringle?"

"Yes, my dear. Sir Thomas has consented."

"Then he had better not," said Ayala, bristling up in hot anger.

"Uncle Tom has got nothing to do with it, either in refusing or

consenting. I won't see him."

"I think you must see him if he calls."

"But I don't want. Oh, Aunt Margaret, pray make him not come. I

don't like him a bit. We are doing so very well. Are we not, Aunt

Margaret?"

"Certainly, my dear, we are doing very well;--at least, I hope so.

But you are old enough now to understand that this is a very serious

matter."

"Of course it is serious," said Ayala, who certainly was not guilty

of the fault of making light of her future life. Those dreams of

hers, in which were contained all her hopes and all her aspirations,

were very serious to her. This was so much the case that she had

by no means thought of her Cousin Tom in a light spirit, as though

he were a matter of no moment to her. He was to her just what the

Beast must have been to the Beauty, when the Beast first began to

be in love. But her safety had consisted in the fact that no one

had approved of the Beast being in love with her. Now she could

understand that all the horrors of oppression might fall upon her. Of

course it was serious; but not the less was she resolved that nothing

should induce her to marry the Beast.

"I think you ought to see him when he comes, and to remember how

different it will be when he comes with the approval of his father.

It is, of course, saying that they are ready to welcome you as their

daughter."

"I don't want to be anybody's daughter."

"But, Ayala, there are so many things to be thought of. Here is a

young man who is able to give you not only every comfort but great

opulence."

"I don't want to be opulent."

"And he will be a baronet."

"I don't care about baronets, Aunt Margaret."

"And you will have a house of your own in which you may be of service

to your sister."

"I had rather she should have a house."

"But Tom is not in love with Lucy."

"He is such a lout! Aunt Margaret, I won't have anything to say to

him. I would a great deal sooner die. Uncle Tom has no right to send

him here. They have got rid of me, and I am very glad of it; but

it isn't fair that he should come after me now that I'm gone away.

Couldn't Uncle Reginald tell him to stay away?"

A great deal more was said, but nothing that was said had the

slightest effect on Ayala. When she was told of her dependent

position, and of the splendour of the prospects offered, she declared

that she would rather go into the poor-house than marry her cousin.

When she was told that Tom was good-natured, honest, and true, she

declared that good-nature, honesty, and truth had nothing to do with

it. When she was asked what it was that she looked forward to in the

world she could merely sob and say that there was nothing. She could

not tell even her sister Lucy of those dreams and castles. How, then,

could she explain them to her Aunt Margaret? How could she make her

aunt understand that there could be no place in her heart for Tom

Tringle seeing that it was to be kept in reserve for some angel of

light who would surely make his appearance in due season,--but who

must still be there, present to her as her angel of light, even

should he never show himself in the flesh. How vain it was to talk

of Tom Tringle to her, when she had so visible before her eyes that

angel of light with whom she was compelled to compare him!

But, though she could not be brought to say that she would listen

patiently to his story, she was nevertheless made to understand that

she must see him when he came to her. Aunt Margaret was very full on

that subject. A young man who was approved of by the young lady's

friends, and who had means at command, was, in Mrs. Dosett's opinion,

entitled to a hearing. How otherwise were properly authorised

marriages to be made up and arranged? When this was going on there

was in some slight degree a diminished sympathy between Ayala and her

aunt. Ayala still continued her household duties,--over which, in the

privacy of her own room, she groaned sadly; but she continued them

in silence. Her aunt, upon whom she had counted, was, she thought,

turning against her. Mrs. Dosett, on the other hand, declared to

herself that the girl was romantic and silly. Husbands with every

immediate comfort, and a prospect of almost unlimited wealth, are not

to be found under every hedge. What right could a girl so dependent

as Ayala have to refuse an eligible match? She therefore in this way

became an advocate on behalf of Tom,--as did also Uncle Reginald,

more mildly. Uncle Reginald merely remarked that Tom was attending

to his business, which was a great thing in a young man. It was not

much, but it showed Ayala that in this matter her uncle was her

enemy. In this, her terrible crisis, she had not a friend, unless it

might be Lucy.

Then a day was fixed on which Tom was to come, which made the matter

more terrible by anticipation. "What can be the good?" Ayala said to

her aunt when the hour named for the interview was told her, "as I

can tell him everything just as well without his coming at all." But

all that had been settled. Aunt Margaret had repeated over and over

again that such an excellent young man as Tom, with such admirable

intentions, was entitled to a hearing from any young lady. In reply

to this Ayala simply made a grimace, which was intended to signify

the utter contempt in which she held her cousin Tom with all his

wealth.

Tom Tringle, in spite of his rings and a certain dash of vulgarity,

which was, perhaps, not altogether his own fault, was not a bad

fellow. Having taken it into his heart that he was very much in love

he was very much in love. He pictured to himself a happiness of a

wholesome cleanly kind. To have the girl as his own, to caress her

and foster her, and expend himself in making her happy; to exalt her,

so as to have it acknowledged that she was, at any rate, as important

as Augusta; to learn something from her, so that he, too, might

become romantic, and in some degree poetical;--all this had come

home to him in a not ignoble manner. But it had not come home to him

that Ayala might probably refuse him. Hitherto Ayala had been very

persistent in her refusals; but then hitherto there had existed the

opposition of all the family. Now he had overcome that, and he felt

therefore that he was entitled to ask and to receive.

On the day fixed, and at the hour fixed, he came in the plenitude of

all his rings. Poor Tom! It was a pity that he should have had no

one to advise him as to his apparel. Ayala hated his jewelry. She

was not quite distinct in her mind as to the raiment which would be

worn by the angel of light when he should come, but she was sure

that he would not be chiefly conspicuous for heavy gilding; and Tom,

moreover, had a waistcoat which would of itself have been suicidal.

Such as he was, however, he was shown up into the drawing-room, where

he found Ayala alone. It was certainly a misfortune to him that no

preliminary conversation was possible. Ayala had been instructed

to be there with the express object of listening to an offer of

marriage. The work had to be done,--and should be done; but it would

not admit of other ordinary courtesies. She was very angry with

him, and she looked her anger. Why should she be subjected to this

terrible annoyance? He had sense enough to perceive that there was no

place for preliminary courtesy, and therefore rushed away at once to

the matter in hand. "Ayala!" he exclaimed, coming and standing before

her as she sat upon the sofa.

"Tom!" she said, looking boldly up into his face.

"Ayala, I love you better than anything else in the world."

"But what's the good of it?"

"Of course it was different when I told you so before. I meant to

stick to it, and I was determined that the governor should give way.

But you couldn't know that. Mother and the girls were all against

us."

"They weren't against me," said Ayala.

"They were against our being married, and so they squeezed you out

as it were. That is why you have been sent to this place. But they

understand me now, and know what I am about. They have all given

their consent, and the governor has promised to be liberal. When he

says a thing he'll do it. There will be lots of money."

"I don't care a bit about money," said Ayala, fiercely.

"No more do I,--except only that it is comfortable. It wouldn't do to

marry without money,--would it?"

"It would do very well if anybody cared for anybody." The angel of

light generally appeared "in formÃ¢ pauperis," though there was always

about him a tinge of bright azure which was hardly compatible with

the draggle-tailed hue of everyday poverty.

"But an income is a good thing, and the governor will come down like

a brick."

"The governor has nothing to do with it. I told you before that it

is all nonsense. If you will only go away and say nothing about it I

shall always think you very good-natured."

"But I won't go away," said Tom speaking out boldly, "I mean to stick

to it. Ayala, I don't believe you understand that I am thoroughly in

earnest."

"Why shouldn't I be in earnest, too?"

"But I love you, Ayala. I have set my heart upon it. You don't know

how well I love you. I have quite made up my mind about it."

"And I have made up my mind."

"But Ayala--" Now the tenor of his face changed, and something of the

look of a despairing lover took the place of that offensive triumph

which had at first sat upon his brow. "I don't suppose you care for

any other fellow yet."

There was the angel of light. But even though she might be most

anxious to explain to him that his suit was altogether impracticable

she could say nothing to him about the angel. Though she was sure

that the angel would come, she was not certain that she would ever

give herself altogether even to the angel. The celestial castle

which was ever being built in her imagination was as yet very much

complicated. But had it been ever so clear it would have been quite

impossible to explain anything of this to her cousin Tom. "That has

nothing to do with it," she said.

"If you knew how I love you!" This came from him with a sob, and as

he sobbed he went down before her on his knees.

"Don't be a fool, Tom,--pray don't. If you won't get up I shall go

away. I must go away. I have heard all that there is to hear. I told

them that there is no use in your coming."

"Ayala!" with this there were veritable sobs.

"Then why don't you give it up and let us be good friends."

"I can't give it up. I won't give it up. When a fellow means it as I

do he never gives it up. Nothing on earth shall make me give it up.

Ayala, you've got to do it, and so I tell you."

"Nobody can make me," said Ayala, nodding her head, but somewhat

tamed by the unexpected passion of the young man.

"Then you won't say one kind word to me?"

"I can't say anything kinder."

"Very well. Then I shall go away and come again constantly till you

do. I mean to have you. When you come to know how very much I love

you I do think you will give way at last." With that he picked

himself up from the ground and hurried out of the house without

saying another word.

CHAPTER XII.

"WOULD YOU?"

The scene described in the last chapter took place in March. For

three days afterwards there was quiescence in Kingsbury Crescent.

Then there came a letter from Tom to Ayala, very pressing, full of

love and resolution, offering to wait any time,--even a month,--if

she wished it, but still persisting in his declared intention of

marrying her sooner or later;--not by any means a bad letter had

there not been about it a little touch of bombast which made it

odious to Ayala's sensitive appreciation. To this. Ayala wrote a

reply in the following words:

When I tell you that I won't, you oughtn't to go on. It

isn't manly.

AYALA.

Pray do not write again for I shall never answer another.

Of this she said nothing to Mrs. Dosett, though the arrival of Tom's

letter must have been known to that lady. And she posted her own

epistle without a word as to what she was doing.

She wrote again and again to Lucy imploring her sister to come to

her, urging that as circumstances now were she could not show herself

at the house in Queen's Gate. To these Lucy always replied; but she

did not reply by coming, and hardly made it intelligible why she did

not come. Aunt Emmeline hoped, she said, that Ayala would very soon

be able to be at Queen's Gate. Then there was a difficulty about the

carriage. No one would walk across with her except Tom; and walking

by herself was forbidden. Aunt Emmeline did not like cabs. Then there

came a third or fourth letter, in which Lucy was more explanatory,

but yet not sufficiently so. During the Easter recess, which would

take place in the middle of April, Augusta and Mr. Traffick would

be married. The happy couple were to be blessed with a divided

honeymoon. The interval between Easter and Whitsuntide would require

Mr. Traffick's presence in the House, and the bride with her

bridegroom were to return to Queen's Gate. Then they would depart

again for the second holidays, and when they were so gone Aunt

Emmeline hoped that Ayala would come to them for a visit. "They quite

understand," said Lucy, "that it will not do to have you and Augusta

together."

This was not at all what Ayala wanted. "It won't at all do to have me

and him together," said Ayala to herself, alluding of course to Tom

Tringle. But why did not Lucy come over to her? Lucy, who knew so

well that her sister did not want to see any one of the Tringles, who

must have been sure that any visit to Queen's Gate must have been

impossible, ought to have come to her. To whom else could she say

a word in her trouble? It was thus that Ayala argued with herself,

declaring to herself that she must soon die in her misery,--unless

indeed that angel of light might come to her assistance very quickly.

But Lucy had troubles of her own in reference to the family at

Queen's Gate, which did, in fact, make it almost impossible to visit

her sister for some weeks. Sir Thomas had given an unwilling but a

frank consent to his son's marriage,--and then expected simply to be

told that it would take place at such and such a time, when money

would be required. Lady Tringle had given her consent,--but not quite

frankly. She still would fain have forbidden the banns, had any power

of forbidding remained in her hands. Augusta was still hot against

the marriage, and still resolute to prevent it. That proposed journey

upstairs after the scrap-book at Glenbogie, that real journey up to

the top of St. Peter's, still rankled in her heart. That Tom should

make Ayala a future baronet's wife; that Tom should endow Ayala with

the greatest share of the Tringle wealth; that Ayala should become

powerful in Queen's Gate, and dominant probably at Merle Park and

Glenbogie,--was wormwood to her. She was conscious that Ayala was

pretty and witty, though she could affect to despise the wit and the

prettiness. By instigating her mother, and by inducing Mr. Traffick

to interfere when Mr. Traffick should be a member of the family,

she thought that she might prevail. With her mother she did in part

prevail. Her future husband was at present too much engaged with

Supply and Demand to be able to give his thoughts to Tom's affairs.

But there would soon be a time when he naturally would be compelled

to divide his thoughts. Then there was Gertrude. Gertrude's own

affairs had not as yet been smiled upon, and the want of smiles she

attributed very much to Augusta. Why should Augusta have her way and

not she, Gertrude, nor her brother Tom? She therefore leagued herself

with Tom, and declared herself quite prepared to receive Ayala into

the house. In this way the family was very much divided.

When Lucy first made her petition for the carriage, expressing her

desire to see Ayala, both her uncle and her aunt were in the room.

Objection was made,--some frivolous objection,--by Lady Tringle, who

did not in truth care to maintain much connection between Queen's

Gate and the Crescent. Then Sir Thomas, in his burly authoritative

way, had said that Ayala had better come to them. That same evening

he had settled or intended to settle it with his wife. Let Ayala come

as soon as the Trafficks,--as they then would be,--should have gone.

To this Lady Tringle had assented, knowing more than her husband as

to Ayala's feelings, and thinking that in this way a breach might be

made between them. Ayala had been a great trouble to her, and she was

beginning to be almost sick of the Dormer connection altogether. It

was thus that Lucy was hindered from seeing her sister for six weeks

after that first formal declaration of his love made by Tom to Ayala.

Tom had still persevered and had forced his way more than once into

Ayala's presence, but Ayala's answers had been always the same. "It's

a great shame, and you have no right to treat me in this, way."

Then came the Traffick marriage with great Ã©clat. There were no less

than four Traffick bridesmaids, all of them no doubt noble, but none

of them very young, and Gertrude and Lucy were bridesmaids,--and two

of Augusta's friends. Ayala, of course, was not of the party. Tom was

gorgeous in his apparel, not in the least depressed by his numerous

repulses, quite confident of ultimate success, and proud of his

position as a lover with so beautiful a girl. He talked of his

affairs to all his friends, and seemed to think that even on this

wedding-day his part was as conspicuous as that of his sister,

because of his affair with his beautiful cousin. "Augusta doesn't hit

it off with her," he said to one of his friends, who asked why Ayala

was not at the wedding,--"Augusta is the biggest fool out, you know.

She's proud of her husband because he's the son of a lord. I wouldn't

change Ayala for the daughter of any duchess in Europe;"--thus

showing that he regarded Ayala as being almost his own already. Lord

Boardotrade was there, making a semi-jocose speech, quite in the

approved way for a cognate paterfamilias. Perhaps there was something

of a thorn in this to Sir Thomas, as it had become apparent at last

that Mr. Traffick himself did not purpose to add anything from his

own resources to the income on which he intended to live with his

wife. Lord Boardotrade had been obliged to do so much for his eldest

son that there appeared to be nothing left for the member for Port

Glasgow. Sir Thomas was prepared with his Â£120,000, and did not

perhaps mind this very much. But a man, when he pays his money, likes

to have some return for it, and he did not quite like the tone with

which the old nobleman, not possessed of very old standing in the

peerage, seemed to imply that he, like a noble old Providence, had

enveloped the whole Tringle family in the mantle of his noble blood.

He combined the jocose and the paternal in the manner appropriate to

such occasions; but there did run through Sir Thomas's mind as he

heard him an idea that Â£120,000 was a sufficient sum to pay, and that

it might be necessary to make Mr. Traffick understand that out of the

income thenceforth coming he must provide a house for himself and his

wife. It had been already arranged that he was to return to Queen's

Gate with his wife for the period between Easter and Whitsuntide.

It had lately,--quite lately,--been hinted to Sir Thomas that the

married pair would run up again after the second holidays. Mr.

Septimus Traffick had once spoken of Glenbogie as almost all his own,

and Augusta had, in her father's hearing, said a word intended to be

very affectionate about "dear Merle Park." Sir Thomas was a father

all over, with all a father's feelings; but even a father does not

like to be done. Mr. Traffick, no doubt, was a member of Parliament

and son of a peer;--but there might be a question whether even Mr.

Traffick had not been purchased at quite his full value.

Nevertheless the marriage was pronounced to have been a success.

Immediately after it,--early, indeed, on the following morning,--Sir

Thomas inquired when Ayala was coming to Queen's Gate. "Is it

necessary that she should come quite at present?" asked Lady Tringle.

"I thought it was all settled," said Sir Thomas, angrily. This had

been said in the privacy of his own dressing-room, but downstairs

at the breakfast-table, in the presence of Gertrude and Lucy, he

returned to the subject. Tom, who did not live in the house, was

not there. "I suppose we might as well have Ayala now," he said,

addressing himself chiefly to Lucy. "Do you go and manage it with

her." There was not a word more said. Sir Thomas did not always have

his own way in his family. What man was ever happy enough to do that?

But he was seldom directly contradicted. Lady Tringle when the order

was given pursed up her lips, and he, had he been observant, might

have known that she did not intend to have Ayala if she could help

it. But he was not observant,--except as to millions.

When Sir Thomas was gone, Lady Tringle discussed the matter with

Lucy. "Of course, my dear," she said, "if we could make dear Ayala

happy--"

"I don't think she will come, Aunt Emmeline."

"Not come!" This was not said at all in a voice of anger, but simply

as eliciting some further expression of opinion.

"She's afraid of--Tom." Lucy had never hitherto expressed a positive

opinion on that matter at Queen's Gate. When Augusta had spoken of

Ayala as having run after Tom, Lucy had been indignant, and had

declared that the running had been all on the other side. In a side

way she had hinted that Ayala, at any rate at present, was far from

favourable to Tom's suit. But she had never yet spoken out her mind

at Queen's Gate as Ayala had spoken it to her.

"Afraid of him?" said Aunt Emmeline.

"I mean that she is not a bit in love with him, and when a girl is

like that I suppose she is--is afraid of a man, if everybody else

wants her to marry him."

"Why should everybody want her to marry Tom?" asked Lady Tringle,

indignantly. "I am sure I don't want her."

"I suppose it is Uncle Tom, and Aunt Dosett, and Uncle Reginald,"

said poor Lucy, finding that she had made a mistake.

"I don't see why anybody should want her to marry Tom. Tom is carried

away by her baby face, and makes a fool of himself. As to everybody

wanting her, I hope she does not flatter herself that there is

anything of the kind."

"I only meant that I think she would rather not be brought here,

where she would have to see him daily."

After this the loan of the carriage was at last made, and Lucy was

allowed to visit her sister at the Crescent. "Has he been there?" was

almost the first question that Ayala asked.

"What he do you mean?"

"Isadore Hamel."

"No; I have not seen him since I met him in the Park. But I do not

want to talk about Mr. Hamel, Ayala. Mr. Hamel is nothing."

"Oh, Lucy."

"He is nothing. Had he been anything, he has gone, and there would be

an end to it. But he is nothing."

"If a man is true he may go, but he will come back." Ayala had her

ideas about the angel of light very clearly impressed upon her mind

in regard to the conduct of the man, though they were terribly

vague as to his personal appearance, his condition of life, his

appropriateness for marriage, and many other details of his

circumstances. It had also often occurred to her that this angel of

light, when he should come, might not be in love with herself,--and

that she might have to die simply because she had seen him and loved

him in vain. But he would be a man sure to come back if there were

fitting reasons that he should do so. Isadore Hamel was not quite an

angel of light, but he was nearly angelic,--at any rate very good,

and surely would come back.

"Never mind about Mr. Hamel, Ayala. It is not nice to talk about a

man who has never spoken a word."

"Never spoken a word! Oh, Lucy!"

"Mr. Hamel has never spoken a word, and I will not talk about him.

There! All my heart is open to you, Ayala. You know that. But I will

not talk about Mr. Hamel. Aunt Emmeline wants you to come to Queen's

Gate."

"I will not."

"Or rather it is Sir Thomas who wants you to come. I do like Uncle

Tom. I do, indeed."

"So do I."

"You ought to come when he asks you."

"Why ought I? That lout would be there,--of course."

"I don't know about his being a lout, Ayala."

"He comes here, and I have to be perfectly brutal to him. You can't

guess the sort of things I say to him, and he doesn't mind it a bit.

He thinks that he has to go on long enough, and that I must give way

at last. If I were to go to Queen's Gate it would be just as much as

to say that I had given way."

"Why not?"

"Lucy!"

"Why not? He is not bad. He is honest, and true, and kind-hearted. I

know you can't be happy here."

"No."

"Aunt Dosett, with all her affairs, must be trouble to you. I could

not bear them patiently. How can you?"

"Because they are better than Tom Tringle. I read somewhere about

there being seven houses of the Devil, each one being lower and worse

than the other. Tom would be the lowest,--the lowest,--the lowest."

"Ayala, my darling."

"Do not tell me that I ought to marry Tom," said Ayala, almost

standing off in anger from the proferred kiss. "Do you think that I

could love him?"

"I think you could if you tried, because he is loveable. It is so

much to be good, and then he loves you truly. After all, it is

something to have everything nice around you. You have not been made

to be poor and uncomfortable. I fear that it must be bad with you

here."

"It is bad."

"I wish I could have stayed, Ayala. I am more tranquil than you, and

could have borne it better."

"It is bad. It is one of the houses,--but not the lowest. I can eat

my heart out here, peaceably, and die with a great needle in my hand

and a towel in my lap. But if I were to marry him I should kill

myself the first hour after I had gone away with him. Things! What

would things be with such a monster as that leaning over one? Would

you marry him?" In answer to this, Lucy made no immediate reply. "Why

don't you say? You want me to marry him. Would you?"

"No."

"Then why should I?"

"I could not try to love him."

"Try! How can a girl try to love any man? It should come because she

can't help it, let her try ever so. Trying to love Tom Tringle! Why

can't you try?"

"He doesn't want me."

"But if he did? I don't suppose it would make the least difference to

him which it was. Would you try if he asked?"

"No."

"Then why should I? Am I so much a poorer creature than you?"

"You are a finer creature. You know that I think so."

"I don't want to be finer. I want to be the same."

"You are free to do as you please. I am not--quite."

"That means Isadore Hamel."

"I try to tell you all the truth, Ayala; but pray do not talk about

him even to me. As for you, you are free; and if you could--"

"I can't. I don't know that I am free, as you call it." Then Lucy

started, as though about to ask the question which would naturally

follow. "You needn't look like that, Lucy. There isn't any one to be

named."

"A man not to be named?"

"There isn't a man at all. There isn't anybody. But I may have my

own ideas if I please. If I had an Isadore Hamel of my own I could

compare Tom or Mr. Traffick, or any other lout to him, and could say

how infinitely higher in the order of things was my Isadore than

any of them. Though I haven't an Isadore can't I have an image? And

can't I make my image brighter, even higher, than Isadore? You won't

believe that, of course, and I don't want you to believe it yourself.

But you should believe it for me. My image can make Tom Tringle just

as horrible to me as Isadore Hamel can make him to you." Thus it was

that Ayala endeavoured to explain to her sister something of the

castle which she had built in the air, and of the angel of light who

inhabited the castle.

Then it was decided between them that Lucy should explain to Aunt

Emmeline that Ayala could not make a prolonged stay at Queen's Gate.

"But how shall I say it?" asked Lucy.

"Tell her the truth, openly. 'Tom wants to marry Ayala, and Ayala

won't have him. Therefore, of course, she can't come, because it

would look as though she were going to change her mind,--which she

isn't.' Aunt Emmeline will understand that, and will not be a bit

sorry. She doesn't want to have me for a daughter-in-law. She had

quite enough of me at Rome."

All this time the carriage was waiting, and Lucy was obliged to

return before half of all that was necessary had been said. What was

to be Ayala's life for the future? How were the sisters to see each

other? What was to be done when, at the end of the coming summer,

Lucy should be taken first to Glenbogie and then to Merle Park?

There is a support in any excitement, though it be in the excitement

of sorrow only. At the present moment Ayala was kept alive by the

necessity of her battle with Tom Tringle, but how would it be with

her when Tom should have given up the fight? Lucy knew, by sad

experience, how great might be the tedium of life in Kingsbury

Crescent, and knew, also, how unfitted Ayala was to endure it. There

seemed to be no prospect of escape in future. "She knows nothing of

what I am suffering," said Ayala, "when she gives me the things to

do, and tells me of more things, and more, and more! How can there

be so many things to be done in such a house as this?" But as Lucy

was endeavouring to explain how different were the arrangements in

Kingsbury Crescent from those which had prevailed at the bijou, the

offended coachman sent up word to say that he didn't think Sir Thomas

would like it if the horses were kept out in the rain any longer.

Then Lucy hurried down, not having spoken of half the things which

were down in her mind on the list for discussion.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE TRINGLES FELL INTO TROUBLE.

After the Easter holidays the Trafficks came back to Queen's Gate,

making a combination of honeymoon and business which did very well

for a time. It was understood that it was to be so. During honeymoon

times the fashionable married couple is always lodged and generally

boarded for nothing. That opening wide of generous hands, which

exhibits itself in the joyous enthusiasm of a coming marriage, taking

the shape of a houseful of presents, of a gorgeous and ponderous

trousseau, of a splendid marriage feast, and not unfrequently of

subsidiary presents from the opulent papa,--presents which are

subsidiary to the grand substratum of settled dowry,--generously

extends itself to luxurious provision for a month or two. That Mr.

and Mrs. Traffick should come back to Queen's Gate for the six weeks

intervening between Easter and Whitsuntide had been arranged, and

arranged also that the use of Merle Park, for the Whitsun holidays,

should be allowed to them. This last boon Augusta, with her sweetest

kiss, had obtained from her father only two days before the wedding.

But when it was suggested, just before the departure to Merle Park,

that Mr. Traffick's unnecessary boots might be left at Queen's Gate,

because he would come back there, then Sir Thomas, who had thought

over the matter, said a word.

It was in this way. "Mamma," said Augusta, "I suppose I can leave a

lot of things in the big wardrobe. Jemima says I cannot take them to

Merle Park without ever so many extra trunks."

"Certainly, my dear. When anybody occupies the room, they won't want

all the wardrobe. I don't know that any one will come this summer."

This was only the thin end of the wedge, and, as Augusta felt, was

not introduced successfully. The words spoken seemed to have admitted

that a return to Queen's Gate had not been intended. The conversation

went no further at the moment, but was recommenced the same evening.

"Mamma, I suppose Septimus can leave his things here?"

"Of course, my dear; he can leave anything,--to be taken care of."

"It will be so convenient if we can come back,--just for a few days."

Now, there certainly had been a lack of confidence between the

married daughter and her mother as to a new residence. A word had

been spoken, and Augusta had said that she supposed they would go

to Lord Boardotrade when they left Queen's Gate, just to finish the

season. Now, it was known that his lordship, with his four unmarried

daughters, lived in a small house in a small street in Mayfair. The

locality is no doubt fashionable, but the house was inconvenient. Mr.

Traffick, himself, had occupied lodgings near the House of Commons,

but these had been given up. "I think you must ask your papa," said

Lady Tringle.

"Couldn't you ask him?" said the Honourable Mrs. Traffick. Lady

Tringle was driven at last to consent, and then put the question to

Sir Thomas,--beginning with the suggestion as to the unnecessary

boots.

"I suppose Septimus can leave his things here?"

"Where do they mean to live when they come back to town?" asked Sir

Thomas, sharply.

"I suppose it would be convenient if they could come here for a

little time," said Lady Tringle.

"And stay till the end of the season,--and then go down to Glenbogie,

and then to Merle Park! Where do they mean to live?"

"I think there was a promise about Glenbogie," said Lady Tringle.

"I never made a promise. I heard Traffick say that he would like

to have some shooting,--though, as far as I know, he can't hit a

haystack. They may come to Glenbogie for two or three weeks, if they

like, but they shan't stay here during the entire summer."

"You won't turn your own daughter out, Tom."

"I'll turn Traffick out, and I suppose he'll take his wife with him,"

said Sir Thomas, thus closing the conversation in wrath.

The Trafficks went and came back, and were admitted into the bed-room

with the big wardrobe, and to the dressing-room where the boots

were kept. On the very first day of his arrival Mr. Traffick

was in the House at four, and remained there till four the next

morning,--certain Irish Members having been very eloquent. He was not

down when Sir Thomas left the next morning at nine, and was again at

the House when Sir Thomas came home to dinner. "How long is it to

be?" said Sir Thomas, that night, to his wife. There was a certain

tone in his voice which made Lady Tringle feel herself to be ill all

over. It must be said, in justice to Sir Thomas, that he did not

often use this voice in his domestic circle, though it was well known

in Lombard Street. But he used it now, and his wife felt herself to

be unwell. "I am not going to put up with it, and he needn't think

it."

"Don't destroy poor Augusta's happiness so soon."

"That be d----d," said the father, energetically. "Who's going to

destroy her happiness. Her happiness ought to consist in living in

her husband's house. What have I given her all that money for?" Then

Lady Tringle did not dare to say another word.

It was not till the third day that Sir Thomas and his son-in-law met

each other. By that time Sir Thomas had got it into his head that his

son-in-law was avoiding him. But on the Saturday there was no House.

It was then just the middle of June,--Saturday, June 15,--and Sir

Thomas had considered, at the most, that there would be yet nearly

two months before Parliament would cease to sit and the time for

Glenbogie would come. He had fed his anger warm, and was determined

that he would not be done. "Well, Traffick, how are you?" he said,

encountering his son-in-law in the hall, and leading him into the

dining-room. "I haven't seen you since you've been back."

"I've been in the House morning, noon, and night, pretty near."

"I dare say. I hope you found yourself comfortable at Merle Park."

"A charming house,--quite charming. I don't know whether I shouldn't

build the stables a little further from--"

"Very likely. Nothing is so easy as knocking other people's houses

about. I hope you'll soon have one to knock about of your own."

"All in good time," said Mr. Traffick, smiling.

Sir Thomas was one of those men who during the course of a successful

life have contrived to repress their original roughnesses, and who

make a not ineffectual attempt to live after the fashion of those

with whom their wealth and successes have thrown them. But among such

will occasionally be found one whose roughness does not altogether

desert him, and who can on an occasion use it with a purpose. Such

a one will occasionally surprise his latter-day associates by the

sudden ferocity of his brow, by the hardness of his voice, and by an

apparently unaccustomed use of violent words. The man feels that he

must fight, and, not having learned the practice of finer weapons,

fights in this way. Unskilled with foils or rapier he falls back

upon the bludgeon with which his hand has not lost all its old

familiarity. Such a one was Sir Thomas Tringle, and a time for such

exercise had seemed to him to have come now. There are other men who

by the possession of imperturbable serenity seem to be armed equally

against rapier and bludgeon, whom there is no wounding with any

weapon. Such a one was Mr. Traffick. When he was told of knocking

about a house of his own, he quite took the meaning of Sir Thomas's

words, and was immediately prepared for the sort of conversation

which would follow. "I wish I might;--a Merle Park of my own for

instance. If I had gone into the city instead of to Westminster it

might have come in my way."

"It seems to me that a good deal has come in your way without very

much trouble on your part."

"A seat in the House is a nice thing,--but I work harder I take it

than you do, Sir Thomas."

"I never have had a shilling but what I earned. When you leave this

where are you and Augusta going to live?"

This was a home question, which would have disconcerted most

gentlemen in Mr. Traffick's position, were it not that gentlemen

easily disconcerted would hardly find themselves there.

"Where shall we go when we leave this? You were so kind as to say

something about Glenbogie when Parliament is up."

"No, I didn't."

"I thought I understood it."

"You said something and I didn't refuse."

"Put it any way you like, Sir Thomas."

"But what do you mean to do before Parliament is up? The long and the

short of it is, we didn't expect you to come back after the holidays.

I like to be plain. This might go on for ever if I didn't speak out."

"And a very comfortable way of going on it would be." Sir Thomas

raised his eyebrows in unaffected surprise, and then again assumed

his frown. "Of course I'm thinking of Augusta chiefly."

"Augusta made up her mind no doubt to leave her father's house when

she married."

"She shows her affection for her parents by wishing to remain in it.

The fact, I suppose, is, you want the rooms."

"But even if we didn't? You're not going to live here for ever, I

suppose."

"That, Sir, is too good to be thought of, I fear. The truth is we

had an idea of staying at my father's. He spoke of going down to the

country and lending us the house. My sisters have made him change his

mind and so here we are. Of course we can go into lodgings."

"Or to an hotel."

"Too dear! You see you've made me pay such a sum for insuring my

life. I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll let us make it out here

till the 10th of July we'll go into an hotel then." Sir Thomas,

surprised at his own compliance, did at last give way. "And then we

can have a month at Glenbogie from the 12th."

"Three weeks," said Sir Thomas, shouting at the top of his voice.

"Very well; three weeks. If you could have made it the month it would

have been convenient; but I hate to be disagreeable." Thus the matter

was settled, and Mr. Traffick was altogether well pleased with the

arrangement.

"What are we to do?" said Augusta, with a very long face. "What are

we to do when we are made to go away?"

"I hope I shall be able to make some of the girls go down by that

time, and then we must squeeze in at my father's."

This and other matters made Sir Thomas in those days irritable and

disagreeable to the family. "Tom," he said to his wife, "is the

biggest fool that ever lived."

"What is the matter with him now?" asked Lady Tringle, who did not

like to have her only son abused.

"He's away half his time, and when he does come he'd better be away.

If he wants to marry that girl why doesn't he marry her and have done

with it?"

Now this was a matter upon which Lady Tringle had ideas of her own

which were becoming every day stronger. "I'm sure I should be very

sorry to see it," she said.

"Why should you be sorry? Isn't it the best thing a young man can do?

If he's set his heart that way all the world won't talk him off. I

thought all that was settled."

"You can't make the girl marry him."

"Is that it?" asked Sir Thomas, with a whistle. "You used to say she

was setting her cap at him."

"She is one of those girls you don't know what she would be at. She's

full of romance and nonsense, and isn't half as fond of telling the

truth as she ought to be. She made my life a burden to me while she

was with us, and I don't think she would be any better for Tom."

"But he's still determined."

"What's the use of that?" said Lady Tringle.

"Then he shall have her. I made him a promise and I'm not going to

give it up. I told him that if he was in earnest he should have her."

"You can't make a girl marry a young man."

"You have her here, and then we'll take her to Glenbogie. Now when I

say it I mean it. You go and fetch her, and if you don't I will. I'm

not going to have her turned out into the cold in that way."

"She won't come, Tom." Then he turned round and frowned at her.

The immediate result of this was that Lady Tringle herself did drive

across to Kingsbury Crescent accompanied by Gertrude and Lucy, and

did make her request in form. "My dear, your uncle particularly wants

you to come to us for the next month." Mrs. Dosett was sitting by. "I

hope Ayala may be allowed to come to us for a month."

"Ayala must answer for herself," said Mrs. Dosett, firmly. There had

never been any warm friendship between Mrs. Dosett and her husband's

elder sister.

"I can't," said Ayala, shaking her head.

"Why not, my dear?" said Lady Tringle.

"I can't," said Ayala.

Lady Tringle was not in the least offended or annoyed at the refusal.

She did not at all desire that Ayala should come to Glenbogie. Ayala

at Glenbogie would make her life miserable to her. It would, of

course, lead to Tom's marriage, and then there would be internecine

fighting between Ayala and Augusta. But it was necessary that she

should take back to her husband some reply;--and this reply, if

in the form of refusal, must come from Ayala herself. "Your uncle

has sent me," said Lady Tringle, "and I must give him some reason.

As for expense, you know,"--then she turned to Mrs. Dosett with a

smile,--"that of course would be our affair."

"If you ask me," said Mrs. Dosett, "I think that as Ayala has come

to us she had better remain with us. Of course things are very

different, and she would be only discontented." At this Lady Tringle

smiled her sweetest smile,--as though acknowledging that things

certainly were different,--and then turned to Ayala for a further

reply.

"Aunt Emmeline, I can't," said Ayala.

"But why, my dear? Can't isn't a courteous answer to a request that

is meant to be kind."

"Speak out, Ayala," said Mrs. Dosett. "There is nobody here but your

aunts."

"Because of Tom."

"Tom wouldn't eat you," said Lady Tringle, again smiling.

"It's worse than eating me," said Ayala. "He will go on when I tell

him not. If I were down there he'd be doing it always. And then you'd

tell me that I--encouraged him!"

Lady Tringle felt this to be unkind and undeserved. Those passages

in Rome had been very disagreeable to every one concerned. The girl

certainly, as she thought, had been arrogant and impertinent. She had

been accepted from charity and had then domineered in the family. She

had given herself airs and had gone out into company almost without

authority, into company which had rejected her,--Lady Tringle. It had

become absolutely necessary to get rid of an inmate so troublesome,

so unbearable. The girl had been sent away,--almost ignominiously.

Now she, Lady Tringle, the offended aunt, the aunt who had so

much cause for offence, had been good enough, gracious enough, to

pardon all this, and was again offering the fruition of a portion

of her good things to the sinner. No doubt she was not anxious

that the offer should be accepted, but not the less was it made

graciously,--as she felt herself. In answer to this she had thrown

back upon her the only hard word she had ever spoken to the girl!

"You wouldn't be told anything of the kind, but you needn't come if

you don't like it."

"Then I don't," said Ayala, nodding her head.

"But I did think that after all that has passed, and when I am trying

to be kind to you, you would have made yourself more pleasant to me.

I can only tell your uncle that you say you won't."

"Give my love to my uncle, and tell him that I am much obliged to him

and that I know how good he is; but I can't--because of Tom."

"Tom is too good for you," exclaimed Aunt Emmeline, who could not

bear to have her son depreciated even by the girl whom she did not

wish to marry him.

"I didn't say he wasn't," said Ayala, bursting into tears. "The

Archbishop of Canterbury would be too good for me, but I don't want

to marry him." Then she got up and ran out of the room in order that

she might weep over her troubles in the privacy of her own chamber.

She was thoroughly convinced that she was being ill-used. No one had

a right to tell her that any man was too good for her unless she

herself should make pretensions to the man. It was an insult to

her even to connect her name with that of any man unless she had

done something to connect it. In her own estimation her cousin Tom

was infinitely beneath her,--worlds beneath her,--a denizen of an

altogether inferior race, such as the Beast was to the Beauty! Not

that Ayala had ever boasted to herself of her own face or form. It

was not in that respect that she likened herself to the Beauty when

she thought of Tom as the Beast. Her assumed superiority existed in

certain intellectual or rather artistic and Ã¦sthetic gifts,--certain

celestial gifts. But as she had boasted of them to no one, as she

had never said that she and her cousin were poles asunder in their

tastes, poles asunder in their feelings, poles asunder in their

intelligence, was it not very, very cruel that she should be told,

first that she encouraged him, and then that she was not good enough

for him? Cinderella did not ask to have the Prince for her husband.

When she had her own image of which no one could rob her, and was

content with that, why should they treat her in this cruel way?

"I am afraid you are having a great deal of trouble with her," said

Lady Tringle to Mrs. Dosett.

"No, indeed. Of course she is romantic, which is very objectionable."

"Quite detestable!" said Lady Tringle.

"But she has been brought up like that, so that it is not her fault.

Now she endeavours to do her best."

"She is so upsetting."

"She is angry because her cousin persecutes her."

"Persecutes her, indeed! Tom is in a position to ask any girl to be

his wife. He can give her a home of her own, and a good income. She

ought to be proud of the offer instead of speaking like that. But

nobody wants her to have him."

"He wants it, I suppose."

"Just taken by her baby face;--that's all. It won't last, and she

needn't think so. However, I've done my best to be kind, Mrs. Dosett,

and there's an end of it. If you please I'll ring the bell for the

carriage. Good-bye." After that she swam out of the room and had

herself carried back to Queen's Gate.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK HOUSTON.

Three or four days afterwards Sir Thomas asked whether Ayala was to

come to Glenbogie. "She positively refused," said his wife, "and

was so rude and impertinent that I could not possibly have her now."

Then Sir Thomas frowned and turned himself away, and said not a word

further on that occasion.

There were many candidates for Glenbogie on this occasion. Among

others there was Mr. Frank Houston, whose candidature was not pressed

by himself,--as could not well have been done,--but was enforced by

Gertrude on his behalf. It was now July. Gertrude and Mr. Houston

had seen something of each other in Rome, as may be remembered, and

since then had seen a good deal of each other in town. Gertrude was

perfectly well aware that Mr. Houston was impecunious; but Augusta

had been allowed to have an impecunious lover, and Tom to throw

himself at the feet of an impecunious love. Gertrude felt herself to

be entitled to her Â£120,000; did not for a moment doubt but that she

would get it. Why shouldn't she give it to any young man she liked

as long as he belonged to decent people? Mr. Houston wasn't a Member

of Parliament,--but then he was young and good-looking. Mr. Houston

wasn't son to a lord, but he was brother to a county squire, and came

of a family much older than that of those stupid Boardotrade and

Traffick people. And then Frank Houston was very presentable, was not

at all bald, and was just the man for a girl to like as a husband. It

was dinned into her ears that Houston had no income at all,--just a

few hundreds a year on which he never could keep himself out of debt.

But he was a generous man, who would be more than contented with the

income coming from Â£120,000. He would not spunge upon the house at

Queen's Gate. He would not make use of Merle Park and Glenbogie. He

would have a house of his own for his old boots. Four-per-cent. would

give them nearly Â£5,000 a year. Gertrude knew all about it already.

They could have a nice house near Queen's Gate;--say somewhere about

Onslow Gardens. There would be quite enough for a carriage for three

months upon a mountain in Switzerland, and three more among the art

treasures of Italy. It was astonishing how completely Gertrude had

it all at her finger's ends when she discussed the matter with her

mother. Mr. Houston was a man of no expensive tastes. He didn't want

to hunt. He did shoot, no doubt, and perhaps a little shooting at

Glenbogie might be nice before they went to Switzerland. In that case

two months on the top of the mountain would suffice. But if he was

not asked he would never condescend to demand an entry at Glenbogie

as a part of his wife's dower. Lady Tringle was thus talked over,

though she did think that at least one of her daughters' husbands

ought to have an income of his own. There was another point which

Gertrude put forward very frankly, and which no doubt had weight with

her mother. "Mamma, I mean to have him," she said, when Lady Tringle

expressed a doubt.

"But papa?"

"I mean to have him. Papa can scold, of course, if he pleases."

"But where would the income come from if papa did not give it?"

"Of course he'll give it. I've a right to it as much as Augusta."

There was something in Gertrude's face as she said this which made

her mother think that she would have her way.

But Sir Thomas had hitherto declined. When Frank Houston, after

the manner of would-be sons-in-law, had applied to Sir Thomas, Sir

Thomas, who already knew all about it, asked after his income, his

prospects, and his occupation. Fifty years ago young men used to

encounter the misery of such questions, and to live afterwards often

in the enjoyment of the stern questioner's money and daughters. But

there used in those days to be a bad quarter of an hour while the

questions were being asked, and not un-frequently a bad six months

afterwards, while the stern questioner was gradually undergoing a

softening process under the hands of the females of the family. But

the young man of to-day has no bad quarter of an hour. "You are a

mercantile old brick, with money and a daughter. I am a jeunesse

dorÃ©e,--gilded by blood and fashion, though so utterly impecunious!

Let us know your terms. How much is it to be, and then I can say

whether we can afford to live upon it." The old brick surrenders

himself more readily and speedily to the latter than to the former

manner;--but he hardly surrenders himself quite at once. Frank

Houston, when inquired into, declared at once, without blushing,

that he had no income at all to speak of in reference to matrimonial

life. As to family prospects he had none. His elder brother had four

blooming boys, and was likely to have more. As for occupation, he

was very fond of painting, very fond of art all round, could shoot a

little, and was never in want of anything to do as long as he had a

book. But for the earning of money he had no turn whatever. He was

quite sure of himself that he could never earn a shilling. But then

on the other hand he was not extravagant,--which was almost as good

as earning. It was almost incredible; but with his means, limited

as they were to a few hundreds, he did not owe above a thousand

pounds;--a fact which he thought would weigh much with Sir Thomas in

regard to his daughter's future happiness.

Sir Thomas gave him a flat refusal. "I think that I may boast that

your daughter's happiness is in my charge," said Frank Houston.

"Then she must be unhappy," said Sir Thomas. Houston shrugged his

shoulders. "A fool like that has no right to be happy."

"There isn't another man in the world by whom I would allow her to be

spoken of like that," said Houston.

"Bother!"

"I regard her as all that is perfect in woman, and you must forgive

me if I say that I shall not abandon my suit. I may be allowed, at

any rate, to call at the house?"

"Certainly not."

"That is a kind of thing that is never done nowadays;--never," said

Houston, shaking his head.

"I suppose my own house is my own."

"Yours and Lady Tringle's, and your daughters', no doubt. At any

rate, Sir Thomas, you will think of this again. I am sure you will

think of it again. If you find that your daughter's happiness depends

upon it--"

"I shall find nothing of the kind. Good morning."

"Good morning, Sir Thomas." Then Mr. Houston, bowing graciously, left

the little back room in Lombard Street, and jumping into a cab, had

himself taken straight away to Queen's Gate.

"Papa is always like that," said Gertrude. On that day Mrs. Traffick,

with all the boots, had taken herself away to the small house in

Mayfair, and Gertrude, with her mother, had the house to herself. At

the present moment Lady Tringle was elsewhere, so that the young lady

was alone with her lover.

"But he comes round, I suppose."

"If he doesn't have too much to eat,--which disagrees with him,--he

does. He's always better down at Glenbogie because he's out of doors

a good deal, and then he can digest things."

"Then take him down to Glenbogie and let him digest it at once."

"Of course we can't go till the 12th. Perhaps we shall start on the

10th, because the 11th is Sunday. What will you do, Frank?" There had

been a whisper of Frank's going to the Tyrol in August, there to join

the Mudbury Docimers, who were his far-away cousins. Imogene Docimer

was a young lady of marvellous beauty,--not possessed indeed of

Â£120,000,--of whom Gertrude had heard, and was already anxious that

her Frank should not go to the Tyrol this year. She was already aware

that her Frank had--just an artist's eye for feminine beauty in its

various shapes, and thought that in the present condition of things

he would be better at Glenbogie than in the Tyrol.

"I am thinking of wandering away somewhere;--perhaps to the Tyrol.

The Mudbury Docimers are there. He's a pal of mine, besides being a

cousin. Mrs. Docimer is a very nice woman."

"And her sister?"

"A lovely creature. Such a turn of the neck! I've promised to make a

study of her back head."

"Come down to Glenbogie," said Gertrude, sternly.

"How can I do that when your governor won't let me enter his

house-door even in London?"

"But you're here."

"Well,--yes;--I am here. But he told me not. I don't see how I'm to

drive in at the gate at Glenbogie with all my traps, and ask to be

shown my room. I have cheek enough for a good deal, my pet."

"I believe you have, Sir;--cheek enough for anything. But mamma must

manage it,--mamma and me, between us. Only keep yourself disengaged.

You won't go to the Tyrol,--eh?" Then Frank Houston promised that he

would not go to the Tyrol as long as there was a chance open that he

might be invited to Glenbogie.

"I won't hear of it," said Sir Thomas to his wife. On that occasion

his digestion had perhaps failed him a little. "He only wants to get

my money."

"But Gertrude has set her heart on it, and nothing will turn her

away."

"Why can't she set her heart on some one who has got a decent income.

That man hasn't a shilling."

"Nor yet has Mr. Traffick."

"Mr. Traffick has, at any rate, got an occupation. Were it to do

again, Mr. Traffick would never see a shilling of my money. By ----,

those fellows, who haven't got a pound belonging to them, think that

they're to live on the fat of the land out of the sweat of the brow

of such men as me."

"What is your money for, Tom, but for the children?"

"I know what it's for. I'd sooner build a hospital than give it to an

idle fellow like that Houston. When I asked him what he did, he said

he was fond of 'picters!'" Sir Thomas would fall back from his usual

modes of expression when he was a little excited.

"Of course he hasn't been brought up to work. But he is a gentleman,

and I do think he would make our girl happy."

"My money would make him happy,--till he had spent it."

"Tie it up."

"You don't know what you're talking about. How are you to prevent a

man from spending his wife's income?"

"At any rate, if you have him down at Glenbogie you can see what sort

of a man he is. You don't know him now."

"As much as I wish to."

"That isn't fair to the poor girl. You needn't give your consent to

a marriage because he comes to Glenbogie. You have only to say that

you won't give the money and then it must be off. They can't take

the money from you." His digestion could not have been very bad, for

he allowed himself to be persuaded that Houston should be asked to

Glenbogie for ten days. This was the letter of invitation;--

MY DEAR MR. HOUSTON,

We shall start for Glenbogie on the 10th of next month.

Sir Thomas wishes you to join us on the 20th if you can,

and stay till the end of the month. We shall be a little

crowded at first, and therefore cannot name an earlier

day.

I am particularly to warn you that this means nothing more

than a simple invitation. I know what passed between you

and Sir Thomas, and he hasn't at all changed his mind. I

think it right to tell you this. If you like to speak to

him again when you are at Glenbogie of course you can.

Very sincerely yours,

EMMELINE TRINGLE.

At the same time, or within a post of it, he got another letter,

which was as follows;--

DEAREST F,

Papa, you see, hasn't cut up so very rough, after all. You

are to be allowed to come and help to slaughter grouse,

which will be better than going to that stupid Tyrol.

If you want to draw somebody's back head you can do it

there. Isn't it a joke papa's giving way like that all in

a moment? He gets so fierce sometimes that we think he's

going to eat everybody. Then he has to come down, and he

gets eaten worse than anybody else.

Of course, as you're asked to Glenbogie, you can come

here as often as you like. I shall ride on Thursday and

Friday. I shall expect you exactly at six, just under the

Memorial. You can't come home to dinner, you know, because

he might flare up; but you can turn in at lunch every day

you please except Saturday and Sunday. I intend to be so

jolly down at Glenbogie. You mustn't be shooting always.

Ever your own,

G.

Frank Houston as he read this threw himself back on the sofa and gave

way to a soft sigh. He knew he was doing his duty,--just as another

man does who goes forth from his pleasant home to earn his bread

and win his fortune in some dry, comfortless climate, far from the

delights to which he has been always accustomed. He must do his duty.

He could not live always adding a hundred or two of debt to the

burden already round his neck. He must do his duty. As he thought

of this he praised himself mightily. How beautiful was his far-away

cousin, Imogene Docimer, as she would twist her head round so as to

show the turn of her neck! How delightful it would be to talk love to

Imogene! As to marrying Imogene, who hadn't quite so many hundreds

as himself, that he knew to be impossible. As for marriage, he

wasn't quite sure that he wanted to marry any one. Marriage, to his

thinking, was "a sort of grind," at the best. A man would have to get

up and go to bed with some regularity. His wife might want him to

come down in a frock coat to breakfast. His wife would certainly

object to his drawing the back heads of other young women. Then he

thought of the provocation he had received to draw Gertrude's back

head. Gertrude hadn't got any turn of a neck to speak of. Gertrude

was a stout, healthy girl; and, having Â£120,000, was entitled to such

a husband as himself. If he waited longer he might be driven to worse

before he found the money which was so essentially necessary. He was

grateful to Gertrude for not being worse, and was determined to treat

her well. But as for love, romance, poetry, art,--all that must for

the future be out of the question. Of course, there would now be no

difficulty with Sir Thomas, and therefore he must at once make up his

mind. He decided that morning, with many soft regrets, that he would

go to Glenbogie, and let those dreams of wanderings in the mountains

of the Tyrol pass away from him. "Dear, dearest Imogene!" He could

have loved Imogene dearly had fates been more propitious. Then he got

up and shook himself, made his resolution like a man, ate a large

allowance of curried salmon for his breakfast,--and then wrote the

following letter. "Duty first!" he said to himself as he sat down to

the table like a hero.

Letter No. 1.

DEAR LADY TRINGLE,

So many thanks! Nothing could suit my book so well as a

few days at Glenbogie just at the end of August. I will be

there, like a book, on the 20th. Of course I understand

all that you say. Fathers can't be expected to yield all

at once, especially when suitors haven't got very much of

their own. I shouldn't have dared to ask hadn't I known

myself to be a most moderate man. Of course I shall ask

again. If you will help me, no doubt I shall succeed. I

really do think that I am the man to make Gertrude happy.

Yours, dear Lady Tringle, ever so much,

F. HOUSTON.

Letter No. 2.

MY OWN ONE,

Your governor is a brick. Of course, Glenbogie will be

better than the Tyrol, as you are to be there. Not but

what the Tyrol is a very jolly place, and we'll go and see

it together some day. Ask Tom to let me know whether one

can wear heavy boots in the Glenbogie mountains. They are

much the best for the heather; but I have shot generally

in Yorkshire, and there they are too hot. What number does

he shoot with generally? I fancy the birds are wilder with

you than with us.

As for riding, I don't dare to sit upon a horse this

weather. Nobody but a woman can stand it. Indeed, now I

think of it, I sold my horse last week to pay the fellow

I buy paints from. I've got the saddle and bridle, and if

I stick them up upon a rail, under the trees, it would be

better than any horse while the thermometer is near 80.

All the ladies could come round and talk to one so nicely.

I hate lunch, because it makes me red in the face, and

nobody will give me my breakfast before eleven at the

earliest. But I'll come in about three as often as you

like to have me. I think I perhaps shall run over to the

Tyrol after Glenbogie. A man must go somewhere when he has

been turned out in that fashion. There are so many babies

at Buncombe Hall!

--Buncombe Hall is the family seat of the Houstons,--

and I don't like to see my own fate typified before the

time.

Can I do anything for you except riding or eating

lunch,--which are simply feminine exercises? Always your

own,

FRANK.

Letter No. 3.

DEAR COUSIN IM,

How pleasant it is that a little strain of thin blood

should make the use of that pretty name allowable! What

a stupid world it is when the people who like each other

best cannot get together because of proprieties, and

marriages, and such balderdash as we call love. I do not

in the least want to be in love with you,--but I do want

to sit near you, and listen to you, and look at you, and

to know that the whole air around is impregnated by the

mysterious odour of your presence. When one is thoroughly

satisfied with a woman there comes a scent as of sweet

flowers, which does not reach the senses of those whose

feelings are not so awakened.

And now for my news! I suppose that G. T. will in a

tremendously short period become Mistress F. H. 'A long

day, my Lord.' But, if you are to be hung, better be hung

at once. PÃ¨re Tringle has not consented,--has done just

the reverse,--has turned me out of his house, morally.

That is, out of his London house. He asked of my 'house

and my home,' as they did of Allan-a-Dale.

Queen's Gate and Glenbogie stand fair on the hill.

"My home," quoth bold Houston, "shows gallanter still.

'Tis the garret up three pair--"

Then he told me roughly to get me gone; but 'I had laughed

on the lass with my bonny black eye.' So the next day I

got an invite to Glenbogie, and at the appropriate time in

August,

She'll go to the mountains to hear a love tale,

And the youth--

it will be told by is to be your poor unfortunate coz,

Frank Houston. Who's going to whimper? Haven't I known

all along what was to come? It has not been my lot in

life to see a flower and pick it because I love it. But

a good head of cabbage when you're hungry is wholesome

food.--Your loving cousin, but not loving as he oughtn't

to love,

FRANK HOUSTON.

I shall still make a dash for the Tyrol when this episode

at Glenbogie is over.

CHAPTER XV.

AYALA WITH HER FRIENDS.

Some few days after Lady Tringle had been at Kingsbury Crescent,

two visitors, who knew little or nothing of each other, came to see

Ayala. One was a lady and the other a gentleman, and the lady came

first. The gentleman, however, arrived before the lady had gone. Mrs.

Dosett was present while the lady remained; but when the gentleman

came she was invited to leave him alone with her niece,--as shall be

told.

The lady was the Marchesa Baldoni. Can the reader go so far back as

to remember the Marchesa Baldoni? It was she who rather instigated

Ayala to be naughty to the Tringles in Rome, and would have Ayala

at her parties when she did not want the Tringles. The Marchesa was

herself an Englishwoman, though she had lived at Rome all her life,

and had married an Italian nobleman. She was now in London for a few

weeks, and still bore in mind her friendship for Ayala, and a certain

promise she had once made her. In Rome Lady Tringle, actuated by

Augusta, who at the moment was very angry with everybody including

her own lover, had quarrelled with the Marchesa. The Marchesa had

then told Ayala that she, Ayala, must stay with her aunt,--must,

in fact, cease for the time to come to the Marchesa's apartments,

because of the quarrel; but that a time would come in which they

might again be friends. Soon afterwards the Marchesa had heard that

the Tringle family had discarded poor Ayala,--that her own quarrel

had, in fact, extended itself to Ayala, and that Ayala had been

shunted off to a poor relation, far away from all the wealth and

luxuries which she had been allowed to enjoy for so short a time.

Therefore, soon after her arrival in London, the Marchesa had made

herself acquainted with the address of the Dosetts, and now was in

Kingsbury Crescent in fulfilment of her promise made at Rome.

"So now you have got our friend Ayala," said the Marchesa with a

smile to Mrs. Dosett.

"Yes; we have her now. There has been a change. Her sister, Lucy, has

gone to my husband's sister, Lady Tringle."

The Marchesa made a pleasant little bow at each word. She seemed to

Mrs. Dosett to be very gorgeously dressed. She was thoroughly well

dressed, and looked like a Marchesa;--or perhaps, even, like a

Marchioness. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a smile perhaps

a little too continuously sweet, but with a look conscious of her

own position behind it. She had seen in a moment of what nature was

Ayala, how charming, how attractive, how pretty, how clever,--how

completely the very opposite of the Tringles! Ayala learned Italian

so readily that she could talk it almost at once. She could sing,

and play, and draw. The Marchesa had been quite willing that her

own daughter Nina should find a friend in Ayala. Then had come the

quarrel. Now she was quite willing to renew the friendship, though

Ayala's position was so sadly altered. Mrs. Dosett was almost

frightened as the grand lady sat holding Ayala's hand, and patting

it. "We used to know her so well in Rome;--did we not, Ayala?"

"You were very kind to me."

"Nina couldn't come, because her father would make her go with him to

the pictures. But now, my dear, you must come to us just for a little

time. We have a furnished house in Brook Street, near the park, till

the end of the season, and we have one small spare room which will

just do for you. I hope you will let her come to us, for we really

are old friends," said the Marchesa, turning to Mrs. Dosett.

Mrs. Dosett looked black. There are people who always look black when

such applications are made to them,--who look black at any allusions

to pleasures. And then there came across her mind serious thoughts as

to flowers and ribbons,--and then more serious thoughts as to boots,

dresses, and hats. Ayala, no doubt, had come there less than six

months since with good store of everything; but Mrs. Dosett knew that

such a house as would be that of this lady would require a girl to

show herself with the newest sheen on everything. And Ayala knew it

too. The Marchesa turned from the blackness of Mrs. Dosett's face

with her sweetest smile to Ayala. "Can't we manage it?" said the

Marchesa.

"I don't think we can," said Ayala, with a deep sigh.

"And why not?"

Ayala looked furtively round to her aunt. "I suppose I may tell, Aunt

Margaret?" she said.

"You may tell everything, my dear," said Mrs. Dosett.

"Because we are poor," said Ayala.

"What does that matter?" said the Marchesa, brightening up. "We want

you because you are rich in good gifts and pretty ways."

"But I can't get new frocks now as I used to do in Rome. Aunt

Emmeline was cruel to me, and said things which I could not bear. But

they let me have everything. Uncle Reginald gives me all that he has,

and I am much happier here. But we cannot go out and buy things,--can

we, Aunt Margaret?"

"No, my dear; we cannot."

"It does not signify," said the Marchesa. "We are quite quiet, and

what you have got will do very well. Frocks! The frocks you had in

Rome are good enough for London. I won't have a word of all that.

Nina has set her heart upon it, and so has my husband, and so have

I. Mrs. Dosett, when we are at home we are the most homely people in

the world. We think nothing of dressing. Not to come and see your old

friends because of your frocks! We shall send for you the day after

to-morrow. Don't you know, Mrs. Dosett, it will do her good to be

with her young friend for a few days." Mrs. Dosett had not succeeded

in her remonstrances when Sir Thomas Tringle was shown into the room,

and then the Marchesa took her leave. For Sir Thomas Tringle was the

other visitor who came on that morning to see Ayala.

"If you wouldn't mind, Mrs. Dosett," said Sir Thomas before he sat

down, "I should like to see Ayala alone." Mrs. Dosett had not a word

to say against such a request, and at once took her leave.

"My dear," he began, coming and sitting opposite to Ayala, with his

knees almost touching her, "I have got something very particular to

say to you." Ayala was at once much frightened. Her uncle had never

before spoken to her in this way,--had never in truth said a word to

her seriously. He had always been kind to her, making her presents,

and allowing himself to be kissed graciously morning and evening. He

had never scolded her, and, better than all, had never said a word to

her, one way or the other, about Tom. She had always liked her uncle,

because he had never caused her trouble when all the others in his

house had been troublesome to her. But now she was afraid of him. He

did not frown, but he looked very seriously at her, as he might look,

perhaps, when he was counting out all his millions in Lombard Street.

"I hope you think that I have always wished to be kind to you,

Ayala."

"I am sure you have, Uncle Tom."

"When you had come to us I always wished you to stay. I don't like

changes of this sort. I suppose you didn't hit it off with Augusta.

But she's gone now."

"Aunt Emmeline said something." That accusation, as to

"encouragement," so rankled in her heart, that when she looked back

at her grievances among the Tringles that always loomed the largest.

"I don't want to hear anything about it," said Sir Thomas. "Let

bygones be bygones. Your aunt, I am sure, never meant unkindly by

you. Now, I want you to listen to me."

"I will, Uncle Tom."

"Listen to me to the end, like a good girl."

"I will."

"Your Cousin Tom--." Ayala gave a visible shudder, and uttered an

audible groan, but as yet she did not say a word. Sir Thomas, having

seen the shudder, and heard the groan, did frown as he began again.

"Your Cousin Tom is most truly attached to you."

"Why won't he leave me alone, then?"

"Ayala, you promised to listen to me without speaking."

"I will, Uncle Tom. Only--"

"Listen to me, and then I will hear anything you have to say."

"I will," said Ayala, screwing up her lips, so that no words should

come out of them, let the provocation be what it might.

Sir Thomas began again. "Your Cousin Tom is most truly attached to

you. For some time I and his mother disapproved of this. We thought

you were both too young, and there were other reasons which I need

not now mention. But when I came to see how thoroughly he was in

earnest, how he put his heart into it, how the very fact that he

loved you had made a man of him; then how the fact that you would

not return his love unmanned him,--when I saw all that, I gave my

permission." Here he paused, almost as though expecting a word; but

Ayala gave an additional turn to the screw on her lips, and remained

quite silent. "Yes; we gave our permission,--I and your aunt. Of

course, our son's happiness is all in all to us; and I do believe

that you are so good that you would make him a good wife."

"But--"

"Listen till I have done, Ayala." Then there was another squeeze. "I

suppose you are what they call romantic. Romance, my dear, won't buy

bread and butter. Tom is a very good young man, and he loves you

most dearly. If you will consent to be his I will make a rich man of

him. He will then be a respectable man of business, and will become

a partner in the house. You and he can choose a place to live in

almost where you please. You can have your own establishment and your

carriage, and will be able to do a deal of good. You will make him

happy, and you will be my dear child. I have come here to tell you

that I will make you welcome into the family, and to promise that I

will do everything I can to make you happy. Now you may say what you

like; but, Ayala, think a little before you speak."

Ayala thought a little;--not as to what she should say, but as to

the words in which she might say it. She was conscious that a great

compliment was paid to her. And there was a certain pride in her

heart as she thought that this invitation into the family had come to

her after that ignominious accusation of encouragement had been made.

Augusta had snubbed her about Tom, and her aunt; but now she was

asked to come among them, and be one of them, with full observances.

She was aware of all this, and aware, also, that such treatment

required from her a gracious return. But not on that account could

she give herself to the Beast. Not on that account could she be

untrue to her image. Not on that account could she rob her bosom

of that idea of love which was seated there. Not on that account

could she look upon the marriage proposed to her with aught but a

shuddering abhorrence. She sat silent for a minute or two, while her

heavy eyes were fixed upon his. Then, falling on her knees before

him, she put up her little hands to pray to him. "Uncle Tom, I

can't," she said. And then the tears came running down her cheeks.

"Why can't you, Ayala? Why cannot you be sensible, as other girls

are?" said Sir Thomas, lifting her up, and putting her on his knee.

"I can't," she said. "I don't know how to tell you."

"Do you love some other man?"

"No; no; no!" To Uncle Tom, at any rate, she need say nothing of the

image.

"Then why is it?"

"Because I can't. I don't know what to say, but I can't. I know how

very, very, very good you are."

"I would love you as my daughter."

"But I can't, Uncle Tom. Pray tell him, and make him get somebody

else. He would be quite happy if he could get somebody else."

"It is you that he loves."

"But what's the use of it, when I can't? Dear, dear Uncle Tom, do

have it all settled for me. Nothing on earth could ever make me do

it. I should die if I were to try."

"That's nonsense."

"I do so want not to make you angry, Uncle Tom. And I do so wish he

would be happy with someone else. Nobody ought to be made to marry

unless they like it;--ought they?"

"There is no talk of making," said Sir Thomas, frowning.

"At any rate I can't," said Ayala, releasing herself from her uncle's

embrace.

It was in vain that even after this he continued his request, begging

her to come down to Glenbogie, so that she might make herself used

to Tom and his ways. If she could only once more, he thought, be

introduced to the luxuries of a rich house, then she would give way.

But she would not go to Glenbogie; she would not go to Merle Park;

she would not consent to see Tom anywhere. Her uncle told her that

she was romantic and foolish, endeavouring to explain to her over

and over again that the good things of the world were too good to be

thrown away for a dream. At last there was a touch of dignity in the

final repetition of her refusal. "I am sorry to make you angry, but

I can't, Uncle Tom." Then he frowned with all his power of frowning,

and, taking his hat, left the room and the house almost without a

word.

At the time fixed the Marchesa's carriage came, and Ayala with her

boxes was taken away to Brook Street. Uncle Reginald had offered

to do something for her in the way of buying a frock, but this she

refused, declaring that she would not allow herself to become an

expense merely because her friends in Rome had been kind to her. So

she had packed up the best of what she had and started, with her

heart in her mouth, fearing the grandeur of the Marchesa's house. On

her arrival she was received by Nina, who at once threw herself into

all her old intimacy. "Oh, Ayala," she said, "this is so nice to have

you again. I have been looking forward to this ever since we left

Rome."

"Yes," said Ayala, "it is nice."

"But why did you tell mamma you would not come? What nonsense to

talk to her about frocks? Why not come and tell me? You used to have

everything at Rome, much more than I had."

Then Ayala began to explain the great difference between Uncle Tom

and Uncle Reginald,--how Uncle Tom had so many thousands that nobody

could count them, how Uncle Reginald was so shorn in his hundreds

that there was hardly enough to supply the necessaries of life.

"You see," she said, "when papa died Lucy and I were divided. I

got the rich uncle, and Lucy got the poor one; but I made myself

disagreeable, and didn't suit, and so we have been changed."

"But why did you make yourself disagreeable?" said Nina, opening her

eyes. "I remember when we were at Rome your cousin Augusta was always

quarrelling with you. I never quite knew what it was all about."

"It wasn't only that," said Ayala, whispering.

"Did you do anything very bad?"

Then it occurred to Ayala that she might tell the whole story to

her friend, and she told it. She explained the nature of that great

persecution as to Tom. "And that was the real reason why we were

changed," said Ayala, as she completed her story.

"I remember seeing the young man," said Nina.

"He is such a lout!"

"But was he very much in love?" asked Nina.

"Well, I don't know. I suppose he was after his way. I don't think

louts like that can be very much in love to signify. Young men when

they look like that would do with one girl as well as another."

"I don't see that at all," said Nina.

"I am sure he would if he'd only try. At any rate what's the good of

his going on? They can't make a girl marry unless she chooses."

"Won't he be rich?"

"Awfully rich," said Ayala.

"Then I should think about it again," said the young lady from Rome.

"Never," said Ayala, with an impressive whisper. "I will never think

about it again. If he were made of diamonds I would not think about

it again."

"And is that why you were changed?" said Nina.

"Well, yes. No; it is very hard to explain. Aunt Emmeline told me

that--that I encouraged him. I thought I should have rushed out of

the house when she said that. Then I had to be changed. I don't know

whether they could forgive me, but I could not forgive her."

"And how is it now?"

"It is different now," said Ayala, softly. "Only that it can't make

any real difference."

"How different?"

"They'd let me come if I would, I suppose; but I shall never, never

go to them any more."

"I suppose you won't tell me everything?" said Nina, after a pause.

"What everything?"

"You won't be angry if I ask?"

"No, I will not be angry."

"I suppose there is someone else you really care for?"

"There is no one," said Ayala, escaping a little from her friend's

embrace.

"Then why should you be so determined against that poor young man?"

"Because he is a lout and a beast," said Ayala, jumping up. "I wonder

you should ask me;--as if that had anything to do with it. Would you

fall in love with a lout because you had no one else? I would rather

live for ever all alone, even in Kingsbury Crescent, than have to

think of becoming the wife of my cousin Tom." At this Nina shrugged

her shoulders, showing that her education in Italy had been less

romantic than that accorded to Ayala in London.

CHAPTER XVI.

JONATHAN STUBBS.

But, though Nina differed somewhat from Ayala as to their ideas as

to life in general, they were close friends, and everything was done

both by the Marchesa and by her daughter to make Ayala happy. There

was not very much of going into grand society, and that difficulty

about the dresses solved itself, as do other difficulties. There came

a few presents, with entreaties from Ayala that presents of that

kind might not be made. But the presents were, of course, accepted,

and our girl was as prettily arrayed, if not as richly, as the best

around her. At first there was an evening at the opera, and then a

theatre,--diversions which are easy. Ayala, after her six dull months

in Kingsbury Crescent, found herself well pleased to be taken to

easy amusements. The carriage in the park was delightful to her, and

delightful a visit which was made to her by Lucy. For the Tringle

carriage could be spared for a visit in Brook Street, even though

there was still a remembrance in the bosom of Aunt Emmeline of the

evil things which had been done by the Marchesa in Rome. Then there

came a dance,--which was not so easy. The Marchesa and Nina were

going to a dance at Lady Putney's, and arrangements were made

that Ayala should be taken. Ayala begged that there might be no

arrangements, declared that she would be quite happy to see Nina go

forth in her finery. But the Marchesa was a woman who always had her

way, and Ayala was taken to Lady Putney's dance without a suspicion

on the part of any who saw her that her ball-room apparatus was not

all that it ought to be.

Ayala when she entered the room was certainly a little bashful. When

in Rome, even in the old days at the bijou, when she did not consider

herself to be quite out, she had not been at all bashful. She had

been able to enjoy herself entirely, being very fond of dancing,

conscious that she could dance well, and always having plenty to say

for herself. But now there had settled upon her something of the

tedium, something of the silence, of Kingsbury Crescent, and she

almost felt that she would not know how to behave herself if she were

asked to stand up and dance before all Lady Putney's world. In her

first attempt she certainly was not successful. An elderly gentleman

was brought up to her,--a gentleman whom she afterwards declared to

be a hundred, and who was, in truth, over forty, and with him she

manoeuvred gently through a quadrille. He asked her two or three

questions to which she was able to answer only in monosyllables.

Then he ceased his questions, and the manoeuvres were carried on in

perfect silence. Poor Ayala did not attribute any blame to the man.

It was all because she had been six months in Kingsbury Crescent.

Of course this aged gentleman, if he wanted to dance, would have a

partner chosen for him out of Kingsbury Crescent. Conversation was

not to be expected from a gentleman who was made to stand up with

Kingsbury Crescent. Any powers of talking that had ever belonged

to herself had of course evaporated amidst the gloom of Kingsbury

Crescent. After this she was returned speedily to the wings of the

Marchesa, and during the next dance sat in undisturbed peace. Then

suddenly, when the Marchesa had for a moment left her, and when Nina

had just been taken away to join a set, she saw the man of silence

coming to her from a distance, with an evident intention of asking

her to stand up again. It was in his eye, in his toe, as he came

bowing forward. He had evidently learned to suppose that they two

outcasts might lessen their miseries by joining them together. She

was to dance with him because no one else would ask her! She had

plucked up her spirit and resolved that, desolate as she might be,

she would not descend so far as that, when, in a moment, another

gentleman sprang in, as it were, between her and her enemy, and

addressed her with free and easy speech as though he had known her

all her life. "You are Ayala Dormer, I am sure," said he. She looked

up into his face and nodded her head at him in her own peculiar way.

She was quite sure that she had never set her eyes on him before.

He was so ugly that she could not have forgotten him. So at least

she told herself. He was very, very ugly, but his voice was very

pleasant. "I knew you were, and I am Jonathan Stubbs. So now we are

introduced, and you are to come and dance with me."

She had heard the name of Jonathan Stubbs. She was sure of that,

although she could not at the moment join any facts with the name.

"But I don't know you," she said, hesitating. Though he was so ugly

he could not but be better than that ancient dancer whom she saw

standing at a distance, looking like a dog that has been deprived of

his bone.

"Yes, you do," said Jonathan Stubbs, "and if you'll come and dance

I'll tell you about it. The Marchesa told me to take you."

"Did she?" said Ayala, getting up, and putting her little hand upon

his arm.

"I'll go and fetch her if you like; only she's a long way off, and we

shall lose our place. She's my aunt."

"Oh," said Ayala, quite satisfied,--remembering now that she had

heard her friend Nina boast of a Colonel cousin, who was supposed

to be the youngest Colonel in the British army, who had done some

wonderful thing,--taken a new province in India, or marched across

Africa, or defended the Turks,--or perhaps conquered them. She knew

that he was very brave,--but why was he so very ugly? His hair was

ruby red, and very short; and he had a thick red beard: not silky,

but bristly, with each bristle almost a dagger,--and his mouth was

enormous. His eyes were very bright, and there was a smile about him,

partly of fun, partly of good humour. But his mouth! And then that

bristling beard! Ayala was half inclined to like him, because he

was so completely master of himself, so unlike the unhappy ancient

gentleman who was still hovering at a distance. But why was he so

ugly? And why was he called Jonathan Stubbs?

"There now," he said, "we can't get in at any of the sets. That's

your fault."

"No, it isn't," said Ayala.

"Yes, it is. You wouldn't stand up till you had heard all about me."

"I don't know anything about you now."

"Then come and walk about and I'll tell you. Then we shall be ready

for a waltz. Do you waltz well?"

"Do you?"

"I'll back myself against any Englishman, Frenchman, German, or

Italian, for a large sum of money. I can't come quite up to the

Poles. The fact is, the honester the man is the worse he always

dances. Yes; I see what you mean. I must be a rogue. Perhaps I

am;--perhaps I'm only an exception. I knew your father."

"Papa!"

"Yes, I did. He was down at Stalham with the Alburys once. That was

five years ago, and he told me he had a daughter named Ayala. I

didn't quite believe him."

"Why not?"

"It is such an out-of-the-way name."

"It's as good as Jonathan, at any rate." And Ayala again nodded her

head.

"There's a prejudice about Jonathan, as there is about Jacob and

Jonah. I never could quite tell why. I was going to marry a girl once

with a hundred thousand pounds, and she wouldn't have me at last

because she couldn't bring her lips to say Jonathan. Do you think she

was right?"

"Did she love you?" said Ayala, looking up into his face.

"Awfully! But she couldn't bear the name; so within three months

she gave herself and all her money to Mr. Montgomery Talbot de

Montpellier. He got drunk, and threw her out of the window before a

month was over. That's what comes of going in for sweet names."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Ayala.

"Very well. Didn't Septimus Traffick marry your cousin?"

"Of course he did, about a month ago."

"He is another friend of mine. Why didn't you go to your cousin's

marriage?"

"There were reasons," said Ayala.

"I know all about it," said the Colonel. "You quarreled with Augusta

down in Scotland, and you don't like poor Traffick because he has got

a bald head."

"I believe you're a conjuror," said Ayala.

"And then your cousin was jealous because you went to the top of St.

Peter's, and because you would walk with Mr. Traffick on the Pincian.

I was in Rome, and saw all about it."

"I won't have anything more to do with you," said Ayala.

"And then you quarreled with one set of uncles and aunts, and now you

live with another."

"Your aunt told you that."

"And I know your cousin, Tom Tringle."

"You know Tom?" asked Ayala.

"Yes; he was ever so good to me in Rome about a horse; I like Tom

Tringle in spite of his chains. Don't you think, upon the whole, if

that young lady had put up with Jonathan she would have done better

than marry Montpellier? But now they're going to waltz, come along."

Thereupon Ayala got up and danced with him for the next ten minutes.

Again and again before the evening was over she danced with him;

and although, in the course of the night, many other partners had

offered themselves, and many had been accepted, she felt that Colonel

Jonathan Stubbs had certainly been the partner of the evening. Why

should he be so hideously ugly? said Ayala to herself, as she wished

him good night before she left the room with the Marchesa and Nina.

"What do you think of my nephew?" said the Marchesa, when they were

in the carriage together.

"Do tell us what you think of Jonathan?" asked Nina.

"I thought he was very good-natured."

"And very handsome?"

"Nina, don't be foolish. Jonathan is one of the most rising officers

in the British service, and luckily he can be that without being

beautiful to look at."

"I declare," said Nina, "sometimes, when he is talking, I think him

perfectly lovely. The fire comes out of his eyes, and he rubs his old

red hairs about till they sparkle. Then he shines all over like a

carbuncle, and every word he says makes me die of laughter."

"I laughed too," said Ayala.

"But you didn't think him beautiful," said Nina.

"No, I did not," said Ayala. "I liked him very much, but I thought

him very ugly. Was it true about the young lady who married Mr.

Montgomery de Montpellier and was thrown out of window a week

afterwards?"

"There is one other thing I must tell you about Jonathan," said Nina.

"You must not believe a word that he says."

"That I deny," said the Marchesa; "but here we are. And now, girls,

get out of the carriage and go up to bed at once."

Ayala, before she went to sleep, and again when she woke in the

morning, thought a great deal about her new friend. As to shining

like a carbuncle,--perhaps he did, but that was not her idea of manly

beauty. And hair ought not to sparkle. She was sure that Colonel

Stubbs was very, very ugly. She was almost disposed to think that he

was the ugliest man she had ever seen. He certainly was a great deal

worse than her cousin Tom, who, after all, was not particularly ugly.

But, nevertheless, she would very much rather dance with Colonel

Stubbs. She was sure of that, even without reference to Tom's

objectionable love-making. Upon the whole she liked dancing with

Colonel Stubbs, ugly as he was. Indeed, she liked him very much. She

had spent a very pleasant evening because he had been there. "It

all depends upon whether any one has anything to say." That was the

determination to which she came when she endeavoured to explain

to herself how it had come to pass that she had liked dancing

with anybody so very hideous. The Angel of Light would of course

have plenty to say for himself, and would be something altogether

different in appearance. He would be handsome,--or rather, intensely

interesting, and his talk would be of other things. He would not

say of himself that he danced as well as though he were a rogue, or

declare that a lady had been thrown out of a window the week after

she was married. Nothing could be more unlike an Angel of Light

than Colonel Stubbs,--unless, perhaps, it were Tom Tringle. Colonel

Stubbs, however, was completely unangelic,--so much so that the

marvel was that he should yet be so pleasant. She had no horror of

Colonel Stubbs at all. She would go anywhere with Colonel Stubbs, and

feel herself to be quite safe. She hoped she might meet him again

very often. He was, as it were, the Genius of Comedy, without a touch

of which life would be very dull. But the Angel of Light must have

something tragic in his composition,--must verge, at any rate, on

tragedy. Ayala did not know that beautiful description of a "Sallow,

sublime, sort of Werther-faced man," but I fear that in creating her

Angel of Light she drew a picture in her imagination of a man of that

kind.

Days went on, till the last day of Ayala's visit had come, and it was

necessary that she should go back to Kingsbury Crescent. It was now

August, and everybody was leaving town. The Marchesa and Nina were

going to their relations, the Alburys, at Stalham, and could not,

of course, take Ayala with them. The Dosetts would remain in town

for another month, with a distant hope of being able to run down to

Pegwell Bay for a fortnight in September. But even that had not yet

been promised. Colonel Stubbs had been more than once at the house in

Brook Street, and Ayala had come to know him almost as she might some

great tame dog. It was now the afternoon of the last day, and she was

sorry because she would not be able to see him again. She was to be

taken to the theatre that night,--and then to Kingsbury Crescent and

the realms of Lethe early on the following morning.

It was very hot, and they were sitting with the shutters nearly

closed, having resolved not to go out, in order that they might be

ready for the theatre--when the door was opened and Tom Tringle was

announced. Tom Tringle had come to call on his cousin.

"Lady Baldoni," he said, "I hope you won't think me intrusive, but I

thought I'd come and see my cousin once whilst she is staying here."

The Marchesa bowed, and assured him that he was very welcome. "It's

tremendously hot," said Tom.

"Very hot, indeed," said the Marchesa.

"I don't think it's ever so hot as this in Rome," said Nina, fanning

herself.

"I find it quite impossible to walk a yard," said Tom, "and therefore

I've hired a Hansom cab all to myself. The man goes home and changes

his horse regularly when I go to dinner; then he comes for me at ten,

and sticks to me till I go to bed. I call that a very good plan."

Nina asked him why he didn't drive the cab himself. "That would be a

grind," said he, "because it would be so hot all day, and there might

be rain at night. Have you read what my brother-in-law, Traffick,

said in the House last night, my Lady?"

"I'm afraid I passed it over," said the Marchesa. "Indeed, I am not

very good at the debates."

"They are dull," said Tom, "but when it's one's brother-in-law, one

does like to look at it. I thought he made that very clear about the

malt tax." The Marchesa smiled and bowed.

"What is--malt tax?" asked Nina.

"Well, it means beer," said Tom. "The question is whether the poor

man pays it who drinks the beer, or the farmer who grows the malt. It

is very interesting when you come to think of it."

"But I fear I never have come to think of it," said the Marchesa.

During all this time Ayala never said a word, but sat looking at her

cousin, and remembering how much better Colonel Jonathan Stubbs would

have talked if he had been there. Then, after a pause, Tom got up,

and took his leave, having to content himself with simply squeezing

his cousin's hand as he left the room.

"He is a lout," said Ayala, as soon as she knew that the door was

closed behind him.

"I don't see anything loutish at all," said the Marchesa.

"He's just like most other young men," said Nina.

"He's not at all like Colonel Stubbs," said Ayala.

Then the Marchesa preached a little sermon. "Colonel Stubbs, my

dear," she said, "happens to have been thrown a good deal about the

world, and has thus been able to pick up that easy mode of talking

which young ladies like, perhaps because it means nothing. Your

cousin is a man of business, and will probably have amassed a large

fortune when my poor nephew will be a do-nothing old general on

half-pay. His chatter will not then have availed him quite so much as

your cousin's habits of business."

"Mamma," said Nina, "Jonathan will have money of his own."

"Never mind, my dear. I do not like to hear a young man called a lout

because he's more like a man of business than a man of pleasure."

Ayala felt herself to be snubbed, but was not a whit the less sure

that Tom was a lout, and the Colonel an agreeable partner to dance

with. But at the same time she remembered that neither the one nor

the other was to be spoken of in the same breath, or thought of in

the same spirit, as the Angel of Light.

When they were dressed, and just going to dinner, the ugly man with

the red head was announced, and declared his purpose of going with

them to the theatre. "I've been to the office," said he, "and got a

stall next to yours, and have managed it all. It now only remains

that you should give me some dinner and a seat in the carriage." Of

course he was told that there was no dinner sufficient for a man to

eat; but he put up with a feminine repast, and spent the whole of the

evening sitting next to his aunt, on a back tier, while the two girls

were placed in front. In this way, leaning forward, with his ugly

head between them, he acted as a running chorus to the play during

the whole performance. Ayala thoroughly enjoyed herself, and thought

that in all her experience no play she'd seen had ever been so

delightful. On their return home the two girls were both told to

go to bed in the Marchesa's good-natured authoritative tone; but,

nevertheless, Ayala did manage to say a word before she finally

adjusted herself on her pillow. "It is all very well, Nina, for your

mamma to say that a young man of business is the best; but I do know

a lout when I see him; and I am quite sure that my cousin Tom is a

lout, and that Colonel Jonathan is not."

"I believe you are falling in love with Colonel Jonathan," said Nina.

"I should as soon think of falling in love with a wild bear;--but

he's not a lout, and therefore I like him."

CHAPTER XVII.

LUCY IS VERY FIRM.

It was just before the Tringles had returned from Rome, during the

winter, that Lucy Dormer had met Mr. Hamel in Kensington Gardens for

the second time, had walked there with him perhaps for half-an-hour,

and had then returned home with a conviction that she had done a

wicked thing. But she had other convictions also, which were perhaps

stronger. "Now that we have met, am I to lose you again?" he had

said. What could he mean by losing, except that she was the one thing

which he desired to find? But she had not seen him since, or heard a

word of his whereabouts, although, as she so well remembered, she had

given him an address at her Aunt Emmeline's,--not knowing then that

it would be her fate to become a resident in her Aunt Emmeline's

house. She had told him that Ayala would live there, and that perhaps

she might sometimes be found visiting Ayala. Now, she was herself

filling Ayala's place, and might so easily have been found. But she

knew nothing of the man who had once asked whether he was "to lose

her again."

Her own feelings about Isadore Hamel were clear enough to herself

now. Ayala in her hot humour had asked her whether she could give her

hand and her heart to such a one as their cousin Tom, and she had

found herself constrained to say that she could not do so, because

she was not free,--not quite free,--to do as she pleased with her

hand and her heart. She had striven hard not to acknowledge anything,

even to Ayala,--even to herself. But the words had been forced

from her, and now she was conscious, terribly conscious, that the

words were true. There could be no one else now, whether Tom or

another,--whether such as Tom or such as any other. It was just that

little word that had won her. "Am I to lose you again?" A girl loves

most often because she is loved,--not from choice on her part. She is

won by the flattery of the man's desire. "Am I to lose you again?" He

had seemed to throw all his soul into his voice and into his eyes as

he had asked the question. A sudden thrill had filled her, and, for

his sake,--for his sake,--she had hoped that she might not be lost to

him. Now she began to fear that he was lost to her.

Something has been told of the relations between Isadore Hamel and

his father. They were both sculptors, the father having become a

successful artist. The father was liberal, but he was essentially

autocratic. If he supplied to his son the means of living,--and

he was willing to supply the means of very comfortable life,--he

expected that his son should live to some extent in accordance with

his fancies. The father wished his son to live in Rome, and to live

after the manner of Romans. Isadore would prefer to live in London,

and after the manner of Londoners. For a time he had been allowed to

do so, and had achieved a moderate success. But a young artist may

achieve a moderate success with a pecuniary result that shall be

almost less than moderate. After a while the sculptor in Rome had

told his son that if he intended to remain in London he ought to do

so on the independent proceeds of his own profession. Isadore, if

he would return to Rome, would be made welcome to join his affairs

to those of his father. In other words, he was to be turned adrift

if he remained in London, and petted with every luxury if he would

consent to follow his art in Italy. But in Rome the father lived

after a fashion which was distasteful to the son. Old Mr. Hamel had

repudiated all conventions. Conventions are apt to go very quickly,

one after another, when the first has been thrown aside. The man who

ceases to dress for dinner soon finds it to be a trouble to wash his

hands. A house is a bore. Calling is a bore. Church is a great bore.

A family is a bore. A wife is an unendurable bore. All laws are

bores, except those by which inferiors can be constrained to do their

work. Mr. Hamel had got rid of a great many bores, and had a strong

opinion that bores prevailed more mightily in London than in Rome.

Isadore was not a bore to him. He was always willing to have Isadore

near to him. But if Isadore chose to enter the conventional mode of

life he must do it at his own expense. It may be said at once that

Isadore's present view of life was very much influenced by Lucy

Dormer, and by a feeling that she certainly was conventional. A small

house, very prettily furnished, somewhat near the Fulham Road, or

perhaps verging a little towards South Kensington, with two maids,

and perhaps an additional one as nurse in the process of some months,

with a pleasant English breakfast and a pleasant English teapot in

the evening, afforded certainly a very conventional aspect of life.

But, at the present moment, it was his aspect, and therefore he could

not go upon all fours with his father. In this state of things there

had, during the last twelvemonth, been more than one journey made

to Rome and back. Ayala had seen him at Rome, and Lady Tringle,

remembering that the man had been intimate with her brother, was

afraid of him. They had made inquiry about him, and had fully

resolved that he should not be allowed into the house if he came

after Ayala. He had no mother,--to speak of; and he had little

brothers and sisters, who also had no mother,--to speak of. Mr.

Hamel, the father, entertained friends on Sunday, with the express

object of playing cards. That a Papist should do so was to be

borne;--but Mr. Hamel was not a Papist, and, therefore, would

certainly be ----. All this and much more had been learned at Rome,

and therefore Lucy, though she herself never mentioned Mr. Hamel's

name in Queen's Gate, heard evil things said of the man who was so

dear to her.

It was the custom of her life to be driven out every day with her

aunt and Gertrude. Not to be taken two or three times round the

park would be to Lady Tringle to rob her of the best appreciated of

all those gifts of fortune which had come to her by reason of the

banker's wealth. It was a stern law;--and as stern a law that Lucy

should accompany her. Gertrude, as being an absolute daughter of

the house, and as having an almost acknowledged lover of her own,

was allowed some choice. But for Lucy there was no alternative. Why

should she not go and be driven? Two days before they left town she

was being driven, while her aunt was sitting almost in a slumber

beside her, when suddenly a young man, leaning over the railings,

took off his hat so close to Lucy that she could almost have put out

her hand to him. He was standing there all alone, and seemed simply

to be watching the carriages as they passed. She felt that she

blushed as she bowed to him, and saw also that the colour had risen

to his face. Then she turned gently round to her aunt, whom she hoped

to find still sleeping; but Aunt Emmeline could slumber with one eye

open. "Who was that young man, my dear?" said Aunt Emmeline.

"It was Mr. Hamel."

"Mr. Isadore Hamel!" said Aunt Emmeline, horrified. "Is that the

young man at Rome who has got the horrible father?"

"I do not know his father," said Lucy; "but he does live at Rome."

"Of course, it's the Mr. Hamel I mean. He scraped some acquaintance

with Ayala, but I would not have it for a moment. He is not at all

the sort of person any young girl ought to know. His father is a

horrible man. I hope he is no friend of yours, Lucy!"

"He is a friend of mine." Lucy said this in a tone of voice which was

very seldom heard from her, but which, when heard, was evidence that

beneath the softness of her general manner there lay a will of her

own.

"Then, my dear, I hope that such friendship may be discontinued as

long as you remain with us."

"He was a friend of papa's," said Lucy.

"That's all very well. I suppose artists must know artists, even

though they are disreputable."

"Mr. Hamel is not disreputable."

Aunt Emmeline, as she heard this, could almost fancy that she

was renewing one of her difficulties with Ayala. "My dear," she

said,--and she intended to be very impressive as she spoke,--"in

a matter such as this I must beg you to be guided by me. You must

acknowledge that I know the world better than you do. Mr. Hamel is

not a fit person to be acquainted with a young lady who occupies the

place of my daughter. I am sure that will be sufficient." Then she

leant back in the carriage, and seemed again to slumber; but she

still had one eye open, so that if Mr. Hamel should appear again at

any corner and venture to raise his hand she might be aware of the

impropriety. But on that day Mr. Hamel did not appear again.

Lucy did not speak another word during the drive, and on reaching

the house went at once to her bed-room. While she had been out with

her aunt close to her, and while it had been possible that the man

she loved should appear again, she had been unable to collect her

thoughts or to make up her mind what she would do or say. One thing

simply was certain to her, that if Mr. Hamel should present himself

again to her she would not desert him. All that her aunt had said to

her as to improprieties and the like had no effect at all upon her.

The man had been welcomed at her father's house, had been allowed

there to be intimate with her, and was now, as she was well aware,

much dearer to her than any other human being. Not for all the Aunt

Emmelines in the world would she regard him otherwise than as her

dearest friend.

When she was alone she discussed the matter with herself. It was

repugnant to her that there should be any secret on the subject

between herself and her aunt after what had been said,--much more

that there should be any deceit. "Mr. Hamel is not fit to be

acquainted with a lady who occupies the position of my daughter." It

was thus that her aunt had spoken. To this the proper answer seemed

to be,--seemed at least to Lucy,--"In that case, my dear aunt, I

cannot for a moment longer occupy the position of your daughter,

as I certainly am acquainted and shall remain acquainted with Mr.

Hamel." But to such speech as this on her own part there were two

impediments. In the first place it would imply that Mr. Hamel was her

lover,--for implying which Mr. Hamel had given her no authority; and

then what should she immediately do when she had thus obstinately

declared herself to be unfit for that daughter's position which she

was supposed now to occupy? With all her firmness of determination

she could not bring herself to tell her aunt that Mr. Hamel was her

lover. Not because it was not as yet true. She would have been quite

willing that her aunt should know the exact truth, if the exact

truth could be explained. But how could she convey to such a one

as Aunt Emmeline the meaning of those words,--"Am I to lose you

again?" How could she make her aunt understand that she held herself

to be absolutely bound, as by a marriage vow, by such words as

those,--words in which there was no promise, even had they come from

some fitting suitor, but which would be regarded by Aunt Emmeline

as being simply impertinent coming as they did from such a one as

Isadore Hamel. It was quite out of the question to tell all that to

Aunt Emmeline, but yet it was necessary that something should be

told. She had been ordered to drop her acquaintance with Isadore, and

it was essential that she should declare that she would do nothing

of the kind. She would not recognise such obedience as a duty on her

part. The friendship had been created by her father, to whom her

earlier obedience had been due. It might be that, refusing to render

such obedience, her aunt and her uncle might tell her that there

could be no longer shelter for her in that house. They could not

cherish and foster a disobedient child. If it must be so, it must.

Though there should be no home left to her in all the wide world she

would not accept an order which should separate her from the man

she loved. She must simply tell her aunt that she could not drop Mr.

Hamel's acquaintance,--because Mr. Hamel was a friend.

Early on the next morning she did so. "Are you aware," said Aunt

Emmeline, with a severe face, "that he is--illegitimate." Lucy

blushed, but made no answer. "Is he--is he--engaged to you?"

"No," said Lucy, sharply.

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"No," said Lucy.

"Then what is it?" asked Lady Tringle, in a tone which was intended

to signify that as nothing of that kind had taken place such a

friendship could be a matter of no consequence.

"He was papa's friend."

"My dear, what can that matter? Your poor papa has gone, and you are

in my charge and your uncle's. Surely you cannot object to choose

your friends as we should wish. Mr. Hamel is a gentleman of whom we

do not approve. You cannot have seen very much of him, and it would

be very easy for you, should he bow to you again in the park, to let

him see that you do not like it."

"But I do like it," said Lucy, with energy.

"Lucy!"

"I do like to see Mr. Hamel, and I feel almost sure that he will come

and call here now that he has seen me. Last winter he asked me my

address, and I gave him this house."

"When you were living with your Aunt Dosett?"

"Yes, I did, Aunt Emmeline. I thought Aunt Margaret would not like

him to come to Kingsbury Crescent, and, as Ayala was to be here, I

told him he might call at Queen's Gate."

Then Lady Tringle was really angry. It was not only that her house

should have been selected for so improper a use but that Lucy should

have shown a fear and a respect for Mrs. Dosett which had not been

accorded to herself. It was shocking to her pride that that should

have appeared to be easy of achievement at Queen's Gate which was

too wicked to be attempted at Kingsbury Crescent. And then the thing

which had been done seemed in itself to her to be so horrible! This

girl, when living under the care of her aunt, had made an appointment

with an improper young man at the house of another aunt! Any

appointment made by a young lady with a young man must, as she

thought, be wrong. She began to be aghast at the very nature of the

girl who could do such a thing, and on reflecting that that girl was

at present under her charge as an adopted daughter. "Lucy," she said,

very impressively, "there must be an end of this."

"There cannot be an end of it," said Lucy.

"Do you mean to say that he is to come here to this house whether I

and your uncle like it or not?"

"He will come," said Lucy; "I am sure he will come. Now he has seen

me he will come at once."

"Why should he do that if he is not your lover?"

"Because," said Lucy,--and then she paused; "because--. It is very

hard to tell you, Aunt Emmeline."

"Why should he come so quickly?" demanded Aunt Emmeline again.

"Because--. Though he has said nothing to me such as that you mean,"

stammered out Lucy, determined to tell the whole truth, "I believe

that he will."

"And you?"

"If he did I should accept him."

"Has he any means?"

"I do not know."

"Have you any?"

"Certainly not."

"And you would consent to be his wife after what I've told you?"

"Yes," said Lucy, "I should."

"Then it must not be in this house. That is all. I will not have him

here on any pretence whatsoever."

"I thought not, Aunt Emmeline, and therefore I have told you."

"Do you mean that you will make an appointment with him elsewhere?"

"Certainly not. I have not in fact ever made an appointment with him.

I do not know his address. Till yesterday I thought that he was in

Rome. I never had a line from him in my life, and of course have

never written to him." Upon hearing all this Lady Tringle sat in

silence, not quite knowing how to carry on the conversation. The

condition of Lucy's mind was so strange to her, that she felt herself

to be incompetent to dictate. She could only resolve that under no

circumstances should the objectionable man be allowed into her house.

"Now, Aunt Emmeline," said Lucy, "I have told you everything. Of

course you have a right to order, but I also have some right. You

told me I was to drop Mr. Hamel, but I cannot drop him. If he comes

in my way I certainly shall not drop him. If he comes here I shall

see him if I can. If you and Uncle Tom choose to turn me out of

course you can do so."

"I shall tell your uncle all about it," said Aunt Emmeline, angrily,

"and then you will hear what he says." And so the conversation was

ended.

At that moment Sir Thomas was, of course, in the City managing his

millions, and as Lucy herself had suggested that Mr. Hamel might not

improbably call on that very day, and as she was quite determined

that Mr. Hamel should not enter the doors of the house in Queen's

Gate, it was necessary that steps should be taken at once. Some hours

afterwards Mr. Hamel did call and asked for Miss Dormer. The door was

opened by a well-appointed footman, who, with lugubrious face,--with

a face which spoke much more eloquently than his words,--declared

that Miss Dormer was not at home. In answer to further inquiries he

went on to express an opinion that Miss Dormer never would be at

home;--from all which it may be seen that Aunt Emmeline had taken

strong measures to carry out her purpose. Hamel, when he heard his

fate thus plainly spoken from the man's mouth, turned away, not

doubting its meaning. He had seen Lucy's face in the park, and had

seen also Lady Tringle's gesture after his greeting. That Lady

Tringle should not be disposed to receive him at her house was not

matter of surprise to him.

When Lucy went to bed that night she did not doubt that Mr. Hamel had

called, and that he had been turned away from the door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOWN IN SCOTLAND.

When the time came, all the Tringles, together with the Honourable

Mrs. Traffick, started for Glenbogie. Aunt Emmeline had told Sir

Thomas all Lucy's sins, but Sir Thomas had not made so much of them

as his wife had expected. "It wouldn't be a bad thing to have a

husband for Lucy," said Sir Thomas.

"But the man hasn't got a sixpence."

"He has a profession."

"I don't know that he makes anything. And then think of his father!

He is--illegitimate!" Sir Thomas seemed rather to sneer at this. "And

if you knew the way the old man lives in Rome! He plays cards all

Sunday!" Again Sir Thomas sneered. Sir Thomas was fairly submissive

to the conventionalities himself, but did not think that they ought

to stand in the way of a provision for a young lady who had no

provision of her own. "You wouldn't wish to have him at Queen's

Gate?" asked Lady Tringle.

"Certainly not, if he makes nothing by his profession. A good deal,

I think, depends upon that." Then nothing further was said, but Lucy

was not told her uncle's opinion on the matter, as had been promised.

When she went down to Glenbogie she only knew that Mr. Hamel was

considered to be by far too black a sheep to be admitted into her

aunt's presence, and that she must regard herself as separated from

the man as far as any separation could be effected by her present

protectors. But if he would be true to her, as to a girl whom he had

a short time since so keenly rejoiced in "finding again," she was

quite sure that she could be true to him.

On the day fixed, the 20th of August, Mr. Houston arrived at

Glenbogie, with boots and stockings and ammunition, such as Tom

had recommended when interrogated on those matters by his sister,

Gertrude. "I travelled down with a man I think you know," he said to

Lucy;--"at any rate your sister does, because I saw him with her at

Rome." The man turned out to be Isadore Hamel. "I didn't like to ask

him whether he was coming here," said Frank Houston.

"No; he is not coming here," said Aunt Emmeline.

"Certainly not," said Gertrude, who was quite prepared to take up the

cudgels on her mother's behalf against Mr. Hamel.

"He said something about another man he used to know at Rome, before

you came. He was a nephew of that Marchesa Baldoni."

"She was a lady we didn't like a bit too well," said Gertrude.

"A very stuck-up sort of person, who did all she could to spoil

Ayala," said Aunt Emmeline.

"Ayala has just been staying with her," said Lucy. "She has been very

kind to Ayala."

"We have nothing to do with that now," said Aunt Emmeline. "Ayala can

stay with whom she and her aunt pleases. Is this Mr. Hamel, whom you

saw, a friend of the Marchesa's?"

"He seemed to be a friend of the Marchesa's nephew," continued

Houston;--"one Colonel Stubbs. We used to see him at Rome, and a most

curious man he is. His name is Jonathan, and I don't suppose that any

man was ever seen so red before. He is shooting somewhere, and Hamel

seems to be going to join him. I thought he might have been coming

here afterwards, as you all were in Rome together."

"Certainly he is not coming here," said Aunt Emmeline. "And as for

Colonel Stubbs, I never heard of him before."

A week of the time allotted to Frank Houston had gone before he had

repeated a word of his suit to Sir Thomas. But with Gertrude every

opportunity had been allowed him, and by the rest of the family they

had been regarded as though they were engaged. Mr. Traffick, who was

now at Glenbogie, in accordance with the compact made with him, did

not at first approve of Frank Houston. He had insinuated to Lady

Tringle, and had said very plainly to Augusta, that he regarded a

young man, without any employment and without any income, as being

quite unfit to marry. "If he had a seat in the House it would be

quite a different thing," he had said to Augusta. But his wife had

snubbed him; telling him, almost in so many words, that if Gertrude

was determined to have her way in opposition to her father she

certainly would not be deterred by her brother-in-law. "It's nothing

to me," Mr. Traffick had then said; "the money won't come out of my

pocket; but when a man has nothing else to do he is sure to spend all

that he can lay his hands upon." After that, however, he withdrew

his opposition, and allowed it to be supposed that he was ready to

receive Frank Houston as his brother-in-law, should it be so decided.

The time was running by both with Houston, the expectant son-in-law,

and with Mr. Traffick, who had achieved his position, and both were

aware that no grace would be allowed to them beyond that which had

been promised. Frank had fully considered the matter, and was quite

resolved that it would be unmanly in him to run after his cousin

Imogene, in the Tyrol, before he had performed his business. One

day, therefore, after having returned from the daily allowance of

slaughter, he contrived to find Sir Thomas in the solitude of his own

room, and again began to act the part of Allan-a-Dale. "I thought,

Mr. Houston," said Sir Thomas, "that we had settled that matter

before."

"Not quite," said Houston.

"I don't know why you should say so. I intended to be understood as

expressing my mind."

"But you have been good enough to ask me down here."

"I may ask a man to my house, I suppose, without intending to give

him my daughter's hand." Then he again asked the important question,

to which Allan-a-Dale's answer was so unreasonable and so successful.

"Have you an income on which to maintain my daughter?"

"I cannot just say that I have, Sir Thomas," said Houston,

apologetically.

"Then you mean to ask me to furnish you with an income."

"You can do as you please about that, Sir Thomas."

"You can hardly marry her without it."

"Well; no; not altogether. No doubt it is true that I should not have

proposed myself had I not thought that the young lady would have

something of her own."

"But she has nothing of her own," said Sir Thomas. And then that

interview was over.

"You won't throw us over, Lady Tringle?" Houston said to Gertrude's

mother that evening.

"Sir Thomas likes to have his own way," said Lady Tringle.

"Somebody got round him about Septimus Traffick."

"That was different," said Lady Tringle. "Mr. Traffick is in

Parliament, and that gives him an employment. He is a son of Lord

Boardotrade, and some of these days he will be in office."

"Of course, you know that if Gertrude sticks to it she will have her

own way. When a girl sticks to it her father has to give way. What

does it matter to him whether I have any business or not? The money

would be the same in one case as the other, only it does seem such an

unnecessary trouble to have it put off."

All this Lady Tringle seemed to take in good part, and half

acknowledged that if Frank Houston were constant in the matter he

would succeed at last. Gertrude, when the time for his departure

had come, expressed herself as thoroughly disgusted by her father's

sternness. "It's all bosh," she said to her lover. "Who is Lord

Boardotrade that that should make a difference? I have as much right

to please myself as Augusta." But there was the stern fact that the

money had not been promised, and even Frank had not proposed to marry

the girl of his heart without the concomitant thousands.

Before he left Glenbogie, on the evening of his departure, he wrote a

second letter to Miss Docimer, as follows;--

DEAR COUSIN IM,

Here I am at Glenbogie, and here I have been for a week,

without doing a stroke of work. The father still asks "of

his house and his home," and does not seem to be at all

affected by my reference to the romantic grandeur of my

own peculiar residence. Perhaps I may boast so far as to

say that I have laughed on the lass as successfully as did

Allan-a-Dale. But what's the good of laughing on a lass

when one has got nothing to eat. Allan-a-Dale could pick

a pocket or cut a purse, accomplishments in which I am

altogether deficient. I suppose I shall succeed sooner or

later, but when I put my neck into the collar I had no

idea that there would be so much up-hill work before me.

It is all very well joking, but it is not nice to be asked

"of your house and your home" by a gentleman who knows

very well you've got none, and is conscious of inhabiting

three or four palaces himself. Such treatment must be

described as being decidedly vulgar. And then he must know

that it can be of no possible permanent use. The ladies

are all on my side, but I am told by Tringle mÃ¨re that

I am less acceptable than old Traffick, who married the

other girl, because I'm not the son of Lord Boardotrade!

Nothing astonishes me so much as the bad taste of some

people. Now, it must all be put off till Christmas, and

the cruel part is, that one doesn't see how I'm to go on

living.

In the meantime I have a little time in which to amuse

myself, and I shall turn up in about three weeks at Merle

Park. I wish chiefly to beg that you will not dissuade me

from what I see clearly to be a duty. I know exactly your

line of argument. Following a girl for her money is, you

will say, mercenary. So, as far as I can see, is every

transaction in the world by which men live. The judges,

the bishops, the poets, the Royal academicians, and the

Prime Ministers, are all mercenary;--as is also the man

who breaks stones for 2\_s.\_ 6\_d.\_ a-day. How shall a man

live without being mercenary unless he be born to fortune?

Are not girls always mercenary? Will she marry me knowing

that I have nothing? Will you not marry some one whom

you will probably like much less simply because he will

have something for you to eat and drink? Of course I

am mercenary, and I don't even pretend to old Tringle

that I am not so. I feel a little tired of this special

effort;--but if I were to abandon it I should simply have

to begin again elsewhere. I have sighted my stag, and

I must go on following him, trying to get on the right

side of the wind till I bring him down. It is not nice,

but it is to me manifestly my duty,--and I shall do it.

Therefore, do not let there be any blowing up. I hate to

be scolded.

Yours always affectionately,

F. H.

Gertrude, when he was gone, did not take the matter quite so quietly

as he did, feeling that, as she had made up her mind, and as all

her world would know that she had made up her mind, it behoved her

to carry her purpose to its desired end. A girl who is known to

be engaged, but whose engagement is not allowed, is always in a

disagreeable plight.

"Mamma," she said, "I think that papa is not treating me well."

"My dear, your papa has always had his own way."

"That is all very well;--but why am I to be worse used than Augusta?

It turns out now that Mr. Traffick has not got a shilling of his

own."

"Your papa likes his being in Parliament."

"All the girls can't marry Members of Parliament."

"And he likes his being the son of Lord Boardotrade."

"Lord Boardotrade! I call that very mean. Mr. Houston is a gentleman,

and the Buncombe property has been for ever so many hundreds of years

in the family. I think more of Frank as to birth and all that than I

do of Lord Boardotrade and his mushroom peerage. Can't you tell papa

that I mean to marry Mr. Houston at last, and that he is making very

little of me to let me be talked about as I shall be?"

"I don't think I can, Gertrude."

"Then I shall. What would he say if I were to run away with Frank?"

"I don't think Frank Houston would do that."

"He would if I told him,--in a moment." There Miss Tringle was

probably in error. "And unless papa consents I shall tell him. I am

not going to be made miserable for ever."

This was at Glenbogie, in Inverness-shire, on the southeastern side

of Loch Ness, where Sir Thomas Tringle possessed a beautiful mansion,

with a deer-forest, and a waterfall of his own, and any amount of

moors which the minds of sportmen could conceive. Nothing in Scotland

could be more excellent, unless there might be some truth in the

remarks of those who said that the grouse were scarce, and that the

deer were almost non-existent. On the other side of the lake, four

miles up from the gates, on the edge of a ravine, down which rushed

a little stream called the Caller, was an inconvenient ricketty

cottage, built piecemeal at two or three different times, called

Drumcaller. From one room you went into another, and from that into

a third. To get from the sitting-room, which was called the parlour,

into another which was called the den, you had to pass through the

kitchen, or else to make communication by a covered passage out of

doors which seemed to hang over the margin of the ravine. Pine-trees

enveloped the place. Looking at the house from the outside any

one would declare it to be wet through. It certainly could not

with truth be described as a comfortable family residence. But you

might, perhaps, travel through all Scotland without finding a more

beautifully romantic spot in which to reside. From that passage,

which seemed to totter suspended over the rocks, whence the tumbling

rushing waters could always be heard like music close at hand, the

view down over the little twisting river was such as filled the mind

with a conviction of realised poetry. Behind the house across the

little garden there was a high rock where a little path had been

formed, from which could be seen the whole valley of the Caller and

the broad shining expanse of the lake beyond. Those who knew the

cottage of Drumcaller were apt to say that no man in Scotland had a

more picturesque abode, or one more inconvenient. Even bread had to

be carried up from Callerfoot, as was called the little village down

on the lake side, and other provisions, such even as meat, had to be

fetched twenty miles, from the town of Inverness.

A few days after the departure of Houston from Glenbogie two men

were seated with pipes in their mouths on the landing outside the

room called the den to which the passage from the parlour ran. Here

a square platform had been constructed capable of containing two

arm-chairs, and here the owner of the cottage was accustomed to sit,

when he was disposed, as he called it, to loaf away his time at

Drumcaller. This man was Colonel Jonathan Stubbs, and his companion

at the present moment was Isadore Hamel.

"I never knew them in Rome," said the Colonel. "I never even saw

Ayala there, though she was so much at my aunt's house. I was in

Sicily part of the time, and did not get back till they had all

quarrelled. I did know the nephew, who was a good-natured but a

vulgar young man. They are vulgar people, I should say."

"You could hardly have found Ayala vulgar?" asked Hamel.

"Indeed, no. But uncles and aunts and nephews and nieces are not at

all bound to run together. Ayala is the daintiest little darling I

ever saw."

"I knew their father and mother, and certainly no one would have

called them vulgar."

"Sisters when they marry of course go off according to their

husbands, and the children follow. In this case one sister became

Tringlish after Sir Tringle, and the other Dormerish, after that most

improvident of human beings, your late friend the artist. I don't

suppose any amount of experience will teach Ayala how many shillings

there are in a pound. No doubt the Honourable Mrs. Traffick knows all

about it."

"I don't think a girl is much improved by knowing how many shillings

there are in a pound," said Hamel.

"It is useful sometimes."

"So it might be to kill a sheep and skin it, or to milk a cow and

make cheese; but here, as in other things, one acquirement will drive

out others. A woman, if she cannot be beautiful, should at any rate

be graceful, and if she cannot soar to poetry, should at least be

soft and unworldly."

"That's all very well in its way, but I go in for roasting, baking,

and boiling.

I can bake and I can brew;

I can make an Irish stew;

Wash a shirt and iron it too.

That's the sort of girl I mean to go in for if ever I marry; and

when you've got six children and a small income it's apt to turn out

better than grace and poetry."

"A little of both perhaps," said Hamel.

"Well, yes; I don't mind a little Byron now and again, so there is

no nonsense. As to Glenbogie, it's right over there across the lake.

You can get a boat at Callerfoot, and a fellow to take you across and

wait for you won't cost you more than three half-crowns. I suppose

Glenbogie is as far from the lake on that side as my cottage is on

this. How you'll get up except by walking I cannot say, unless you

will write a note to Sir Thomas and ask him to send a horse down for

you."

"Sir Thomas would not accommodate me."

"You think he will frown if you come after his niece?"

"I simply want to call on Miss Dormer," said Hamel, blushing,

"because her father was always kind to me."

"I don't mean to ask any questions," said the Colonel.

"It is just so as I say. I do not like being in the neighbourhood

without calling on Miss Dormer."

"I daresay not."

"But I doubt whether Sir Thomas or Lady Tringle would be at all

inclined to make me welcome. As to the distance, I can walk that

easily enough, and if the door is slammed in my face I can walk back

again."

Thus it was resolved that early on the following morning after

breakfast Isadore Hamel should go across the lake and make his way up

to Glenbogie.

CHAPTER XIX.

ISADORE HAMEL IS ASKED TO LUNCH.

On the following morning, the morning of Monday, 2nd September,

Isadore Hamel started on his journey. He had thought much about the

journey before he made it. No doubt the door had been slammed in his

face in London. He felt quite conscious of that, and conscious also

that a man should not renew his attempt to enter a door when it has

been once slammed in his face. But he understood the circumstances

nearly as they had happened,--except that he was not aware how far

the door had been slammed by Lady Tringle without any concurrence

on the part of Sir Thomas. But the door had, at any rate, not been

slammed by Lucy. The only person he had really wished to see within

that house had been Lucy Dormer; and he had hitherto no reason for

supposing that she would be unwilling to receive him. Her face had

been sweet and gracious when she saw him in the Park. Was he to deny

himself all hope of any future intercourse with her because Lady

Tringle had chosen to despise him? He must make some attempt. It was

more than probable, no doubt, that this attempt would be futile.

The servant at Glenbogie would probably be as well instructed as

the servant in Queen's Gate. But still a man has to go on and do

something, if he means to do anything. There could be no good in

sitting up at Drumcaller, at one side of the lake, and thinking of

Lucy Dormer far away, at the other side. He had not at all made up

his mind that he would ask Lucy to be his wife. His professional

income was still poor, and she, as he was aware, had nothing. But

he felt it to be incumbent upon him to get nearer to her if it were

possible, and to say something to her if the privilege of speech

should be accorded to him.

He walked down to Callerfoot, refusing the loan of the Colonel's pony

carriage, and thence had himself carried across the lake in a hired

boat to a place called Sandy's Quay. That, he was assured, was the

spot on the other side from whence the nearest road would be found

to Glenbogie. But nobody on the Callerfoot side could tell him what

would be the distance. At Sandy's Quay he was assured that it was

twelve miles to Glenbogie House; but he soon found that the man who

told him had a pony for hire. "Ye'll nae get there under twalve

mile,--or maybe saxteen, if ye attampt to walk up the glin." So said

the owner of the pony. But milder information came to him speedily.

A little boy would show him the way up the glen for sixpence, and

engage to bring him to the house in an hour and a half. So he started

with the little boy, and after a hot scramble for about two hours he

found himself within the demesne. Poking their way up through thick

bushes from a ravine, they showed their two heads,--first the boy and

then the sculptor,--close by the side of the private road,--just as

Sir Thomas was passing, mounted on his cob. "It's his ain sell," said

the boy, dropping his head again amongst the bushes.

Hamel, when he had made good his footing, had first to turn round

so that the lad might not lose his wages. A dirty little hand came

up for the sixpence, but the head never appeared again. It was well

known in the neighbourhood,--especially at Sandy's Quay, where boats

were used to land,--that Sir Thomas was not partial to visitors who

made their way into Glenbogie by any but the authorised road. While

Hamel was paying his debt, he stood still on his steed waiting to

see who might be the trespasser. "That's not a high road," said Sir

Thomas, as the young man approached him. As the last quarter of an

hour from the bottom of the ravine had been occupied in very stiff

climbing among the rocks the information conveyed appeared to Hamel

to have been almost unnecessary. "Your way up to the house, if you

are going there, would have been through the lodge down there."

"Perhaps you are Sir Thomas Tringle," said Hamel.

"That is my name."

"Then I have to ask your pardon for my mode of ingress. I am going up

to the house; but having crossed the lake from Callerfoot I did not

know my way on this side, and so I have clambered up the ravine." Sir

Thomas bowed, and then waited for further tidings. "I believe Miss

Dormer is at the house?"

"My niece is there."

"My name is Hamel,--Isadore Hamel. I am a sculptor, and used to be

acquainted with her father. I have had great kindness from the whole

family, and so I was going to call upon her. If you do not object, I

will go on to the house."

Sir Thomas sat upon his horse speechless for a minute. He had to

consider whether he did not object or not. He was well aware that

his wife objected,--aware also that he had declined to coincide with

his wife's objection when it had been pressed upon him. Why should

not his niece have the advantage of a lover, if a proper sort of a

lover came in her way? As to the father's morals or the son's birth,

those matters to Sir Thomas were nothing. The young man, he was

told, was good at making busts. Would any one buy the busts when

they were made? That was the question. His wife would certainly be

prejudiced,--would think it necessary to reject for Lucy any suitor

she would reject for her own girls. And then, as Sir Thomas felt, she

had not shown great judgment in selecting suitors for her own girls.

"Oh, Mr. Hamel, are you?" he said at last.

"Isadore Hamel."

"You called at Queen's Gate once, not long ago?"

"I did," said Hamel; "but saw no one."

"No, you didn't; I heard that. Well, you can go on to the house if

you like, but you had better ask for Lady Tringle. After coming over

from Callerfoot you'll want some lunch. Stop a moment. I don't mind

if I ride back with you." And so the two started towards the house,

and Hamel listened whilst Sir Thomas expatiated on the beauties of

Glenbogie.

They had passed through one gate and were approaching another, when,

away among the trees, there was a young lady seen walking alone.

"There is Miss Dormer," said Hamel; "I suppose I may join her?" Sir

Thomas could not quite make up his mind whether the meeting was to

be allowed or not, but he could not bring himself at the spur of the

moment to refuse his sanction. So Hamel made his way across to Lucy,

while Sir Thomas rode on alone to the house.

Lucy had seen her uncle on the cob, and, being accustomed to see him

on the cob, knew of course who he was. She had also seen another man

with him, but not in the least expecting that Hamel was in those

parts, had never dreamt that he was her uncle's companion. It was

not till Hamel was near to her that she understood that the man was

coming to join herself; and then, when she did recognise the man, she

was lost in amazement. "You hardly expected to see me here?" said he.

"Indeed; no."

"Nor did I expect that I should find you in this way."

"My uncle knows it is you?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, yes. I met him as I came up from the ravine, and he has asked

me to go on to the house to lunch." Then there was silence for a few

moments as they walked on together. "I hope you do not think that I

am persecuting you in making my way over here."

"Oh, no; not persecuting!" Lucy when she heard the sound of what she

herself had said, was angry with herself, feeling that she had almost

declared him guilty of some wrong in having come thither. "Of course

I am glad to see you," she added, "for papa's sake, but I'm afraid--"

"Afraid of what, Miss Dormer?"

She looked him full in the face as she answered him, collecting her

courage to make the declaration which seemed to be necessary. "My

Aunt Emmeline does not want you to come."

"Why should she not want me?"

"That I cannot tell. Perhaps if I did know I should not tell. But

it is so. You called at Queen's Gate, and I know that you were not

admitted, though I was at home. Of course, Aunt Emmeline has a right

to choose who shall come. It is not as though I had a house of my

own."

"But Sir Thomas asked me in."

"Then you had better go in. After what Aunt Emmeline said, I do not

think that you ought to remain with me."

"Your uncle knows I am with you," said Hamel. Then they walked on

towards the house together in silence for a while. "Do you mean to

say," he continued, "that because your aunt objects you are never to

see me again?"

"I hope I shall see you again. You were papa's friend, and I should

be so very sorry not to see you again."

"I suppose," he said, slowly, "I can never be more than your papa's

friend."

"You are mine also."

"I would be more than that." Then he paused as if waiting for a

reply, but she of course had none to make. "I would be so much more

than that, Lucy." Still she had no answer to give him. But there

comes a time when no answer is as excellent eloquence as any words

that can be spoken. Hamel, who had probably not thought much of this,

was nevertheless at once informed by his instincts that it was so.

"Oh, Lucy," he said, "if you can love me say so."

"Mr. Hamel," she whispered.

"Lucy."

"Mr. Hamel, I told you about Aunt Emmeline. She will not allow it. I

ought not to have let you speak to me like this, while I am staying

here."

"But your uncle knows I am with you."

"My aunt does not know. We must go to the house. She expressly

desired that I would not speak to you."

"And you will obey her--always?"

"No; not always. I did not say that I should obey her always. Some

day, perhaps, I shall do as I think fit myself."

"And then you will speak to me?"

"Then I will speak to you," she said.

"And love me?"

"And love you," she answered, again looking him full in the face.

"But now pray, pray let us go on." For he had stopped her awhile

amidst the trees, and had put out his hand as though to take hers,

and had opened his arms as though he would embrace her. But she

passed on quickly, and hardly answered his further questions till

they found themselves together in the hall of the house.

Then they met Lady Tringle, who was just passing into the room where

the lunch was laid, and following her were Augusta, Gertrude, and the

Honourable Septimus Traffick. For, though Frank Houston had found

himself compelled to go at the day named, the Honourable Septimus

had contrived to squeeze out another week. Augusta was indeed still

not without hope that the paternal hospitality of Glenbogie might be

prolonged till dear Merle Park should once again open her portals.

Sir Thomas had already passed into the dining-room, having in gruff

voice informed his wife that he had invited Mr. Hamel to come in to

lunch. "Mr. Hamel!" she had exclaimed. "Yes, Mr. Hamel. I could not

see the man starving when he had come all this way. I don't know

anything against him." Then he had turned away, and had gone into

the dining-room, and was now standing with his back to the empty

fire-place, determined to take Mr. Hamel's part if any want of

courtesy were shown to him.

It certainly was hard upon Lady Tringle. She frowned and was going to

walk on without any acknowledgment, when Lucy timidly went through

a form of introduction. "Aunt Emmeline, this is Mr. Hamel. Uncle

Tom met him somewhere in the grounds and has asked him to come to

luncheon." Then Lady Tringle curtseyed and made a bow. The curtsey

and the bow together were sufficient to have crushed the heart of any

young man who had not been comforted and exalted by such words as

Isadore had heard from Lucy's lips not five minutes since. "And love

you," she had said. After that Lady Tringle might curtsey and bow

as she would, and he could still live uncrushed. After the curtsey

and the bow Lady Tringle passed on. Lucy fell into the rank behind

Gertrude; and then Hamel afterwards took his place behind the

Honourable Septimus. "If you will sit there, Mr. Hamel," said Lady

Tringle, pointing to a chair, across the table, obliquely, at the

greatest possible distance from that occupied by Lucy. There he

was stationed between Mr. Traffick and Sir Thomas. But now, in his

present frame of mind, his position at the table made very little

difference to him.

The lunch was eaten in grim silence. Sir Thomas was not a man profuse

with conversation at his meals, and at this moment was ill-inclined

for any words except what he might use in scolding his wife for being

uncivil to his guest. Lady Tringle sat with her head erect, hardly

opening her mouth sufficiently to allow the food to enter it. It was

her purpose to show her displeasure at Mr. Hamel, and she showed it.

Augusta took her mother's part, thoroughly despising the two Dormer

girls and any lover that they might have. Poor Gertrude had on that

morning been violently persecuted by a lecture as to Frank Houston's

impecuniosity. Lucy of course would not speak. The Honourable

Septimus was anxious chiefly about his lunch,--somewhat anxious also

to offend neither the master nor the mistress of Merle Park. Hamel

made one or two little efforts to extract answers from Sir Thomas,

but soon found that Sir Thomas would prefer to be left in silence.

What did it signify to him? He had done all that he wanted, and much

more than he had expected.

The rising and getting away from luncheon is always a difficulty,--so

great a difficulty when there are guests that lunch should never be

much a company festival. There is no provision for leaving the table

as there is at dinner. But on this occasion Lady Tringle extemporised

provision the first moment in which they had all ceased to eat. "Mr.

Hamel," she said very loudly, "would you like some cheese?" Mr.

Hamel, with a little start, declared that he wanted no cheese. "Then,

my dears, I think we will go into my room. Lucy, will you come with

me?" Upon this the four ladies all went out in procession, but her

ladyship was careful that Lucy should go first so that there might

be no possibility of escape. Augusta and Gertrude followed her. The

minds of all the four were somewhat perturbed; but among the four

Lucy's heart was by far the lightest.

"Are you staying over with Stubbs at that cottage?" asked the

Honourable Septimus. "A very queer fellow is Stubbs."

"A very good fellow," said Hamel.

"I dare say. He hasn't got any shooting?"

"I think not."

"Not a head. Glentower wouldn't let an acre of shooting over there

for any money." This was the Earl of Glentower, to whom belonged an

enormous tract of country on the other side of the lake. "What on

earth does he do with himself stuck up on the top of those rocks?"

"He does shoot sometimes, I believe, when Lord Glentower is there."

"That's a poor kind of fun, waiting to be asked for a day," said

the Honourable Septimus, who rarely waited for anything till he was

asked. "Does he get any fishing?"

"He catches a few trout sometimes in the tarns above. But I fancy

that Stubbs isn't much devoted to shooting and fishing."

"Then what the d---- does he do with himself in such a country as

this?" Hamel shrugged his shoulders, not caring to say that what with

walking, what with reading and writing, his friend could be as happy

as the day was long in such a place as Drumcaller.

"Is he a Liberal?"

"A what?" asked Hamel. "Oh, a Liberal? Upon my word I don't know what

he is. He is chiefly given to poetry, tobacco, and military matters."

Then the Honourable Septimus turned up his nose in disgust, and

ceased his cross-examination as to the character and pursuits of

Colonel Jonathan Stubbs.

"Sir Thomas, I am very much obliged to you for your kindness," said

Hamel, getting up suddenly. "As it is a long way over to Drumcaller I

think I will make a start. I know my way down the Glen and should be

sure to miss it by any other route. Perhaps you'll let me go back as

I came." Sir Thomas offered him the loan of a horse, but this was

refused, and Hamel started on his return journey across the lake.

When he had gone a few steps from the portal he turned to look at

the house which contained one whom he now regarded as belonging

exclusively to himself; perhaps he thought that he might catch some

final view of Lucy; or, not quite thinking it, fancied that some

such chance might at least be possible; but he saw nothing but the

uninteresting facade of the grand mansion. Lucy was employed quite

otherwise. She was listening to a lecture in which her aunt was

describing to her how very badly Mr. Hamel had behaved in obtruding

himself on the shades of Glenbogie. The lecture was somewhat long, as

Aunt Emmeline found it necessary to repeat all the arguments which

she had before used as to the miscreant's birth, as to his want of

adequate means, and as to the general iniquities of the miscreant's

father. All this she repeated more than once with an energy that was

quite unusual to her. The flood of her eloquence was so great that

Lucy found no moment for an interposing word till all these evils

had been denunciated twice and thrice. But then she spoke. "Aunt

Emmeline," she said, "I am engaged to Mr. Hamel now."

"What!"

"He has asked me to be his wife and I have promised."

"And that after all that I had said to you!"

"Aunt Emmeline, I told you that I should not drop him. I did not bid

him come here. Uncle Tom brought him. When I saw him I would have

avoided him if I could. I told him he ought not to be here because

you did not wish it; and then he answered that my uncle knew that he

was with me. Of course when he told me that he--loved me, I could

not make him any other answer." Then Aunt Emmeline expressed the

magnitude of her indignation simply by silence, and Lucy was left to

think of her lover in solitude.

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"And how have you fared on your day's journey?" said the Colonel,

when Hamel found him still seated on the platform with a book in his

hand.

"Much better than I thought. Sir Thomas gave me luncheon."

"And the young lady?"

"The young lady was gracious also; but I am afraid that I cannot

carry my praises of the family at Glenbogie any further. The three

Tringle ladies looked at me as I was sitting at table as though I

certainly had no business in their august society."

CHAPTER XX.

STUBBS UPON MATRIMONY.

Before that evening was over,--or in the course of the night,

it might be better said, as the two men sat up late with their

pipes,--Hamel told his friend the Colonel exactly what had taken

place that morning over at Glenbogie. "You went for the purpose, of

course?" asked the Colonel.

"For an off chance?"

"I know that well enough. I never heard of a man's walking twelve

miles to call upon a young lady merely because he knew her father;

and when there was to be a second call within a few weeks, the first

having not been taken in very good part by the young lady's friends,

my inquiring mind told me that there was something more than old

family friendship."

"Your inquiring mind saw into the truth."

"And now looks forward to further events. Can she bake and can she

brew?"

"I do not doubt that she could if she tried."

"And can she wash a shirt for a man? Don't suppose, my dear fellow,

that I intend to say that your wife will have to wash yours. Washing

a shirt, as read in the poem from which I am quoting, is presumed to

be simply emblematic of household duties in general."

"I take all you say in good part,--as coming from a friend."

"I regard matrimony," said the Colonel, "as being altogether the

happiest state of life for a man,--unless to be engaged to some

lovely creature, in whom one can have perfect confidence, may be a

thought happier. One can enjoy all the ecstatic mental reflection,

all the delights of conceit which come from being loved, that feeling

of superiority to all the world around which illumines the bosom

of the favoured lover, without having to put one's hand into one's

pocket, or having one's pipe put out either morally or physically.

The next to this is matrimony itself, which is the only remedy for

that consciousness of disreputable debauchery, a savour of which

always clings, more or less strongly, to unmarried men in our rank

of life. The chimes must be heard at midnight, let a young man be

ever so well given to the proprieties, and he must have just a touch

of the swingebuckler about him, or he will seem to himself to be

deficient in virility. There is no getting out of it until a man

marry. But then--"

"Well; then?"

"Do you know the man whose long-preserved hat is always brushed

carefully, whose coat is the pattern of neatness, but still a little

threadbare when you look at it,--in the colour of whose cheek there

is still some touch of juvenility, but whose step is ever heavy and

whose brow is always sad? The seriousness of life has pressed the

smiles out of him. He has learned hardly to want anything for himself

but outward decency and the common necessaries of life. Such little

personal indulgences as are common to you and to me are as strange to

him as ortolans or diamonds."

"I do not think I do know him."

"I do;--well. I have seen him in the regiment, I have met him on

the steps of a public office, I have watched him as he entered his

parsonage house. You shall find him coming out of a lawyer's office,

where he has sat for the last nine hours, having supported nature

with two penny biscuits. He has always those few thin hairs over his

forehead, he has always that well-brushed hat, he has always that

load of care on his brow. He is generally thinking whether he shall

endeavour to extend his credit with the butcher, or resolve that the

supply of meat may be again curtailed without injury to the health of

his five daughters."

"That is an ugly picture."

"But is it true?"

"In some cases, of course, it is."

"And yet not ugly all round," said the meditative Colonel, who had

just replenished his pipe. "There are, on the other side, the five

daughters, and the partner of this load of cares. He knows it is well

to have the five daughters, rather than to live with plenty of beef

and mutton,--even with the ortolans if you will,--and with no one to

care whether his body may be racked in this world or his spirit in

the next. I do not say whether the balance of good or evil be on one

side or the other; but when a man is going to do a thing he should

know what it is he is going to do."

"The reading of all this," said Hamel, "is, that if I succeed in

marrying Miss Dormer I must have thin locks, and a bad hat, and a

butcher's bill."

"Other men do."

"Some, instead, have balances at their bankers, and die worth thirty,

forty, or fifty thousand pounds, to the great consolation of the five

daughters."

"Or a hundred thousand pounds! There is, of course, no end to

the amount of thousands which a successful professional man may

accumulate. You may be the man; but the question is, whether you

should not have reasonable ground to suppose yourself the man, before

you encumber yourself with the five daughters."

"It seems to me," said Hamel, "that the need of such assurance is

cowardly."

"That is just the question which I am always debating with myself. I

also want to rid myself of that swingebuckler flavour. I feel that

for me, like Adam, it is not good that I should be alone. I would

fain ask the first girl, that I could love well enough to wish

to make myself one with her, to be my wife, regardless of hats,

butchers, and daughters. It is a plucky and a fine thing for a man to

feel that he can make his back broad enough for all burdens. But yet

what is the good of thinking that you can carry a sack of wheat when

you are sure that you have not, in truth, strength to raise it from

the ground?"

"Strength will come," said Hamel.

"Yes, and the bad hat. And, worse than the bad hat, the soiled gown;

and perhaps with the soiled gown the altered heart;--and perhaps with

the altered heart an absence of all that tenderness which it is a

woman's special right to expect from a man."

"I should have thought you would have been the last to be so

self-diffident."

"To be so thoughtful, you mean," said the Colonel. "I am unattached

now, and having had no special duty for the last three months I have

given myself over to thinking in a nasty morbid manner. It comes,

I daresay, partly from tobacco. But there is comfort in this,--that

no such reflections falling out of one man's mouth ever had the

slightest effect in influencing another man's conduct."

Hamel had told his friend with great triumph of his engagement

with Lucy Dormer, but the friend did not return the confidence by

informing the sculptor that during the whole of this conversation,

and for many days previous to it, his mind had been concerned with

the image of Lucy's sister. He was aware that Ayala had been, as it

were, turned out from her rich uncle's house, and given over to the

comparative poverty of Kingsbury Crescent. He himself, at the present

moment, was possessed of what might be considered a comfortable

income for a bachelor. He had been accustomed to live almost more

than comfortably; but, having so lived, was aware of himself that

he had not adapted himself for straitened circumstances. In spite

of that advice of his as to the brewing, baking, and washing

capabilities of a female candidate for marriage, he knew himself well

enough to be aware that a wife red with a face from a kitchen fire

would be distasteful to him. He had often told himself that to look

for a woman with money would be still more distasteful. Therefore he

had thought that for the present, at least, it would be well for him

to remain as he was. But now he had come across Ayala, and though in

the pursuance of his philosophy he had assured himself that Ayala

should be nothing to him, still he found himself so often reverting

to this resolution that Ayala, instead of being nothing, was very

much indeed to him.

Three days after this Hamel was preparing himself for his departure

immediately after breakfast. "What a beast you are to go," said the

Colonel, "when there can be no possible reason for your going."

"The five daughters and the bad hat make it necessary that a fellow

should do a little work sometimes."

"Why can't you make your images down here?"

"With you for a model, and mud out of the Caller for clay."

"I shouldn't have the slightest objection. In your art you cannot

perpetuate the atrocity of my colour, as the fellow did who painted

my portrait last winter. If you will go, go, and make busts at

unheard-of prices, so that the five daughters may live for ever on

the fat of the land. Can I do any good for you by going over to

Glenbogie?"

"If you could snub that Mr. Traffick, who is of all men the most

atrocious."

"The power doesn't exist," said the Colonel, "which could snub the

Honourable Septimus. That man is possessed of a strength which I

thoroughly envy,--which is perhaps more enviable than any other gift

the gods can give. Words cannot penetrate that skin of his. Satire

flows off him like water from a duck. Ridicule does not touch him.

The fellest abuse does not succeed in inflicting the slightest wound.

He has learnt the great secret that a man cannot be cut who will not

be cut. As it is worth no man's while to protract an enmity with

such a one as he, he suffers from no prolonged enmities. He walks

unassailable by any darts, and is, I should say, the happiest man in

London."

"Then I fear you can do nothing for me at Glenbogie. To mollify Aunt

Emmeline would, I fear, be beyond your power. Sir Thomas, as far as I

can see, does not require much mollifying."

"Sir Thomas might give the young woman a thousand or two."

"That is not the way in which I desire to keep a good hat on my

head," said Hamel, as he seated himself in the little carriage which

was to take him down to Callerfoot.

The Colonel remained at Drumcaller till the end of September, when

his presence was required at Aldershot,--during which time he shot

a good deal, in obedience to the good-natured behests of Lord

Glentower, and in spite of the up-turned nose of Mr. Traffick. He

read much, and smoked much,--so that as to the passing of his time

there was not need to pity him, and he consumed a portion of his

spare hours in a correspondence with his aunt, the Marchesa, and with

his cousin Nina. One of his letters from each shall be given,--and

also one of the letters written to each in reply.

NINA TO HER COUSIN THE COLONEL.

MY DEAR JONATHAN,

Lady Albury says that you ought to be here, and so you

ought. It is ever so nice. There is a Mr. Ponsonby here,

and he and I can beat any other couple at lawn tennis.

There is an awning over the ground, which is such a

lounge. Playing lawn tennis with a parasol as those

Melcombe girls did is stupid. They were here, but have

gone. One I am quite sure was over head and ears in love

with Mr. Ponsonby. These sort of things are always all

on one side, you know. He isn't very much of a man, but

he does play lawn tennis divinely. Take it altogether, I

don't think there is anything out to beat lawn tennis. I

don't know about hunting,--and I don't suppose I ever

shall.

We tried to have Ayala here, but I fear it will not come

off. Lady Albury was good-natured, but at last she did not

quite like writing to Mrs. Dosett. So mamma wrote, but the

lady's answer was very stiff. She thought it better for

Ayala to remain among her own friends. Poor Ayala! It is

clear that a knight will be wanted to go in armour, and

get her out of prison. I will leave it to you to say who

must be the knight.

I hope you will come for a day or two before you go to

Aldershot. We stay till the 1st of October. You will be a

beast if you don't. Lady Albury says she never means to

ask you again. "Oh, Stubbs!" said Sir Harry; "Stubbs is

one of those fellows who never come if they're asked." Of

course we all sat upon him. Then he declared that you were

the dearest friend he had in the world, but that he never

dared to dream that you would ever come to Stalham again.

Perhaps if we can hit it off at last with Ayala, then you

would come. Mamma means to try again.--Your affectionate

cousin,

NINA.

THE MARCHESA BALDONI TO HER NEPHEW, COLONEL STUBBS.

MY DEAR JONATHAN,

I did my best for my protÃ©gÃ©, but I am afraid it will not

succeed. Her aunt Mrs. Dosett seems to think that, as

Ayala is fated to live with her, Ayala had better take

her fate as she finds it. The meaning of that is, that if

a girl is doomed to have a dull life she had better not

begin it with a little pleasure. There is a good deal to

be said for the argument, but if I were the girl I should

like to begin with the pleasure and take my chance for

the reaction. I should perhaps be vain enough to think

that during the preliminary course I might solve all the

difficulty by my beaux yeux. I saw Mrs. Dosett once, and

now I have had a letter from her. Upon the whole, I am

inclined to pity poor Ayala.

We are very happy here. The Marchese has gone to Como

to look after some property he has there. Do not be

ill-natured enough to say that the two things go

together;--but in truth he is never comfortable out of

Italy. He had a slice of red meat put before him the other

day, and that decided him to start at once.

On the first of October we go back to London, and shall

remain till the end of November. They have asked Nina to

come again in November in order that she may see a hunt. I

know that means that she will try to jump over something,

and have her leg broken. You must be here and not allow

it. If she does come here I shall perhaps go down to

Brighton for a fortnight.

Yes;--I do think Ayala Dormer is a very pretty girl, and I

do think, also, that she is clever. I quite agree that she

is ladylike. But I do not therefore think that she is just

such a girl as such a man as Colonel Jonathan Stubbs ought

to marry. She is one of those human beings who seem to

have been removed out of this world and brought up in

another. Though she knows ever so much that nobody else

knows, she is ignorant of ever so much that everybody

ought to know. Wandering through a grove, or seated by a

brook, or shivering with you on the top of a mountain, she

would be charming. I doubt whether she would be equally

good at the top of your table, or looking after your

children, or keeping the week's accounts. She would tease

you with poetry, and not even pretend to be instructed

when you told her how an army ought to be moved. I say

nothing as to the fact that she hasn't got a penny, though

you are just in that position which makes it necessary

for a man to get some money with his wife. I therefore am

altogether indisposed to any matrimonial outlook in that

direction.--Your affectionate aunt,

BEATRICE BALDONI.

COLONEL STUBBS TO HIS COUSIN NINA.

DEAR NINA,

Lady Albury is wrong; I ought not to be at Stalham. What

should I do at Stalham at this time of year, who never

shoot partridges, and what would be the use of attempting

lawn tennis when I know I should be cut out by Mr.

Ponsonby? If that day in November is to come off then I'll

come and coach you across the country. You tell Sir Harry

that I say so, and that I will bring three horses for one

week. I think it very hard about poor Ayala Dormer, but

what can any knight do in such a case? When a young lady

is handed over to the custody of an uncle or an aunt,

she becomes that uncle's and aunt's individual property.

Mrs. Dosett may be the most noxious dragon that ever was

created for the mortification and general misery of an

imprisoned damsel, but still she is omnipotent. The only

knight who can be of any service is one who will go with a

ring in his hand, and absolutely carry the prisoner away

by force of the marriage service. Your unfortunate cousin

is so exclusively devoted to the duty of fighting his

country's battles that he has not even time to think of a

step so momentous as that.

Poor Ayala! Do not be stupid enough to accuse me of

pitying her because I cannot be the knight to release her;

but I cannot but think how happy she would be at Stalham,

struggling to beat you and Mr. Ponsonby at lawn tennis,

and then risking a cropper when the happy days of November

should come round.--Your loving cousin,

J. S.

COLONEL STUBBS TO THE MARCHESA BALDONI.

MY DEAR AUNT,

Your letter is worthy of the Queen of Sheba, if, as was no

doubt the case, she corresponded with King Solomon. As for

Ayala's fate, if it be her fate to live with Mrs. Dosett,

she can only submit to it. You cannot carry her over to

Italy, nor would the Marchese allow her to divide his

Italian good things with Nina. Poor little bird! She had

her chance of living amidst diamonds and bank-notes, with

the Tringle millionaires, but threw it away after some

fashion that I do not understand. No doubt she was a fool,

but I cannot but like her the better for it. I hardly

think that a fortnight at Stalham, with all Sir Harry's

luxuries around her, would do her much service.

As for myself and the top of my table, and the future

companion who is to be doomed to listen to my military

lucubrations, I am altogether inclined to agree with you,

seeing that you write in a pure spirit of worldly good

sense. No doubt the Queen of Sheba gave advice of the

same sort to King Solomon. I never knew a woman to speak

confidentially of matrimony otherwise than as a matter of

pounds, shillings, and pence. In counsels so given, no

word of love has ever been known to creep in. Why should

it, seeing that love cannot put a leg of mutton into the

pot? Don't imagine that I say this in a spirit either of

censure or satire. Your ideas are my own, and should I

ever marry I shall do so in strict accordance with your

tenets, thinking altogether of the weekly accounts, and

determined to eschew any sitting by the sides of brooks.

I have told Nina about my plans. I will be at Stalham in

November to see that she does not break her neck.--Yours

always,

J. S.

CHAPTER XXI.

AYALA'S INDIGNATION.

Perhaps Mrs. Dosett had some just cause for refusing her sanction for

the proposed visit to Albury. If Fate did require that Ayala should

live permanently in Kingsbury Crescent, the gaiety of a very gay

house, and the wealth of a very wealthy house, would hardly be good

preparation for such a life. Up to the time of her going to the

Marchesa in Brook Street, Ayala had certainly done her best to suit

herself to her aunt's manners,--though she had done it with pain and

suffering. She had hemmed the towels and mended the sheets, and had

made the rounds to the shops. She had endeavoured to attend to the

pounds of meat and to sympathise with her aunt in the interest taken

in the relics of the joints as they escaped from the hungry treatment

of the two maidens in the kitchen. Ayala had been clever enough to

understand that her aunt had been wounded by Lucy's indifference, not

so much because she had desired to avail herself of Lucy's labours

as from a feeling that that indifference had seemed to declare that

her own pursuits were mean and vulgar. Understanding this she had

struggled to make those pursuits her own,--and had in part succeeded.

Her aunt could talk to her about the butter and the washing, matters

as to which her lips had been closed in any conversation with Lucy.

That Ayala was struggling Mrs. Dosett had been aware;--but she had

thought that such struggles were good and had not been hopeless. Then

came the visit to Brook Street, and Ayala returned quite an altered

young woman. It seemed as though she neither could nor would struggle

any longer. "I hate mutton-bones," she said to her aunt one morning

soon after her return.

"No doubt we would all like meat joints the best," said her aunt,

frowning.

"I hate joints too."

"You have, I dare say, been cockered up at the Marchesa's with made

dishes."

"I hate dishes," said Ayala, petulantly.

"You don't hate eating?"

"Yes, I do. It is ignoble. Nature should have managed it differently.

We ought to have sucked it in from the atmosphere through our fingers

and hairs, as the trees do by their leaves. There should have been no

butchers, and no grease, and no nasty smells from the kitchen,--and

no gin."

This was worse than all,--this allusion to the mild but unfashionable

stimulant to which Mr. Dosett had been reduced by his good nature.

"You are flying in the face of the Creator, Miss," said Aunt

Margaret, in her most angry voice,--"in the face of the Creator who

made everything, and ordained what his creatures should eat and drink

by His infinite wisdom."

"Nevertheless," said Ayala, "I think we might have done without

boiled mutton." Then she turned to some articles of domestic

needlework which were in her lap so as to show that in spite of the

wickedness of her opinions she did not mean to be idle. But Mrs.

Dosett, in her wrath, snatched the work from her niece's hands

and carried it out of the room, thus declaring that not even a

pillow-case in her house should owe a stitch to the hands of a girl

so ungrateful and so blasphemous.

The wrath wore off soon. Ayala, though not contrite was meek, and

walked home with her aunt on the following morning, patiently

carrying a pound of butter, six eggs, and a small lump of bacon in a

basket. After that the pillow-case was recommitted to her. But there

still was left evidence enough that the girl's mind had been upset by

the luxuries of Brook Street,--evidence to which Aunt Margaret paid

very much attention, insisting upon it in her colloquies with her

husband. "I think that a little amusement is good for young people,"

said Uncle Reginald, weakly.

"And for old people too. No doubt about it, if they can get it so as

not to do them any harm at the same time. Nothing can be good for a

young woman which unfits her for that state of life to which it has

pleased God to call her. Ayala has to live with us. No doubt there

was a struggle when she first came from your sister, Lady Tringle,

but she made it gallantly, and I gave her great credit. She was just

falling into a quiet mode of life when there came this invitation

from the Marchesa Baldoni. Now she has come back quite an altered

person, and the struggle has to be made all over again." Uncle

Reginald again expressed his opinion that young people ought to have

a little amusement, but he was not strong enough to insist very much

upon his theory. It certainly, however, was true that Ayala, though

she still struggled, had been very much disturbed by the visit.

Then came the invitation to Stalham. There was a very pretty note

from Lady Albury to Ayala herself, saying how much pleasure she would

have in seeing Miss Dormer at her house, where Ayala's old friends

the Marchesa and Nina were then staying. This was accompanied by a

long letter from Nina herself, in which all the charms of Stalham,

including Mr. Ponsonby and lawn tennis, were set forth at full

length. Ayala had already heard much about Stalham and the Alburys

from her friend Nina, who had hinted in a whisper that such an

invitation as this might perhaps be forthcoming. She was ready enough

for the visit, having looked through her wardrobe, and resolved that

things which had been good enough for Brook Street would still be

good enough for Stalham. But the same post had brought a letter for

Mrs. Dosett, and Ayala could see, that, as the letter was read, a

frown came upon her aunt's brow, and that the look on her aunt's

face was decidedly averse to Stalham. This took place soon after

breakfast, when Uncle Reginald had just started for his office, and

neither of them for awhile said a word to the other of the letter

that had been received. It was not till after lunch that Ayala spoke.

"Aunt," she said, "you have had a letter from Lady Albury?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dosett, grimly, "I have had a letter from Lady

Albury."

Then there was another silence, till Ayala, whose mind was full of

promised delights, could not refrain herself longer. "Aunt Margaret,"

she said, "I hope you mean to let me go." For a minute or two there

was no reply, and Ayala again pressed her question. "Lady Albury

wants me to go to Stalham."

"She has written to me to say that she would receive you."

"And I may go?"

"I am strongly of opinion that you had better not," said Mrs. Dosett,

confirming her decree by a nod which might have suited Jupiter.

"Oh, Aunt Margaret, why not?"

"I think it would be most prudent to decline."

"But why,--why,--why, Aunt Margaret?"

"There must be expense."

"I have money enough for the journey left of my own from what Uncle

Tom gave me," said Ayala, pleading her cause with all her eloquence.

"It is not only the money. There are other reasons,--very strong

reasons."

"What reasons, Aunt Margaret?"

"My dear, it is your lot to have to live with us, and not with such

people as the Marchesa Baldoni and Lady Albury."

"I am sure I do not complain."

"But you would complain after having for a time been used to the

luxuries of Albury Park. I do not say that as finding fault, Ayala.

It is human nature that it should be so."

"But I won't complain. Have I ever complained?"

"Yes, my dear. You told me the other day that you did not like bones

of mutton, and you were disgusted because things were greasy. I do

not say this by way of scolding you, Ayala, but only that you may

understand what must be the effect of your going from such a house as

this to such a house as Stalham, and then returning back from Stalham

to such a house as this. You had better be contented with your

position."

"I am contented with my position," sobbed Ayala.

"And allow me to write to Lady Albury refusing the invitation."

But Ayala could not be brought to look at the matter with her aunt's

eyes. When her aunt pressed her for an answer which should convey

her consent she would give none, and at last left the room bitterly

sobbing. Turning the matter over in her own bosom upstairs she

determined to be mutinous. No doubt she owed a certain amount of

obedience to her aunt; but had she not been obedient, had she

not worked hard and lugged about that basket of provisions, and

endeavoured to take an interest in all her aunt's concerns? Was she

so absolutely the property of her aunt that she was bound to do

everything her aunt desired to the utter annihilation of all her

hopes, to the extermination of her promised joys? She felt that she

had succeeded in Brook Street. She had met no Angel of Light, but she

was associated with people whom she had liked, and had been talked to

by those to whom it had been a pleasure to listen. That colonel with

the quaint name and the ugly face was still present to her memory

as he had leaned over her shoulder at the theatre, making her now

laugh by his drollery, and now filling her mind with interest by his

description of the scenes which she was seeing. She was sure that

all this, or something of the same nature, would be renewed for her

delight at Stalham. And was she to be robbed of this,--the only

pleasure which seemed to remain to her in this world,--merely because

her aunt chose to entertain severe notions as to duty and pleasure?

Other girls went out when they were asked. At Rome, when that

question of the dance at the Marchesa's had been discussed, she had

had her own way in opposition to her Aunt Emmeline and her cousin

Augusta. No doubt she had, in consequence partly of her conduct on

that occasion, been turned out of her Uncle Tom's house; but of that

she did not think at the present moment. She would be mutinous, and

would appeal to her Uncle Reginald for assistance.

But the letter which contained the real invitation had been addressed

to her aunt, and her aunt could in truth answer it as she pleased.

The answer might at this moment be in the act of being written, and

should it be averse Ayala knew very well that she could not go in

opposition to it. And yet her aunt came to her in the afternoon

consulting her again, quite unconquered as to her own opinion, but

still evidently unwilling to write the fatal letter without Ayala's

permission. Then Ayala assured herself that she had rights of her

own, which her aunt did not care to contravene. "I think I ought to

be allowed to go," she said, when her aunt came to her during the

afternoon.

"When I think it will be bad for you?"

"It won't be bad. They are very good people. I think that I ought to

be allowed to go."

"Have you no reliance on those who are your natural guardians?"

"Uncle Reginald is my natural guardian," said Ayala, through her

tears.

"Very well! If you refuse to be guided by me as though I were not

your aunt, and as you will pay no attention to what I tell you is

proper for you and best, the question must be left till your uncle

comes home. I cannot but be very much hurt that you should think so

little of me. I have always endeavoured to do the best I could for

you, just as though I were your mother."

"I think that I ought to be allowed to go," repeated Ayala.

As the first consequence of this, the replies to all the three

letters were delayed for the next day's post. Ayala had considered

much with what pretty words she might best answer Lady Albury's kind

note, and she had settled upon a form of words which she had felt to

be very pretty. Unless her uncle would support her, that would be of

no avail, and another form must be chosen. To Nina she would tell the

whole truth, either how full of joy she was,--or else how cruelly

used and how thoroughly broken-hearted. But she could not think

that her uncle would be unkind to her. Her uncle had been uniformly

gentle. Her uncle, when he should know how much her heart was set

upon it, would surely let her go.

The poor girl, when she tacitly agreed that her uncle should be the

arbiter in the matter, thus pledging herself to abide by her uncle's

decision, let it be what it might, did not think what great advantage

her aunt would have over her in that discussion which would be held

upstairs while the master of the house was washing his hands before

dinner. Nor did she know of how much stronger will was her Aunt

Margaret than her Uncle Reginald. While he was washing his hands and

putting on his slippers, the matter was settled in a manner quite

destructive of poor Ayala's hopes. "I won't have it," said Mrs.

Dosett, in reply to the old argument that young people ought to have

some amusement. "If I am to be responsible for the girl I must be

allowed my own way with her. It is trouble enough, and very little

thanks I get for it. Of course she hates me. Nevertheless, I can

endeavour to do my duty, and I will. It is not thanks, nor love, nor

even gratitude, that I look for. I am bound to do the best I can by

her because she is your niece, and because she has no other real

friends. I knew what would come of it when she went to that house in

Brook Street. I was soft then and gave way. The girl has moped about

like a miserable creature ever since. If I am not to have my way

now I will have done with her altogether." Having heard this very

powerful speech, Uncle Reginald was obliged to give way, and it was

settled that after dinner he should convey to Ayala the decision to

which they had come.

Ayala, as she sat at the dinner-table, was all expectation, but she

asked no question. She asked no question after dinner, while her

uncle slowly, solemnly, and sadly sipped his one beaker of cold

gin-and-water. He sipped it very slowly, no doubt because he was

anxious to postpone the evil moment in which he must communicate her

fate to his niece. But at last the melancholy glass was drained, and

then, according to the custom of the family, Mrs. Dosett led the way

up into the drawing-room, followed by Ayala and her husband. He, when

he was on the stairs, and when the eyes of his wife were not upon

him, tremulously put out his hand and laid it on Ayala's shoulder,

as though to embrace her. The poor girl knew well that mark of

affection. There would have been no need for such embracing had the

offered joys of Stalham been in store for her. The tears were already

in her eyes when she seated herself in the drawing-room, as far

removed as possible from the arm-chair which was occupied by her

aunt.

Then her uncle pronounced his judgment in a vacillating voice,--with

a vacillation which was ineffectual of any good to Ayala. "Ayala,"

he said, "your aunt and I have been talking over this invitation to

Stalham, and we are of opinion, my dear, that you had better not

accept it."

"Why not, Uncle Reginald?"

"There would be expense."

"I can pay for my own ticket."

"There would be many expenses, which I need not explain to you more

fully. The truth is, my dear, that poor people cannot afford to live

with rich people, and had better not attempt it."

"I don't want to live with them."

"Visiting them is living with them for a time. I am sorry, Ayala,

that we are not able to put you in a position in which you might

enjoy more of the pleasures incidental to your age; but you must take

the things as they are. Looking at the matter all round, I am sure

that your aunt is right in advising that you should stay at home."

"It isn't advice at all," said Ayala.

"Ayala!" exclaimed her aunt, in a tone of indignation.

"It isn't advice," repeated Ayala. "Of course, if you won't let me

go, I can't."

"You are a very wicked girl," said Mrs. Dosett, "to speak to your

uncle like that, after all that he has done for you."

"Not wicked," said the uncle.

"I say, wicked. But it doesn't matter. I shall at once write to

Lady Albury, as you desire, and of course there will be no further

question as to her going." Soon after that Mrs. Dosett sat down to

her desk, and wrote that letter to which the Marchesa had alluded in

hers to her nephew. No doubt it was stern and hard, and of a nature

to make such a woman as the Marchesa feel that Mrs. Dosett would not

be a pleasant companion for a girl like Ayala. But it was written

with a full conviction that duty required it; and the words, though

hard and stiff, had been chosen with the purpose of showing that the

doing of this disagreeable duty had been felt to be imperative.

When the matter had been thus decided, Ayala soon retreated to her

own room. Her very soul was burning with indignation at the tyranny

to which she thought herself subjected. The use of that weak word,

advice, had angered her more than anything. It had not been advice.

It had not been given as advice. A command had been laid upon her, a

most cruel and unjust command, which she was forced to obey, because

she lacked the power of escaping from her condition of slavery.

Advice, indeed! Advice is a thing with which the advised one may or

may not comply, as that advised one may choose. A slave must obey an

order! Her own papa and her own mamma had always advised her, and the

advice had always been followed, even when read only in the glance of

an eye, in a smile, or a nod. Then she had known what it was to be

advised. Now she was ordered,--as slaves are ordered; and there was

no escape from her slavery!

She, too, must write her letter, but there was no need now of that

pretty studied phrase, in which she had hoped to thank Lady Albury

fitly for her great kindness. She found, after a vain attempt or two,

that it was hopeless to endeavour to write to Lady Albury. The words

would not come to her pen. But she did write to Nina;--

DEAR, DEAREST NINA,

They won't let me go! Oh, my darling, I am so miserable!

Why should they not let me go, when people are so kind, so

very kind, as Lady Albury and your dear mamma? I feel as

though I should like to run from the house, and never come

back, even though I had to die in the streets. I was so

happy when I got your letter and Lady Albury's, and now I

am so wretched! I cannot write to Lady Albury. You must

just tell her, with many thanks from me, that they will

not let me go!

Your unhappy but affectionate friend,

AYALA.

CHAPTER XXII.

AYALA'S GRATITUDE.

There was much pity felt for Ayala among the folk at Stalham. The

sympathies of them all should have been with Mrs. Dosett. They ought

to have felt that the poor aunt was simply performing an unpleasant

duty, and that the girl was impracticable if not disobedient. But

Ayala was known to be very pretty, and Mrs. Dosett was supposed to

be plain. Ayala was interesting, while Mrs. Dosett, from the nature

of her circumstances, was most uninteresting. It was agreed on all

sides, at Stalham, that so pretty a bird as Ayala should not be

imprisoned for ever in so ugly a cage. Such a bird ought, at least,

to be allowed its chance of captivating some fitting mate by its

song and its plumage. That was Lady Albury's argument,--a woman very

good-natured, a little given to match-making, a great friend to

pretty girls,--and whose eldest son was as yet only nine, so that

there could be no danger to herself or her own flock. There was much

ridicule thrown on Mrs. Dosett at Stalham, and many pretty things

said of the bird who was so unworthily imprisoned in Kingsbury

Crescent. At last there was something like a conspiracy, the purport

of which was to get the bird out of its cage in November.

In this conspiracy it can hardly be said that the Marchesa took an

active part. Much as she liked Ayala, she was less prone than Lady

Albury to think that the girl was ill-used. She was more keenly

alive than her cousin,--or rather her cousin's wife,--to the hard

necessities of the world. Ayala must be said to have made her own

bed. At any rate there was the bed and she must lie on it. It was not

the Dosetts' fault that they were poor. According to their means they

were doing the best they could for their niece, and were entitled to

praise rather than abuse. And then the Marchesa was afraid for her

nephew. Colonel Stubbs, in his letter to her, had declared that he

quite agreed with her views as to matrimony; but she was quite alive

to her nephew's sarcasm. Her nephew, though he might in truth agree

with her, nevertheless was sarcastic. Though he was sarcastic, still

he might be made to accede to her views, because he did, in truth,

agree with her. She was eminently an intelligent woman, seeing far

into character, and she knew pretty well the real condition of her

nephew's mind, and could foresee his conduct. He would marry before

long, and might not improbably marry a girl with some money if one

could be made to come in his way, who would at the same time suit

his somewhat fastidious taste. But Ayala suited his taste, Ayala who

had not a shilling, and the Marchesa thought it only too likely that

if Ayala were released from her cage, and brought to Albury, Ayala

might become Mrs. Jonathan Stubbs. That Ayala should refuse to become

Mrs. Jonathan Stubbs did not present itself as a possibility to the

Marchesa.

So the matters were when the Marchesa and Nina returned from Stalham

to London, a promise having been given that Nina should go back to

Stalham in November, and be allowed to see the glories of a hunt. She

was not to ride to hounds. That was a matter of course, but she was

to be permitted to see what a pack of hounds was like, and of what

like were the men in their scarlet coats, and how the huntsman's horn

would sound when it should be heard among the woods and fields. It

was already decided that the Colonel should be there to meet her, and

the conspiracy was formed with the object of getting Ayala out of her

cage at the same time. Stalham was a handsome country seat, in the

county of Rufford, and Sir Harry Albury had lately taken upon himself

the duties of Master of the Rufford and Ufford United Pack. Colonel

Stubbs was to be there with his horses in November, but had, in the

meantime, been seen by Lady Albury, and had been instigated to do

something for the release of Ayala. But what could he do? It was

at first suggested that he should call at Kingsbury Crescent, and

endeavour to mollify the stony heart of Aunt Dosett. But, as he had

said himself, he would be the worst person in the world to perform

such an embassy. "I am not an Adonis, I know," he said, "nor do I

look like a Lothario, but still I am in some sort a young man, and

therefore certain to be regarded as pernicious, as dangerous and

damnable, by such a dragon of virtue as Aunt Dosett. I don't see how

I could expect to have a chance." This interview took place in London

during the latter end of October, and it was at last decided that the

mission should be made by Lady Albury herself, and made, not to Mrs.

Dosett, at Kingsbury Crescent, but to Mr. Dosett at his office in

Somerset House. "I don't think I could stand Mrs. D.," said Lady

Albury.

Lady Albury was a handsome fashionable woman, rather tall, always

excellently dressed, and possessed of a personal assurance which

nothing could daunt. She had the reputation of an affectionate

wife and a good mother, but was nevertheless declared by some

of her friends to be "a little fast." She certainly was fond of

comedy,--those who did not like her were apt to say that her comedy

was only fun,--and was much disposed to have her own way when she

could get it. She was now bent upon liberating Ayala from her cage,

and for this purpose had herself driven into the huge court belonging

to Somerset House.

Mr. Dosett was dignified at his office with the use of a room to

himself, a small room looking out upon the river, in which he spent

six hours on six days of the week in arranging the indexes of

a voluminous library of manuscript letter-books. It was rarely

indeed that he was disturbed by the presence of any visitor. When,

therefore, his door was opened by one of the messengers, and he was

informed that Lady Albury desired to see him, he was for the moment

a good deal disturbed. No option, however, was given to him as to

refusing admission to Lady Albury. She was in the room before the

messenger had completed his announcement, and had seated herself in

one of the two spare chairs which the room afforded as soon as the

door was closed. "Mr. Dosett," she said, "I have taken the great

liberty of calling to say a few words about your niece, Miss Ayala

Dormer."

When the lady was first announced, Mr. Dosett, in his confusion, had

failed to connect the name which he had heard with that of the lady

who had invited Ayala to her house. But now he recognised it, and

knew who it was that had come to him. "You were kind enough," he

said, "to invite my little girl to your house some weeks ago."

"And now I have come to invite her again."

Mr. Dosett was now more disturbed than ever. With what words was he

to refuse the request which this kind but very grand lady was about

to make? How could he explain to her all those details as to his own

poverty, and as to Ayala's fate in having to share that poverty with

him? How could he explain the unfitness of Ayala's temporary sojourn

with people so wealthy and luxurious? And yet were he to yield in the

least how could he face his wife on his return home to the Crescent?

"You are very kind, Lady Albury," he said.

"We particularly wish to have her about the end of the first week in

November," said the lady. "Her friend Nina Baldoni will be there, and

one or two others whom she knows. We shall try to be a little gay for

a week or two."

"I have no doubt it would be gay, and we at home are very dull."

"Do you not think a little gaiety good for young people?" said her

ladyship, using the very argument which poor Mr. Dosett had so often

attempted to employ on Ayala's behalf.

"Yes; a little gaiety," he said, as though deprecating the excessive

amount of hilarity which he imagined to prevail at Stalham.

"Of course you do," said Lady Albury. "Poor little girl! I have heard

so much about her, and of all your goodness to her. Mrs. Dosett I

know is another mother to her; but still a little country air could

not but be beneficial. Do say that she shall come to us, Mr. Dosett."

Then Mr. Dosett felt that, disagreeable as it was, he must preach the

sermon which his wife had preached to him, and he did preach it. He

spoke timidly of his own poverty, and the need which there was that

Ayala should share it. He spoke a word of the danger which might come

from luxury, and of the discontent which would be felt when the girl

returned to her own home. Something he added of the propriety of like

living with like, and ended by praying that Ayala might be excused.

The words came from him with none of that energy which his wife could

have used,--were uttered in a low melancholy drone; but still they

were words hard to answer, and called upon Lady Albury for all her

ingenuity in finding an argument against them.

But Lady Albury was strong-minded, and did find an argument. "You

musn't be angry with me," she said, "if I don't quite agree with you.

Of course you wish to do the best you can for this dear child."

"Indeed I do, Lady Albury."

"How is anything then to be done for her if she remains shut up in

your house? You do not, if I understand, see much company

yourselves."

"None at all."

"You won't be angry with me for my impertinence in alluding to it."

"Not in the least. It is the fact that we live altogether to

ourselves."

"And the happiest kind of life too for married people," said Lady

Albury, who was accustomed to fill her house in the country with a

constant succession of visitors, and to have engagements for every

night of the week in town. "But for young people it is not quite so

good. How is a young lady to get herself settled in life?"

"Settled?" asked Mr. Dosett, vaguely.

"Married," suggested Lady Albury, more plainly. Mr. Dosett shook his

head. No idea on the subject had ever flashed across his mind. To

provide bread and meat, a bed and clothes, for his sister's child

he had felt to be a duty,--but not a husband. Husbands came, or did

not,--as the heavens might be propitious. That Ayala should go to

Stalham for the sake of finding a husband was certainly beyond the

extent of his providing care. "In fact how is a girl to have a chance

at all unless she is allowed to see some one? Of course I don't say

this with reference to our house. There will be no young men there,

or anything of that kind. But, taking a broad view, unless you let a

girl like that have what chances come in her way how is she to get

on? I think you have hardly a right to do it."

"We have done it for the best."

"I am sure of that, Mr. Dosett. And I hope you will tell Mrs. Dosett,

with my compliments, how thoroughly I appreciate her goodness. I

should have called upon her instead of coming here, only that I

cannot very well get into that part of the town."

"I will tell her what you are good enough to say."

"Poor Ayala! I am afraid that her other aunt, Aunt Tringle, was not

as good to her as your wife. I have heard about how all that occurred

in Rome. She was very much admired there. I am told that she is

perfectly lovely."

"Pretty well."

"A sort of beauty that we hardly ever see now,--and very, very

clever."

"Ayala is clever, I think."

"She ought to have her chance. She ought indeed. I don't think you

quite do your duty by such a girl as that unless you let her have a

chance. She is sure to get to know people, and to be asked from one

house to another. I speak plainly, for I really think you ought to

let her come."

All this sank deeply into the heart of Uncle Reginald. Whether it was

for good or evil it seemed to him at the moment to be unanswerable.

If there was a chance of any good thing for Ayala, surely it could

not be his duty to bar her from that chance. A whole vista of new

views in reference to the treatment of young ladies was opened to him

by the words of his visitor. Ayala certainly was pretty. Certainly

she was clever. A husband with an income would certainly be a good

thing. Embryo husbands with incomes do occasionally fall in love with

pretty girls. But how can any pretty girl be fallen in love with

unless some one be permitted to see her? At Kingsbury Crescent there

was not a man to be seen from one end of the year to another. It

occurred to him now, for the first time, that Ayala by her present

life was shut out from any chance of marriage. It was manifestly true

that he had no right to seclude her in that fashion. At last he made

a promise, rashly, as he felt at the very moment of making it, that

he would ask his wife to allow Ayala to go to Stalham. Lady Albury of

course accepted this as an undertaking that Ayala should come, and

went away triumphant.

Mr. Dosett walked home across the parks with a troubled mind,

thinking much of all that had passed between him and the lady of

fashion. It was with great difficulty that he could quite make up his

mind which was right,--the lady of fashion or his wife. If Ayala was

to live always as they lived at Kingsbury Crescent, if it should in

process of time be her fate to marry some man in the same class as

themselves, if continued care as to small pecuniary needs was to be

her future lot, then certainly her comfort would only be disturbed by

such a visit as that now proposed. And was it not probable that such

would be the destiny in store for her? Mr. Dosett knew the world

well enough to be aware that all pretty girls such as Ayala cannot

find rich husbands merely by exhibiting their prettiness. Kingsbury

Crescent, unalloyed by the dangers of Stalham, would certainly be the

most secure. But then he had been told that Ayala now had special

chances offered to her, and that he had no right to rob her of those

chances. He felt this the more strongly, because she was not his

daughter,--only his niece. With a daughter he and his wife might have

used their own judgment without check. But now he had been told that

he had no right to rob Ayala of her chances, and he felt that he had

not the right. By the time that he reached Kingsbury Crescent he had,

with many misgivings, decided in favour of Stalham.

It was now some weeks since the first invitation had been refused,

and during those weeks life had not been pleasant at the Crescent.

Ayala moped and pined as though some great misfortune had fallen upon

her. When she had first come to the Crescent she had borne herself

bravely, as a man bears a trouble when he is conscious that he has

brought it on himself by his own act, and is proud of the act which

has done it. But when that excitement has gone, and the trouble still

remains, the pride wears off, and the man is simply alive to his

suffering. So it had been with Ayala. Then had come the visit to

Brook Street. When, soon after that, she was invited to Stalham, it

seemed as though a new world was being opened to her. There came a

moment when she could again rejoice that she had quarrelled with her

Aunt Emmeline. This new world would be a much better world than the

Tringle world. Then had come the great blow, and it had seemed to her

as though there was nothing but Kingsbury Crescent before her for the

rest of her wretched life.

There was not a detail of all this hidden from the eyes of Aunt

Margaret. Stalham had decided that Aunt Margaret was ugly and

uninteresting. Stalham, according to its own views, was right.

Nevertheless the lady in Kingsbury Crescent had both eyes to see and

a heart to feel. She was hot of temper, but she was forgiving. She

liked her own way, but she was affectionate. She considered it right

to teach her niece the unsavoury mysteries of economy, but she was

aware that such mysteries must be distasteful to one brought up as

Ayala. Even when she had been loudest in denouncing Ayala's mutiny,

her heart had melted in ruth because Ayala had been so unhappy.

She, too, had questioned herself again and again as to the justness

of her decision. Was she entitled to rob Ayala of her chances? In

her frequent discussions with her husband she still persisted in

declaring that Kingsbury Crescent was safe, and that Stalham would be

dangerous. But, nevertheless, in her own bosom she had misgivings. As

she saw the poor girl mope and weary through one day after another,

she could not but have misgivings.

"I have had that Lady Albury with me at the office to-day, and have

almost promised that Ayala shall go to her on the 8th of November."

It was thus that Mr. Dosett rushed at once into his difficulty as

soon as he found himself up-stairs with his wife.

"You have?"

"Well, my dear, I almost did. She said a great deal, and I could not

but agree with much of it. Ayala ought to have her chances."

"What chances?" demanded Mrs. Dosett, who did not at all like the

expression.

"Well; seeing people. She never sees anybody here."

"Nobody is better than some people," said Mrs. Dosett, meaning to be

severe on Lady Albury's probable guests.

"But if a girl sees nobody," said Mr. Dosett, "she can have

no,--no,--no chances."

"She has the chance of wholesome victuals," said Mrs. Dosett, "and I

don't know what other chances you or I can give her."

"She might see--a young man." This Mr. Dosett said very timidly.

"A young fiddlestick! A young man! Young men should be waited for

till they come naturally, and never thought about if they don't come

at all. I hate this looking after young men. If there wasn't a young

man for the next dozen years we should do better,--so as just to

get out of the way of thinking about them for a time." This was Mrs.

Dosett's philosophy; but in spite of her philosophy she did yield,

and on that night it was decided that Ayala after all was to be

allowed to go to Stalham.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

To Mr. Dosett was deputed the agreeable task of telling Ayala on the

next evening what was to befall her. If anything agreeable was to be

done in that sombre house it was always deputed to the master.

"What!" said Ayala, jumping from her chair.

"On the eighth of November," said Mr. Dosett.

"To Stalham?"

"Lady Albury was with me yesterday at the office, and your aunt has

consented."

"Oh, Uncle Reginald!" said Ayala, falling on her knees, and hiding

her face on his lap. Heaven had been once more opened to her.

"I'll never forget it," said Ayala, when she went to thank her

aunt,--"never."

"I only hope it may not do you a mischief."

"And I beg your pardon, Aunt Margaret, because I was,--I

was,--because I was--" She could not find the word which would

express her own delinquency, without admitting more than she intended

to admit,--"too self-asserting, considering that I am only a young

girl." That would have been her meaning could she have found

appropriate words.

"We need not go back to that now," said Aunt Margaret.

END OF VOL. I.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

AYALA'S ANGEL

by

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

Author of "Doctor Thorne," "The Prime Minister," "Orley Farm,"

&c., &c.

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AYALA'S ANGEL.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STALHAM PARK.

On the day fixed Ayala went down to Stalham. A few days before she

started there came to her a letter, or rather an envelope, from her

uncle Sir Thomas, enclosing a cheque for Â£20. The Tringle women had

heard that Ayala had been asked to Stalham, and had mentioned the

visit disparagingly before Sir Thomas. "I think it very wrong of my

poor brother," said Lady Tringle. "She can't have a shilling even to

get herself gloves." This had an effect which had not been intended,

and Sir Thomas sent the cheque for Â£20. Then Ayala felt not only that

the heavens were opened to her but that the sweetest zephyrs were

blowing her on upon her course. Thoughts as to gloves had disturbed

her, and as to some shoes which were wanting, and especially as to

a pretty hat for winter wear. Now she could get hat and shoes and

gloves, and pay her fare, and go down to Stalham with money in her

pocket. Before going she wrote a very pretty note to her Uncle Tom.

On her arrival she was made much of by everyone. Lady Albury called

her the caged bird, and congratulated her on her escape from the

bars. Sir Harry asked her whether she could ride to hounds. Nina

gave her a thousand kisses. But perhaps her greatest delight was

in finding that Jonathan Stubbs was at Albury. She had become so

intimate with the Colonel that she regarded him quite like an old

friend; and when a girl has a male friend, though he may be much less

loved, or not loved at all, he is always more pleasant, or at any

rate more piquant, than a female friend. As for love with Colonel

Stubbs that was quite out of the question. She was sure that he would

never fall in love with herself. His manner to her was altogether

unlike that of a lover. A lover would be smooth, soft, poetic,

and flattering. He was always a little rough to her,--sometimes

almost scolding her. But then he scolded her as she liked to be

scolded,--with a dash of fun and a greatly predominating admixture

of good-nature. He was like a bear,--but a bear who would always

behave himself pleasantly. She was delighted when Colonel Stubbs

congratulated her on her escape from Kingsbury Crescent, and felt

that he was justified by his intimacy when he called Mrs. Dosett a

mollified she-Cerberus.

"Are you going to make one of my team?" said the Colonel to her on

the morning after her arrival. It was a non-hunting morning, and the

gentlemen were vacant about the house till they went out for a little

shooting later on in the day.

"What team?" said Ayala, feeling that she had suddenly received a

check to her happiness. She knew that the Colonel was alluding to

those hunting joys which were to be prepared for Nina, and which were

far beyond her own reach. That question of riding gear is terrible to

young ladies who are not properly supplied. Even had time admitted

she would not have dared to use her uncle's money for such a purpose,

in the hope that a horse might be lent to her. She had told herself

that it was out of the question, and had declared to herself that she

was too thankful for her visit to allow any regret on such a matter

to cross her mind. But when the Colonel spoke of his team there was

something of a pang. How she would have liked to be one of such a

team!

"My pony team. I mean to drive too. You mustn't think that I am

taking a liberty when I say that they are to be called Nina and

Ayala."

There was no liberty at all. Had he called her simply Ayala she would

have felt it to be no more than pleasant friendship, coming from him.

He was so big, and so red, and so ugly, and so friendly! Why should

he not call her Ayala? But as to that team,--it could not be. "If

it's riding," she said demurely, "I can't be one of the ponies."

"It is riding,--of course. Now the Marchesa is not here, we mean to

call it hunting in a mild way."

"I can't," she said.

"But you've got to do it, Miss Dormer."

"I haven't got anything to do it with. Of course, I don't mind

telling you."

"You are to ride the sweetest little horse that ever was

foaled,--just bigger than a pony. It belongs to Sir Harry's sister

who is away, and we've settled it all. There never was a safer little

beast, and he can climb through a fence without letting you know that

it's there."

"But I mean--clothes," said Ayala. Then she whispered, "I haven't got

a habit, or anything else anybody ought to have."

"Ah," said the Colonel; "I don't know anything about that. I should

say that Nina must have managed that. The horse department was left

to me, and I have done my part. You will find that you will have to

go out next Tuesday and Friday. The hounds will be here on Tuesday,

and they will be at Rufford on Friday. Rufford is only nine miles

from here, and it's all settled."

Before the day was over the difficulty had vanished. Miss Albury's

horse was not only called into requisition but Miss Albury's habit

also. Ayala had a little black hat of her own, which Lady Albury

assured her would do excellently well for the hunting field. There

was some fitting and some trying on, and perhaps a few moments of

preliminary despair; but on the Tuesday morning she rode away from

the hall door at eleven o'clock mounted on Sprite, as the little

horse was called, and felt herself from head to foot to be one of

Colonel Stubbs's team. When at Glenbogie she had ridden a little, and

again in Italy, and, being fearless by nature, had no trepidation to

impair the fulness of her delight.

Hunting from home coverts rarely exacts much jumping from ladies.

The woods are big, and the gates are numerous. It is when the

far-away homes of wild foxes are drawn,--those secluded brakes

and gorses where the nobler animal is wont to live at a distance

from carriage-roads and other weak refuges of civilization,--that

the riding capacities of ladies must be equal to those of their

husbands and brothers. This present moment was an occasion for great

delight,--at least, so it was found by both Nina and Ayala. But it

was not an opportunity for great glory. Till it was time for lunch

one fox after another ran about the big woods of Albury in a fashion

that seemed perfect to the two girls, but which nearly broke the

heart of old Tony, who was still huntsman to the Ufford and Rufford

United Hunt. "Darm their nasty ways," said Tony to Mr. Larry

Twentyman, who was one of the popular habitues of the hunt; "they

runs one a top of anothers brushes, till there ain't a 'ound living

knows t'other from which. There's always a many on 'em at Albury,

but I never knew an Albury fox worth his grub yet." But there was

galloping along roads and through gates, and long strings of horsemen

followed each other up and down the rides, and an easy coming back to

the places from which they started, which made the girls think that

the whole thing was divine. Once or twice there was a little bank,

and once or twice a little ditch,--just sufficient to make Ayala feel

that no possible fence would be a difficulty to Sprite. She soon

learnt that mode of governing her body which leaping requires, and

when she was brought into lunch at about two she was sure that she

could do anything which the art of hunting required. But at lunch an

edict went forth as to the two girls, against further hunting for

that day. Nina strove to rebel, and Ayala attempted to be eloquent

by a supplicating glance at the Colonel. But they were told that as

the horses would be wanted again on Friday they had done enough. In

truth, Tony had already trotted off with the hounds to Pringle's

Gorse, a distance of five miles, and the gentlemen who had lingered

over their lunch had to follow him at their best pace. "Pringle's

Gorse is not just the place for young ladies," Sir Harry said, and so

the matter had been decided against Nina and Ayala.

At about six Sir Harry, Colonel Stubbs, and the other gentlemen

returned, declaring that nothing quicker than their run from

Pringle's Gorse had ever been known in that country. "About six miles

straight on end in forty minutes," said the Colonel, "and then a kill

in the open."

"He was laid up under a bank," said young Gosling.

"He was so beat he couldn't carry on a field farther," said Captain

Batsby, who was staying in the house.

"I call that the open," said Stubbs.

"I always think I kill a fox in the open," said Sir Harry, "when the

hounds run into him, because he cannot run another yard with the

country there before him." Then there was a long discussion, as they

stood drinking tea before the fire, as to what "the open" meant, from

which they went to other hunting matters. To all this Ayala listened

with attentive ears, and was aware that she had spent a great day.

Oh, what a difference was there between Stalham and Kingsbury

Crescent!

The next two days were almost equally full of delight. She was taken

into the stables to see her horse, and as she patted his glossy coat

she felt that she loved Sprite with all her heart. Oh, what a world

of joy was this;--how infinitely superior even to Queen's Gate and

Glenbogie! The gaudy magnificence of the Tringles had been altogether

unlike the luxurious comfort of Stalham, where everybody was at his

ease, where everybody was good-natured, where everybody seemed to

acknowledge that pleasure was the one object of life! On the evening

before the Friday she was taken out to dinner by Captain Batsby.

She was not sure that she liked Captain Batsby, who made little

complimentary speeches to her. But her neighbour on the other side

was Colonel Stubbs, and she was quite sure that she liked Colonel

Stubbs.

"I know you'll go like a bird to-morrow," said Captain Batsby.

"I shouldn't like that, because there would be no jumping," said

Ayala.

"But you'd be such a beautiful bird." The Captain, as he drawled out

his words, made an eye at her, and she was sure that she did not like

the Captain.

"At what time are we to start to-morrow?" she said, turning to the

Colonel.

"Ten, sharp. Mind you're ready. Sir Harry takes us on the drag, and

wouldn't wait for Venus, though she wanted five minutes more for her

back hair."

"I don't suppose she ever wants any time for her back hair. I

wouldn't if I were a goddess."

"Then you'd be a very untidy goddess, that's all. I wonder whether

you are untidy."

"Well;--yes;--sometimes."

"I hate untidy girls."

"Thank you, Colonel Stubbs."

"What I like is a nice prim little woman, who never had a pin in the

wrong place in her life. Her cuffs and collars are always as stiff

as steel, and she never rubs the sleeves of her dresses by leaning

about, like some young ladies."

"That's what I do."

"My young woman never sits down lest she should crease her dress. My

young woman never lets her ribbons get tangled. My young woman can

dress upon Â£40 a-year, and always look as though she came out of a

band-box."

"I don't believe you've got a young woman, Colonel Stubbs."

"Well; no; I haven't,--except in my imagination."

If so, he too must have his Angel of Light! "Do you ever dream about

her?"

"Oh dear, yes. I dream that she does scold so awfully when I have her

to myself. In my dreams, you know, I'm married to her, and she always

wants me to eat hashed mutton. Now, if there is one thing that makes

me more sick than another it is hashed mutton. Of course I shall

marry her in some of my waking moments, and then I shall have to eat

hashed mutton for ever."

Then Captain Batsby put in another word. "I should so like to be

allowed to give you a lead to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you,--but I'd rather not have it," said Ayala, who was

altogether in the dark, thinking that "a lead" might be some present

which she would not wish to accept from Captain Batsby.

"I mean that I should like to show you a line if we get a run."

"What is a line?" asked Ayala.

"A line? Why a line is just a lead;--keep your eye on me and I'll

take the fences where you can follow without coming to grief."

"Oh," said Ayala, "that's a lead is it? Colonel Stubbs is going to

give my friend and me a lead, as long as we stay here."

"No man ever ought to coach more than one lady at once," said the

Captain, showing his erudition. "You're sure to come on top of one

another if there are two."

"But Colonel Stubbs is especially told by the Marchesa to look after

both of us," said Ayala almost angrily. Then she turned her shoulder

to him, and was soon intent upon further instructions from the

Colonel.

The following morning was fine, and all the ladies in the house were

packed on to the top of Sir Harry's drag. The Colonel sat behind Sir

Harry on the plea that he was wanted to take care of the two girls.

Captain Batsby and three other gentlemen were put inside, where they

consoled themselves with unlimited tobacco. In this way they were

driven to a spot called Rufford Cross Roads, where they found Tony

Tappett sitting perfectly quiescent on his old mare, while the hounds

were seated around him on the grassy sides of the roads. With him was

talking a stout, almost middle-aged gentleman, in a scarlet coat, and

natty pink-top boots, who was the owner of all the country around.

This was Lord Rufford, who a few years since was known as one of the

hardest riders in those parts; but he had degenerated into matrimony,

was now the happy father of half-a-dozen babies, and was hardly ever

seen to jump over a fence. But he still came out when the meets

were not too distant, and carefully performed that first duty of an

English country gentleman,--the preservation of foxes. Though he did

not ride much, no one liked a little hunting gossip better than Lord

Rufford. It was, however, observed that even in regard to hunting he

was apt to quote the authority of his wife.

"Oh, yes, my Lord," said Tony, "there'll sure to be a fox at

Dillsborough. But we'll find one afore we get to Rufford, my Lord."

"Lady Rufford says there hasn't been a fox seen in the home woods

this week."

"Her ladyship will be sure to know," said Tony.

"Do you remember that fence where poor Major Caneback got his fall

six years ago?" asked the Lord.

"Seven years next Christmas, my Lord," said Tony. "He never put a leg

across a saddle again, poor fellow! I remember him well, my Lord; a

man who could 'andle a 'orse wonderful, though he didn't know 'ow to

ride to 'ounds; not according to my idea. To get your animal to carry

you through, never mind 'ow long the thing is; that's my idea of

riding to 'ounds, my Lord. The major was for always making a 'orse

jump over everything. I never wants 'em to jump over nothing I can't

help;--I don't, my Lord."

"That's just what her ladyship is always saying to me," said Lord

Rufford, "and I do pretty much what her ladyship tells me."

On this occasion Lady Rufford had been quite right about the home

covers. No doubt she generally was right in any assertion she made as

to her husband's affairs. After drawing them Tony trotted on towards

Dillsborough, running his hounds through a few little springs, which

lay near his way. As they went Colonel Stubbs rode between the two

girls. "Whenever I see Rufford," said the Colonel, "he does me a

world of good."

"What good can a fat man like that do to you?" said Nina.

"He is a continual sermon against marriage. If I could see Rufford

once a week I know that I should be safe."

"He seems to me to be a very comfortable old gentleman," said Ayala.

"Old! Seven years ago he was acknowledged to be the one undisputed

paragon of a young man in this county. No one else dreamed of looking

at a young lady if he chose to turn his eyes in that direction. He

was handsome as Apollo--"

"He an Apollo!" said Nina.

"The best Apollo there then was in these parts, and every one knew

that he had forty thousand a-year to spend. Now he is supposed to be

the best hand in the house at rocking the cradle."

"Do you mean to say that he nurses the babies?" asked Ayala.

"He looks as if he did at any rate. He never goes ten miles away

from his door without having Lady Rufford with him, and is always

tucked up at night just at half-past ten by her ladyship's own maid.

Ten years ago he would generally have been found at midnight with

cards in his hand and a cigar in his mouth. Now he is allowed two

cigarettes a-day. Well, Mr. Twentyman, how are you getting on?" This

he said to a good looking better sort of farmer, who came up, riding

a remarkably strong horse, and dressed in pink and white cords.

"Thank ye, Colonel, pretty well, considering how hard the times are.

A man who owns a few acres and tries to farm them must be on the road

to ruin now-a-days. That's what I'm always telling my wife, so that

she may know what she has got to expect." Mr. Twentyman had been

married just twelve months.

"She isn't much frightened, I daresay," said the Colonel.

"She's young, you see," continued the farmer, "and hasn't settled

herself down yet to the sorrows of life." This was that Mr. Lawrence

Twentyman who married Kate Masters, the youngest daughter of old

Masters, the attorney at Dillsborough, and sister of Mrs. Morton,

wife of the squire of Bragton. "By the holy," said Twentyman,

suddenly, "the hounds have put a fox out of that little spinney."

CHAPTER XXIV.

RUFFORD CROSS-ROADS.

Ayala, who had been listening attentively to the conversation of Mr.

Twentyman, and been feeling that she was being initiated every moment

into a new phase of life,--who had been endeavouring to make some

connection in her mind between the new charms of the world around

her and that world of her dreams that was ever present to her, and

had as yet simply determined that neither could Lord Rufford or Mr.

Twentyman have ever been an Angel of Light,--at once straightened

herself in her saddle, and prepared herself for the doing of

something memorable. It was evident to her that Mr. Twentyman

considered that the moment for action had come. He did not gallop

off wildly, as did four or five others, but stood still for a moment

looking intently at a few hounds who, with their tails feathering

in the air and with their noses down, seemed at the same time to be

irresolute and determined, knowing that the scent was there but not

yet quite fixed as to its line. "Half a moment, Colonel," he said,

standing up in his stirrups, with his left hand raised, while his

right held his reins and his whip close down on his horse's neck.

"Half a moment!" He only whispered, and then shook his head angrily,

as he heard the ill-timed shouting of one or two men who had already

reached the other side of the little skirting of trees. "I wish Fred

Botsey's tongue were tied to his teeth," he said, still whispering.

"Now, Colonel, they have it. There's a little lane to the right, and

a gate. After that the country's open, and there's nothing which the

ladies' nags can't do. I know the country so well, you'd perhaps

better come with me for a bit."

"He knows all about it," said the Colonel to Ayala. "Do as he tells

you."

Ayala and Nina both were quick enough to obey. Twentyman dashed

along the lane, while the girls followed him with the Colonel after

them. When they were at the hunting-gate already spoken of, old Tony

Tappett was with them, trotting, impatient to get to the hounds,

courteously giving place to the ladies,--whom, however, in his heart,

he wished at home in bed,--and then thrusting himself through the

gate in front of the Colonel. "D---- their pig-headed folly," he

said, as he came up to his friend Twentyman--"they knows no more

about it than if they'd just come from be'ind a counter,--'olloaing,

'olloaing, 'olloaing,--as if 'olloaing'd make a fox break! 'Owsomever

'e's off now, and they've got Cranbury Brook between them and his

line!" This he said in a squeaking little voice, intended to be

jocose and satirical, shaking his head as he rode. This last idea

seemed to give him great consolation.

It was the consideration, deep and well-founded, as to the Cranbury

which had induced Larry Twentyman to pause on the road when he had

paused, and then to make for the lane and the gate. The direction had

hardly seemed to be that of the hounds, but Larry knew the spinney,

knew the brook,--knew the fox, perhaps,--and was aware of the spot at

which the brute would cross the water if he did cross it. The brute

did cross the water, and therefore there was Cranbury Brook between

many of the forward riders and his line.

Sir Harry was then with them, and two or three other farmers. But

Larry had a lead, and the two girls were with him. Tony Tappett,

though he had got up to his hounds, did not endeavour to ride

straight to them as did Larry Twentyman. He was old and unambitious,

very anxious to know where his hounds were, so that he might be

with them should they want the assistance of his voice and counsel,

anxious to be near enough to take their fox from them should they run

into him, but taking no glory in jumping over a fence if he could

avoid it, creeping about here and there, knowing from experience

nearly every turn in the animal's mind, aware of every impediment

which would delay him, riding fast only when the impediments were far

between, taking no amusement to himself out of the riding, but with

his heart cruelly, bloodily, ruthlessly set upon killing the animal

before him. To kill his fox he would imperil his neck, but for the

glory of riding he would not soil his boots if he could help it.

After the girls came the Colonel, somewhat shorn of his honour in

that he was no longer giving them a lead, but doing his best to

maintain the pace, which Twentyman was making very good. "Now, young

ladies," said Twentyman, "give them their heads, and let them do it

just as they please,--alongside of each other, and not too near to

me." It was a brook,--a confluent of Cranbury Brook, and was wide

enough to require a good deal of jumping. It may be supposed that the

two young ladies did not understand much of the instructions given to

them. To hold their breath and be brave was the only idea present to

them. The rest must come from instinct and chance. The other side

of the brook was heaven;--this would be purgatory. Larry, fearing

perhaps that the order as to their not being too near might not be

obeyed, added a little to his own pace so as to be clear of them.

Nevertheless they were only a few strides behind, and had Larry's

horse missed his footing there would have been a mess. As it was they

took the brook side by side close to each other, and landed full of

delight and glory on the opposite bank. "Bravo! young ladies,"

shouted Twentyman.

"Oh, Nina, that is divine," said Ayala. Nina was a little too much

out of breath for answering, but simply threw up her eyes to Heaven

and made a flourish with her whip, intended to be expressive of her

perfect joy.

Away went Larry and away went the girls with him, quite unconscious

that the Colonel's horse had balked the brook and then jumped

into it,--quite unconscious that Sir Harry, seeing the Colonel's

catastrophe, had followed Tony a quarter of a mile up the brook to

a ford. Even in the soft bosoms of young ladies "the devil take the

hindmost" will be the motto most appropriate for hunting. Larry

Twentyman, of whom they had never heard before, was now the god of

their idolatry. Where Larry Twentyman might go it was manifestly

their duty to follow, even though they should never see the poor

Colonel again. They recked nothing of the fox or of the hounds or of

the master or even of the huntsman. They had a man before them to

show them the way, and as long as they could keep him in sight each

was determined to be at any rate as good as the other. To give Larry

his due it must be acknowledged that he was thoroughly thoughtful of

them. At every fence encountered he studied the spot at which they

would be least likely to fall. He had to remember, also, that there

were two of them together, and that he had made himself in a way

responsible for the safety of both. All this he did, and did well,

because he knew his business. With the exception of the water-jump,

the country over which they passed was not difficult. For a time

there was a run of gates, each of which their guide was able to open

for them, and as they came near to Dillsborough Wood there were gaps

in most of the fences; but it seemed to the girls that they had

galloped over monstrous hedges and leapt over walls which it would

almost take a strong man to climb. The brook, however,--the river as

it seemed to them,--had been the crowning glory. Ayala was sure that

that brook would never be forgotten by her. Even the Angel of Light

was hardly more heavenly than the brook.

That the fox was running for Dillsborough Wood was a fact well known

both to Tony Tappett and Mr. Larry Twentyman. A fox crossing the

brook from the Rufford side would be sure to run to Dillsborough

Wood. When Larry, with the two girls, were just about to enter the

ride, there was old Tony standing up on his horse at the corner,

looking into the covert. And now also a crowd of horsemen came

rushing up, who had made their way along the road, and had passed up

to the wood through Mr. Twentyman's farm-yard;--for, as it happened,

here it was that Mr. Twentyman lived and farmed his own land. Then

came Sir Harry, Colonel Stubbs, and some others who had followed the

line throughout,--the Colonel with his boots full of water, as he had

been forced to get off his horse in the bed of the brook. Sir Harry,

himself, was not in the best of humours,--as will sometimes be the

case with masters when they fail to see the cream of a run. "I never

saw such riding in my life," said Sir Harry, as though some great sin

had been committed by those to whom he was addressing himself. Larry

turned round, and winked at the two girls, knowing that, if sin had

been committed, they three were the sinners. The girls understood

nothing about it, but still thought that Larry Twentyman was divine.

While they were standing about on the rides, Tony was still at

his work. The riding was over, but the fox had to be killed, and

Dillsborough Wood was a covert in which a fox will often require a

large amount of killing. No happier home for the vulpine deity exists

among the shires of England! There are earths there deep, capacious,

full of nurseries; but these, on the present occasion, were debarred

from the poor stranger by the wicked ingenuity of man. But there were

deep dells, in which the brambles and bracken were so thick that no

hound careful of his snout would penetrate them. The undergrowth of

the wood was so interwoven that no huntsman could see through its

depths. There were dark nooks so impervious that any fox ignorant of

the theory of his own scent must have wondered why a hound should

have been induced to creep into spaces so narrow. From one side to

another of the wood the hunted brute would traverse, and always seem

to have at last succeeded in putting his persecutors at fault. So

it was on this occasion. The run, while it lasted, had occupied,

perhaps, three-quarters of an hour, and during a time equally long

poor old Tony was to be seen scurrying from one side of the wood to

another, and was to be heard loudly swearing at his attendant whips

because the hounds did not follow his footsteps as quickly as his

soul desired.

"I never mean to put on a pair of top-boots again, as long as I

live," said the Colonel. At this time a little knot of horsemen

was stationed in a knoll in the centre of the wood, waiting till

they should hear the fatal whoop. Among them were Nina, Ayala, the

Colonel, Larry Twentyman, and Captain Batsby.

"Give up top-boots?" said Larry. "You don't mean to say you'll ride

in black!"

"Top-boots, black boots, spurs, breeches, and red coat, I renounce

them all from this moment. If ever I'm seen in a hunting field again

it will be in a pair of trousers with overalls."

"Now, you're joking, Colonel," said Larry.

"Why won't you wear a red coat any more?" said Ayala.

"Because I'm disgraced for ever. I came out to coach two young women,

and give them a lead, and all I've done was to tumble into a brook,

while a better man has taken my charge away from me."

"Oh, Jonathan, I am so sorry," said Nina, "particularly about your

getting into the water."

"Oh, Colonel Stubbs, we ought to have stopped," said Ayala.

"It was my only comfort to see how very little I was wanted," said

the Colonel. "If I had broke my neck instead of wetting my feet it

would have been just the same to some people."

"Oh, Jonathan!" said Nina, really shocked.

"We ought to have stopped. I know we ought to have stopped," said

Ayala, almost crying.

"Nobody ever stops for any one out hunting," said Twentyman, laying

down a great law.

"I should think not," said Captain Batsby, who had hardly been off

the road all the time.

"I am sure the Colonel will not be angry with me because I took the

young ladies on," said Larry.

"The Colonel is such a muff," said the Colonel himself, "that he

will never presume to be angry with anybody again. But if my cousin

and Miss Dormer are not very much obliged to you for what you have

done for them there will be nothing of gratitude left in the female

British bosom. You have probably given to them the most triumphant

moment of their existence."

"It was their own riding, Colonel; I had nothing to do with it."

"I am so much obliged to you, Sir," said Nina.

"And so am I," said Ayala, "though it was such a pity that Colonel

Stubbs got into the water."

At that moment came the long expected call. Tony Tappett had killed

his fox, after crossing and re-crossing through the wood half a score

of times. "Is it all over?" asked Ayala, as they hurried down the

knoll and scurried down the line to get to the spot outside the wood

to which Tony was dragging the carcase of his defeated enemy.

"It's all over for him," said Larry. "A good fox he was, but he'll

never run again. He is one of them bred at Littlecotes. The foxes

bred at Littlecotes always run."

"And is he dead?" asked Nina. "Poor fellow! I wish it wasn't

necessary to kill them." Then they stood by till they saw the

body of the victim thrown up into the air, and fall amongst the

blood-smirched upturned noses of the expectant pack.

"I call that a pretty little run, Sir Harry," said Larry Twentyman.

"Pretty well," said Sir Harry; "the pace wasn't very great, or that

pony of mine which Miss Dormer is riding could not have lived with

it."

"Horses, Sir Harry, don't want so much pace, if they are allowed to

go straight. It's when a man doesn't get well away, or has made a

mess with his fences, that he needs an extra allowance of pace to

catch the hounds. If you're once with them and can go straight you

may keep your place without such a deal of legs." To this Sir Harry

replied only by a grunt, as on the present occasion he had "made a

mess with his fences," as Larry Twentyman had called it.

"And now, young ladies," said Larry, "I hope you'll come in and see

my missus and her baby, and have a little bit of lunch, such as it

is."

Nina asked anxiously whether there would not be another fox. Ayala

also was anxious lest in accepting the proffered hospitality she

should lose any of the delights of the day. But it was at length

arranged that a quarter of an hour should be allowed before Tony took

his hounds over to the Bragton coverts. Immediately Larry was off his

horse, rushing into the house and ordering everyone about it to come

forth with bread and cheese and sherry and beer. In spite of what he

had said of his ruin it was known that Larry Twentyman was a warm

man, and that no man in Rufford gave what he had to give with a

fuller heart. His house was in the middle of the Rufford and Ufford

hunting country, and the consumption there during the hunting

months of bread and cheese, sherry and beer, must have been immense.

Everyone seemed to be intimate with him, and all called for what they

wanted as if they were on their own premises. On such occasions as

these Larry was a proud man; for no one in those parts carried a

lighter heart or was more fond of popularity.

The parlour inside was by no means big enough to hold the crowding

guests, who therefore munched their bread and cheese and drank their

beer round the front door, without dismounting from their horses; but

Nina and Ayala with their friend the Colonel were taken inside to see

Mrs. Twentyman and her baby. "Now, Larry, what sort of a run was it?"

said the young mother. "Where did you find him, and what line did he

take?"

"I'll tell you all about it when I come back; there are two young

ladies for you now to look after." Then he introduced his wife, and

the baby which was in her arms. "The little fellow is only six weeks

old, and yet she wanted to come to the meet. She'd have been riding

to hounds if I'd let her."

"Why not?" said Mrs. Twentyman. "At any rate I might have gone in the

pony carriage and had baby with me."

"Only six weeks old!" said Nina, stooping down and kissing the child.

"He is a darling!" said Ayala. "I hope he'll go out hunting some

day."

"He'll want to go six times a week if he's anything like his father,"

said Mrs. Twentyman.

"And seven times if he's like his mother," said Larry. Then again

they mounted their nags, and trotted off across the high roads to the

Bragton coverts. Mrs. Twentyman with her baby in her arms walked down

to the gate at the high road and watched them with longing eyes, till

Tony and the hounds were out of sight.

Nothing further in the way of hunting was done that day which

requires to be recorded. They drew various coverts and found a fox or

two, but the scent, which had been so strong in the morning, seemed

to have gone, and the glory of the day was over. The two girls and

the Colonel remained companions during the afternoon, and succeeded

in making themselves merry over the incident of the brook. The

Colonel was in truth well pleased that Larry Twentyman should have

taken his place, though he probably would not have been gratified had

he seen Captain Batsby assume his duties. It had been his delight to

see the two girls ride, and he had been near enough to see them. He

was one of those men who, though fond of hunting, take no special

glory in it, and are devoid of the jealousy of riding. Not to have

a good place in a run was no worse to him than to lose a game of

billiards or a rubber of whist. Let the reader understand that this

trait in his character is not mentioned with approbation. "Always

to excel and to go ahead of everybody" should, the present writer

thinks, be in the heart of every man who rides to hounds. There was

in our Colonel a philosophical way of looking into the thing which

perhaps became him as a man, but was deleterious to his character as

a sportsman.

"I do so hope you've enjoyed yourself, Ayala!" he said, as he lifted

her from her horse.

"Indeed,--indeed, I have!" said Ayala, not noticing the use of her

Christian name. "I have been so happy, and I am so much obliged to

you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"YOU ARE NOT HE."

Ayala had been a week at Stalham, and according to the understanding

which had existed she should now have returned to Kingsbury Crescent.

She had come for a week, and she had had her week. Oh, what a week

it had been, so thoroughly happy, without a cloud, filled full with

ecstatic pleasures! Jonathan Stubbs had become to her the pleasantest

of friends. Lady Albury had covered her with caresses and little

presents. Nina was the most perfect of friends. Sir Harry had never

been cross, except for that one moment in the wood. And as for

Sprite,--Sprite had nearly realised her idea of an Angel of Light.

Oh, how happy she had been! She was to return on the Monday, having

thus comprised two Sundays within her elongated week. She knew

that her heaven was to be at an end; but she was grateful, and was

determined in her gratitude to be happy and cheerful to the close.

But early on this Sunday morning Colonel Stubbs spoke a word to Lady

Albury. "That little girl is so thoroughly happy here. Cannot you

prolong it for her just for another three days?"

"Is it to be for her,--or for Colonel Stubbs, who is enamoured of the

little girl?" asked Lady Albury.

"For both," said the Colonel, rather gravely.

"Are you in earnest?"

"What do you call earnest? I do love to see a pretty creature enjoy

herself thoroughly as she does. If you will make her stay till

Thursday Albury will let her ride the little horse again at Star

Cross on Wednesday."

"Of course she shall stay,--all the season if you wish it. She is

indeed a happy girl if you are in earnest."

Then it was settled, and Lady Albury in her happiest manner informed

Ayala that she was not to be allowed to take her departure till after

she had ridden Sprite once again. "Sir Harry says that you have given

the little horse quite a name, and that you must finish off his

character for him at Star Cross." As was the heart of the Peri when

the gate of Paradise was opened for her so was the heart of Ayala.

There were to be four days, with the fourth as a hunting-day, before

she need think of going! There was an eternity of bliss before her.

"But Aunt Margaret!" she said, not, however, doubting for a moment

that she would stay. Who cares for a frowning aunt at the distance of

an eternity. I fear that in the ecstacy of her joy she had forgotten

the promise made, that she would always remember her aunt's goodness

to her. "I will write a note to Mrs. Dosett, and make it all

straight," said Lady Albury. The note was written, and, whether

matters were straight or crooked at Kingsbury Crescent, Ayala

remained at Albury.

Colonel Stubbs had thought about the matter, and determined that he

was quite in earnest. He had, he told himself, enough for modest

living,--for modest living without poverty. More would come to him

when old General Stubbs, his uncle, should die. The general was

already past seventy. What was the use of independence if he could

not allow himself to have the girl whom he really loved? Had any

human being so perfectly lovely as Ayala ever flashed before his eyes

before? Was there ever a sweeter voice heard from a woman's mouth?

And then all her little ways and motions,--her very tricks,--how full

of charm they were! When she would open her eyes and nod her head,

and pout with her lips, he would declare to himself that he could no

longer live without her. And then every word that fell from her lips

seemed to have something in it of pretty humour. In fact the Colonel

was in love, and had now resolved that he would give way to his

love in spite of his aunt, the Marchesa, and in spite of his own

philosophy.

He felt by no means sure of success, but yet he thought that he might

succeed. From the moment in which, as the reader may remember, he

had accosted her at the ball, and desired her to dance with him in

obedience to his aunt's behests, it had been understood by everyone

around him that Ayala had liked him. They had become fast friends.

Ayala allowed him to do many little things which, by some feminine

instinct of her own, would have been put altogether beyond the reach

of Captain Batsby. The Colonel knew all this, and knew at the same

time that he should not trust to it only. But still he could not but

trust to it in some degree. Lady Albury had told him that Ayala would

be a happy girl if he were in earnest, and he himself was well aware

of Ayala's dependent position, and of the discomforts of Kingsbury

Crescent. Ayala had spoken quite openly to him of Kingsbury Crescent

as to a confidential friend. But on all that he did not lean much

as being in his favour. He could understand that such a girl as

Ayala would not accept a husband merely with the object of avoiding

domestic poverty. Little qualms of doubt came upon him as he

remembered the nature of the girl, so that he confessed to himself

that Lady Albury knew nothing about it. But, nevertheless, he hoped.

His red hair and his ugly face had never yet stood against him among

the women with whom he had lived. He had been taught by popularity to

think himself a popular man;--and then Ayala had shown so many signs

of her friendship!

There was shooting on Saturday, and he went out with the shooters,

saying nothing to any one of an intended early return; but at three

o'clock he was back at the house. Then he found that Ayala was out

in the carriage, and he waited. He sat in the library pretending to

read, till he heard the sounds of the carriage-wheels, and then he

met the ladies in the hall. "Are they all home from shooting?" asked

Lady Albury. The Colonel explained that no one was home but himself.

He had missed three cock-pheasants running, and had then come away in

disgust. "I am the most ignominious creature in existence," he said,

laughing; "one day I tumble into a ditch three feet wide--"

"It was ten yards at least," said Nina, jealous as to the glory of

her jump.

"And to-day I cannot hit a bird. I shall take to writing a book and

leave the severer pursuit of sport to more enterprising persons."

Then suddenly turning round he said to Ayala, "Are you good-natured

enough to come and take a walk with me in the shrubbery?"

Ayala, taken somewhat by surprise at the request, looked up into

Lady Albury's face. "Go with him, my dear, if you are not tired,"

said Lady Albury. "He deserves consolation after all his good deeds

to you." Ayala still doubted. Though she was on terms of pleasant

friendship with the man, yet she felt almost awestruck at this sudden

request that she should walk alone with him. But not to do so,

especially after Lady Albury's injunction, would have been peculiar.

She certainly was not tired, and had such a walk come naturally it

would have been an additional pleasure to her; but now, though she

went she hesitated, and showed her hesitation.

"Are you afraid to come with me?" he said, as soon as they were out

on the gravel together.

"Afraid! Oh, dear no, I should not be afraid to go anywhere with you,

I think; only it seemed odd that you did not ask Nina too."

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Why was it?"

"Because I have something to say to you which I do not want Nina

to hear just at this moment. And then I thought that we were such

friends that you would not mind coming with me."

"Of course we are," said Ayala.

"I don't know why it should be so, but I seem to have known you years

instead of days."

"Perhaps that is because you knew papa."

"More likely because I have learnt to know your papa's daughter."

"Do you mean Lucy?"

"I mean Ayala."

"That is saying the same thing twice over. You know me because you

know me."

"Just that. How long do you suppose I have known that Mrs. Gregory,

who sat opposite to us yesterday?"

"How can I tell?"

"Just fifteen years. I was going to Harrow when she came as a young

girl to stay with my mother. Her people and my people had known

each other for the last fifty years. Since that I have seen her

constantly, and of course we are very intimate."

"I suppose so."

"I know as much about her after all that as if we had lived in two

different hemispheres and couldn't speak a word of each other's

language. There isn't a thought or a feeling in common between us. I

ask after her husband and her children, and then tell her it's going

to rain. She says something about the old General's health, and then

there is an end of everything between us. When next we meet we do it

all over again."

"How very uninteresting!" said Ayala.

"Very uninteresting. It is because there are so many Mrs. Gregorys

about that I like to go down to Drumcaller and live by myself.

Perhaps you're a Mrs. Gregory to somebody."

"Why should I be a Mrs. Gregory? I don't think I am at all like Mrs.

Gregory."

"Not to me, Ayala." Now she heard the "Ayala," and felt something

of what it meant. There had been moments at which she had almost

disliked to hear him call her Miss Dormer; but now,--now she wished

that he had not called her Ayala. She strove to assume a serious

expression of face, but having done so she could not dare to turn

it up towards him. The glance of her little anger, if there was any,

fell only upon the ground. "It is because you are to me a creature so

essentially different from Mrs. Gregory that I seem to know you so

well. I never want to go to Drumcaller if you are near me;--or, if I

think of Drumcaller, it is that I might be there with you."

"I am sure the place is very pretty, but I don't suppose I shall ever

see it."

"Do you know about your sister and Mr. Hamel?"

"Yes," said Ayala, surprised. "She has told me all about it. How do

you know?"

"He was staying at Drumcaller,--he and I together with no one

else,--when he went over to ask her. I never saw a man so happy as

when he came back from Glenbogie. He had got all that he wanted in

the world."

"I do so love him because he loves her."

"And I love her,--because she loves you."

"It is not the same, you know," said Ayala, trying to think it all

out.

"May I not love her?"

"He is to be my brother. That's why I love him. She can't be your

sister." The poor girl, though she had tried to think it all out, had

not thought very far.

"Can she not?" he said.

"Of course not. Lucy is to marry Mr. Hamel."

"And whom am I to marry?" Then she saw it all. "Ayala,--Ayala,--who

is to be my wife?"

"I do not know," she said,--speaking with a gruff voice, but still in

a whisper, with a manner altogether different,--thinking how well it

would be that she should be taken at once back into the house.

"Do you not know whom I would fain have as my wife?" Then he felt

that it behoved him to speak out plainly. He was already sure that

she would not at once tell him that it should be as he would have

it,--that she would not instantly throw herself into his arms. But he

must speak plainly to her, and then fight his cause as best he might.

"Ayala, I have asked you to come out with me that I might ask you to

be my wife. It is that that I did not wish Nina to hear at once. If

you will put out your hand and say that it shall be so, Nina and all

the world shall know it. I shall be as proud then as Hamel, and as

happy,--happier, I think. It seems to me that no one can love as I

do now, Ayala; it has grown upon me from hour to hour as I have seen

you. When I first took you away to that dance it was so already. Do

you remember that night at the theatre,--when I had come away from

everything and striven so hard that I might be near to you before you

went back to your home? Ayala, I loved you then so dearly;--but not

as I love you now. When I saw you riding away from me yesterday, when

I could not get over the brook, I told myself that unless I might

catch you at last, and have you all to myself, I could never again be

happy. Do you remember when you stooped down and kissed that man's

baby at the farm-house? Oh, Ayala, I thought then that if you would

not be my wife,--if you would not be my wife,--I should never have

wife, never should have baby, never should have home of my own."

She walked on by his side, listening, but she had not a word to say

to him. It had been easy enough to her to reject and to rebuke and

to scorn Tom Tringle, when he had persisted in his suit; but she

knew not with what words to reject this man who stood so high in

her estimation, who was in many respects so perfect, whom she so

thoroughly liked,--but whom, nevertheless, she must reject. He was

not the Angel of Light,--could never be the Angel of Light. There

was nothing there of the azure wings upon which should soar the all

but celestial being to whom she could condescend to give herself and

her love. He was pleasant, good, friendly, kind-hearted,--all that

a friend or a brother should be; but he was not the Angel of Light.

She was sure of that. She told herself that she was quite sure of it,

as she walked beside him in silence along the path. "You know what

I mean, Ayala, when I tell you that I love you," he continued. But

still she made no answer. "I have seen at last the one human being

with whom I feel that I can be happy to spend my life, and, having

seen her, I ask her to be my wife. The hope has been dwelling with me

and growing since I first met you. Shall it be a vain hope? Ayala,

may I still hope?"

"No," she said, abruptly.

"Is that all?"

"It is all that I can say."

"Is that one 'no' to be the end of everything between us?"

"I don't know what else I ought to say to you, Colonel Stubbs."

"Do you mean that you can never love me?"

"Never," she said.

"That is a hard word,--and hardly friendly. Is there to be no more

than one hard word between you and me? Though I did not venture

to think that you could tell me that you loved me, I looked for

something kinder, something gentler than that."

"From such a sharp and waspish word as 'no,'

To pluck the sting!"

Ayala did not know the lines I have quoted, but the idea conveyed in

them was present clearly to her mind. She would fain have told him,

had she known how to do so, that her heart was very gentle towards

him, was very kind, gentle and kind as a sister's;--but that she

could not love him, so as to become his wife. "You are not he,--not

he, not that Angel of Light, which must come to me, radiant with

poetry, beautiful to the eye, full of all excellences of art, lifted

above the earth by the qualities of his mind,--such a one as must

come to me if it be that I am ever to confess that I love. You are

not he, and I cannot love you. But you shall be the next to him in my

estimation, and you are already so dear to me that I would be tender

to you, would be gentle,--if only I knew how." It was all there,

clear enough in her mind, but she had not the words. "I don't know

what it is that I ought to say," she exclaimed through her sobs.

"The truth, at any rate," he answered, sternly, "but not the truth,

half and half, after the fashion of some young ladies. Do not think

that you should palter with the truth either because it may not be

palatable to me, or seem decorous to yourself. To my happiness this

matter is all important, and you are something to my happiness, if

only because I have risked it on your love. Tell me;--why cannot you

love me?"

The altered tone of his voice, which now had in it something of

severity, seemed to give her more power.

"It is because--" Then she paused.

"Because why? Out with it, whatever it is. If it be something that

a man may remedy I will remedy it. Do not fear to hurt me. Is it

because I am ugly? That I cannot remedy." She did not dare to tell

him that it was so, but she looked up at him, not dissenting by any

motion of her head. "Then God help me, for ugly I must remain."

"It is not that only."

"Is it because my name is Stubbs--Jonathan Stubbs?" Now she did

assent, nodding her head at him. He had bade her tell him the truth,

and she was so anxious to do as he bade her! "If it be so, Ayala, I

must tell you that you are wrong,--wrong and foolish; that you are

carried away by a feeling of romance, which is a false romance. Far

be it from me to say that I could make you happy, but I am sure that

your happiness cannot be made and cannot be marred by such accidents

as that. Do you think that my means are not sufficient?"

"No;--no," she cried; "I know nothing of your means. If I could love

you I would not condescend to ask,--even to hear."

"There is no other man, I think?"

"There is no other man."

"But your imagination has depicted to you something grander than I

am,"--then she assented quickly, turning round and nodding her head

to him,--"some one who shall better respond to that spirit of poetry

which is within you?" Again she nodded her head approvingly, as

though to assure him that now he knew the whole truth. "Then, Ayala,

I must strive to soar till I can approach your dreams. But, if you

dare to desire things which are really grand, do not allow yourself

to be mean at the same time. Do not let the sound of a name move you,

or I shall not believe in your aspirations. Now shall I take you back

to the house?"

Back to the house they went, and there was not another word spoken

between them. By those last words of his she had felt herself to be

rebuked. If it were possible that he could ask her again whether that

sound, Jonathan Stubbs, had anything to do with it, she would let him

know now, by some signal, that she no longer found a barrier in the

name. But there were other barriers,--barriers which he himself had

not pretended to call vain. As to his ugliness, that he had confessed

he could not remedy; calling on God to pity him because he was so.

And as for that something grander which he had described, and for

which her soul sighed, he had simply said that he would seek for it.

She was sure that he would not find it. It was not to such as he that

the something grander,--which was to be the peculiar attribute of

the Angel of Light,--could be accorded. But he had owned that the

something grander might exist.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE FINEST HERO THAT I EVER KNEW."

The Colonel and Ayala returned to the house without a word. When they

were passing through the hall she turned to go at once up the stairs

to her own room. As she did so he put out his hand to her, and she

took it. But she passed on without speaking, and when she was alone

she considered it over all in her own mind. There could be no doubt

that she was right. Of that she was quite sure. It was certainly a

fixed law that a girl should not marry a man unless she loved him.

She did not love this man, and therefore she ought not to marry him.

But there were some qualms at her heart as to the possible reality

of the image which she had created for her own idolatry. And she had

been wounded when he told her that she should not allow herself to be

mean amidst her soarings. She had been wounded, and yet she knew that

he had been right. He had intended to teach her the same lesson when

he told her the absurd story of the woman who had been flung out of

the window. She could not love him; but that name of his should never

again be a reason for not doing so. Let the Angel of Light come to

her with his necessary angelic qualities, and no want of euphony in

a sound should be a barrier to him. Nor in truth could any outside

appearance be an attribute of angelic light. The Angel of Light might

be there even with red hair. Something as to the truth of this also

came across her, though the Colonel had not rebuked her on that head.

But how should she carry herself now during the four days which

remained to her at Stalham Park? All the loveliness seemed to depart

from her prospect. She would hardly know how to open her mouth before

her late friend. She suspected that Lady Albury knew with what

purpose the Colonel had taken her out into the shrubbery, and she

would not dare to look Lady Albury in the face. How should she answer

Nina if Nina were to ask her questions about the walk. The hunt

for next Wednesday was no longer a delight to which she could look

forward. How would it be possible that Colonel Stubbs should direct

her now as to her riding, and instruct her as to her conduct in the

hunting-field? It would be better for her that she should return at

once to Kingsbury Crescent.

As she thought of this there did come upon her a reflection that had

she been able to accept Colonel Stubbs's offer there would have been

an end for ever to the miseries of her aunt's house. She would have

been lifted at once into the mode of life in which the man lived.

Instead of being a stranger admitted by special grace into such an

Elysium as that of Stalham Park, she would become one of those to

whom such an Elysium belonged almost of right. By her own gifts she

would have won her way into that upper and brighter life which seemed

to her to be all smiles and all joy. As to his income she thought

nothing and cared nothing. He lived with men who had horses and

carriages, and who spent their time in pleasurable pursuits. And she

would live amidst ladies who were always arrayed in bright garments,

who, too, had horses and carriages at their command, and were never

troubled by those sordid cares which made life at Kingsbury Crescent

so sad and tedious. One little word would have done it all for her,

would have enabled her to take the step by which she would be placed

among the bright ones of the earth.

But the remembrance of all this only made her firmer in her

resolution. If there was any law of right and wrong fixed absolutely

in her bosom, it was this,--that no question of happiness or

unhappiness, of suffering or joy, would affect her duty to the Angel

of Light. She owed herself to him should he come to seek her. She

owed herself to him no less, even should he fail to come. And she

owed herself equally whether he should be rich or poor. As she was

fortifying herself with these assurances, Nina came to ask her

whether she would not come down to tea. Ayala pleaded headache, and

said that she would rest till dinner. "Has anything happened?" asked

Nina. Ayala simply begged that she might be asked no questions then,

because her head was aching. "If you do not tell me everything, I

shall think you are no true friend," said Nina, as she left the room.

As evening drew on she dressed for dinner, and went down into the

drawing-room. In doing so it was necessary to pass through the

billiard-room, and there she found Colonel Stubbs, knocking about the

balls. "Are you dressed for dinner?" he exclaimed; "I haven't begun

to think of it yet, and Sir Harry hates a man when he comes in late.

That wretch Batsby has beaten me four games." With that he rushed

off, putting down the cue with a rattle, and seeming to Ayala to have

recovered altogether from the late prostration of his spirits.

In the drawing-room Ayala was for a few minutes alone, and then, as

she was glad to see, three or four ladies all came in at once, so

that no question could be asked her by Lady Albury. They went into

dinner without the Colonel, who was in truth late, and she was taken

in by Mr. Gosling, whose pretty little wife was just opposite to her.

On the other side of her sat Lord Rufford, who had come to Stalham

with his wife for a day or two, and who immediately began to

congratulate her on the performance of the day before. "I am told

you jumped the Cranbury Brook," he said. "I should as soon think of

jumping the Serpentine."

"I did it because somebody told me."

"Ah," said Lord Rufford, with a sigh, "there is nothing like

ignorance, innocence, and youth combined. But why didn't Colonel

Stubbs get over after you?"

"Because Colonel Stubbs couldn't," said that gentleman, as he took

his seat in the vacant chair.

"It may be possible," said Sir Harry, "that a gentleman should not be

able to jump over Cranbury Brook; but any gentleman, if he will take

a little trouble, may come down in time for dinner."

"Now that I have been duly snubbed right and left," said the Colonel,

"perhaps I may eat my soup."

Ayala, who had expected she hardly knew what further troubles, and

who had almost feared that nobody would speak to her because she had

misbehaved herself, endeavoured to take heart of grace when she found

that all around her, including the Colonel himself, were as pleasant

as ever. She had fancied that Lady Albury had looked at her specially

when Colonel Stubbs took his seat, and she had specially noticed the

fact that his chair had not been next her own. These little matters

she was aware Lady Albury managed herself, and was aware also that in

accordance with the due rotation of things she and the Colonel should

have been placed together. She was glad that it was not so, but at

the same time she was confident that Lady Albury knew something of

what had passed between herself and her suitor. The evening, however,

went off easily, and nothing occurred to disturb her except that

the Colonel had called her by her Christian name, when as usual he

brought to her a cup of tea in the drawing-room. Oh, that he would

continue to do so, and yet not demand from her more than their old

friendship!

The next morning was Sunday, and they all went to church. It was a

law at Stalham that everyone should go to church on Sunday morning.

Sir Harry himself, who was not supposed to be a peculiarly religious

man, was always angry when any male guest did not show himself in the

enormous family pew. "I call it d---- indecent," he has been heard

to say. But nobody was expected to go twice,--and consequently

nobody ever did go twice. Lunch was protracted later than usual. The

men would roam about the grounds with cigars in their mouths, and

ladies would take to reading in their own rooms, in following which

occupation they would spend a considerable part of the afternoon

asleep. On this afternoon Lady Albury did not go to sleep, but

contrived to get Ayala alone upstairs into her little sitting-room.

"Ayala," she said, with something between a smile and a frown, "I am

afraid I am going to be angry with you."

"Please don't be angry, Lady Albury."

"If I am right in what I surmise, you had an offer made to you

yesterday which ought to satisfy the heart of almost any girl in

England." Here she paused, but Ayala had not a word to say for

herself. "If it was so, the best man I know asked you to share his

fortune with him."

"Has he told you?"

"But he did?"

"I shall not tell," said Ayala, proudly.

"I know he did. I knew that it was his intention before. Are you

aware what kind of man is my cousin, Jonathan Stubbs? Has it occurred

to you that in truth and gallantry, in honour, honesty, courage, and

real tenderness, he is so perfect as to be quite unlike to the crowd

of men you see?"

"I do know that he is good," said Ayala.

"Good! Where will you find any one good like him? Compare him to the

other men around him, and then say whether he is good! Can it be

possible that you should refuse the love of such a man as that?"

"I don't think I ought to be made to talk about it," said Ayala,

hesitating.

"My dear, it is for your own sake and for his. When you go away from

here it may be so difficult for him to see you again."

"I don't suppose he will ever want," said Ayala.

"It is sufficient that he wants it now. What better can you expect

for yourself?"

"I expect nothing," said Ayala, proudly. "I have got nothing, and I

expect nothing."

"He will give you everything, simply because he loves you. My dear,

I should not take the trouble to tell you all this, did I not know

that he is a man who ought to be accepted when he asks such a request

as that. Your happiness would be safe in his hands." She paused, but

Ayala had not a word to say. "And he is not a man likely to renew

such a request. He is too proud for that. I can conceive no possible

reason for such a refusal unless it be that you are engaged. If there

be some one else, then of course there must be an end of it."

"There is no one else."

"Then, my dear, with your prospects it is sheer folly. When the

General dies he will have over two thousand a year."

"As if that had anything to do with it!" said Ayala, holding herself

aloft in her wrath, and throwing angry glances at the lady.

"It is what I call romance," said Lady Albury. "Romance can never

make you happy."

"At any rate it is not riches. What you call romance may be what I

like best. At any rate if I do not love Colonel Stubbs I am sure I

ought not to marry him;--and I won't."

After this there was nothing further to be said. Ayala thought that

she would be turned out of the room,--almost out of the house, in

disgrace. But Lady Albury, who was simply playing her part, was

not in the least angry. "Well, my dear," she said, "pray,--pray,

think better of it. I am in earnest, of course, because of my

cousin,--because he seems to have put his heart upon it. He is just

the man to be absolutely in love when he is in love. But I would

not speak as I do unless I were sure that he would make you happy.

My cousin Jonathan is to me the finest hero that I know. When a

man is a hero he shouldn't be broken-hearted for want of a woman's

smiles,--should he?"

"She ought not to smile unless she loves him," said Ayala, as she

left the room.

The Monday and Tuesday went very quietly. Lady Albury said nothing

more on the great subject, and the Colonel behaved himself exactly

as though there had been no word of love at all. There was nothing

special said about the Wednesday's hunt through the two days, till

Ayala almost thought that there would be no hunt for her. Nor,

indeed, did she much wish for it. It had been the Colonel who had

instigated her to deeds of daring, and under his sanction that she

had ventured to ride. She would hardly know how to go through the

Wednesday,--whether still to trust him, or whether to hold herself

aloof from him. When nothing was said on the subject till late on

the evening of the Tuesday, she had almost resolved that she would

not put on her habit when the morning came. But just as she was about

to leave the drawing-room with her bed-candle Colonel Stubbs came to

her. "Most of us ride to the meet to-morrow," he said; "but you and

Nina shall be taken in the waggonette so as to save you a little.

It is all arranged." She bowed and thanked him, going to bed almost

sorry that it should have been so settled. When the morning came Nina

could not ride. She had hurt her foot, and, coming early into Ayala's

room, declared with tears that she could not go. "Then neither shall

I," said Ayala, who was at that moment preparing to put on her habit.

"But you must. It is all settled, and Sir Harry would be offended if

you did not go. What has Jonathan done that you should refuse to ride

with him because I am lame?"

"Nothing," said Ayala.

"Oh, Ayala, do tell me. I should tell you everything. Of course you

must hunt whatever it is. Even though he should have offered and you

refused him, of course you must go."

"Must I?" said Ayala.

"Then you have refused him?"

"I have. Oh, Nina, pray do not speak of it. Do not think of it if you

can help it. Why should everything be disturbed because I have been a

fool?"

"Then you think you have been a fool?"

"Other people think so; but if so I shall at any rate be constant to

my folly. What I mean is, that it has been done, and should be passed

over as done with. I am quite sure that I ought not to be scolded;

but Lady Albury did scold me." Then they went down together to

breakfast, Ayala having prepared herself properly for the

hunting-field.

In the waggonette there were with her Lady Albury, Mrs. Gosling, and

Nina, who was not prevented by her lameness from going to the meet.

The gentlemen all rode, so that there was no immediate difficulty

as to Colonel Stubbs. But when she had been put on her horse by

his assistance and found herself compelled to ride away from the

carriage, apparently under his especial guidance, her heart misgave

her, and she thoroughly wished that she was at home in the Crescent.

Though she was specially under his guidance there were at first

others close around her, and, while they were on the road going to

the covert which they were to draw, conversation was kept up so that

it was not necessary for her to speak;--but what should she do when

she should find herself alone with him as would certainly soon be the

case? It soon was the case. The hounds were at work in a large wood

in which she was told they might possibly pass the best part of the

day, and it was not long before the men had dispersed themselves,

some on this side some on that, and she found herself with no one

near her but the Colonel. "Ayala," he said, "of course you know that

it is my duty to look after you, and to do it better if I can than I

did on Friday."

"I understand," she said.

"Do not let any remembrance of that walk on Saturday interfere with

your happiness to-day. Who knows when you may be out hunting again?"

"Never!" she said; "I don't suppose I shall ever hunt again."

"Carpe diem," he said, laughing. "Do you know what 'carpe diem'

means?"

"It is Latin perhaps."

"Yes; and therefore you are not supposed to understand it. This is

what it means. As an hour for joy has come, do not let any trouble

interfere with it. Let it all be, for this day at least, as though

there had been no walk in the Stalham Woods. There is Larry

Twentyman. If I break down as I did on Friday you may always trust to

him. Larry and you are old friends now."

"Carpe diem," she said to herself. "Oh, yes; if it were only

possible. How is one to 'carpe diem' with one's heart full of

troubles?" And it was the less possible because this man whom she

had rejected was so anxious to do everything for her happiness. Lady

Albury had told her that he was a hero,--that he was perfect in

honour, honesty, and gallantry; and she felt inclined to own that

Lady Albury was almost right. Yet,--yet how far was he from that

image of manly perfection which her daily thoughts had created for

her! Could she have found an appropriate word with which to thank

him she would have done so; but there was no such word, and Larry

Twentyman was now with them, taking off his hat and overflowing with

compliments. "Oh, Miss Dormer, I am so delighted to see you out

again."

"How is the baby, Mr. Twentyman?"

"Brisk as a bee, and hungry as a hunter."

"And how is Mrs. Twentyman?"

"Brisker and hungrier than the baby. What do you think of the day,

Colonel?"

"A very good sort of day, Twentyman, if we were anywhere out of these

big woods." Larry shook his head solemnly. The Mudcombe Woods in

which they were now at work had been known to occupy Tony Tappett

and his whole pack from eleven o'clock till the dusk of evening.

"We've got to draw them, of course," continued the Colonel. Then Mr.

Twentyman discoursed at some length on the excellence of Mudcombe

Woods. What would any county be without a nursery for young foxes?

Gorse-coverts, hedge-rows, and little spinneys would be of no avail

unless there were some grandly wild domain in which maternal and

paternal foxes could roam in comparative security. All this was just

as Ayala would have it, because it enabled her to ask questions, and

saved her from subjects which might be painful to her.

The day, in truth, was not propitious to hunting even. Foxes were

found in plenty, and two of them were killed within the recesses of

the wood; but on no occasion did they run a mile into the open. For

Ayala it was very well, because she was galloping hither and thither,

and because before the day was over she found herself able to talk to

the Colonel in her wonted manner; but there was no great glory for

her as had been the glory of Little Cranbury Brook.

On the next morning she was taken back to London and handed over

to her aunt in Kingsbury Crescent without another word having been

spoken by Colonel Stubbs in reference to his love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY ALBURY'S LETTER.

"I have had a letter from Lady Albury," said Aunt Margaret, almost as

soon as Ayala had taken off her hat and cloak.

"Yes, I know, Aunt Margaret. She wrote to ask that I might stay for

four more days. I hope it was not wrong."

"I have had another letter since that, on Monday, about it; I have

determined to show it you. There it is. You had better read it by

yourself, and I will come to you again in half an hour." Then, very

solemnly, but with no trace of ill-humour, Mrs. Dosett left the room.

There was something in her tone and gait so exceedingly solemn that

Ayala was almost frightened. Of course, the letter must be about

Colonel Stubbs, and, of course, the writer of it would find fault

with her. She was conscious that she was adding one to her terribly

long list of sins in not consenting to marry Colonel Stubbs. It was

her misfortune that all her friends found fault with everything that

she did. Among them there was not one, not even Nina, who fully

sympathised with her. Not even to Lucy could she expatiate with a

certainty of sympathy in regard to the Angel of Light. And now,

though her aunt was apparently not angry,--only solemn,--she felt

already sure that she was to be told that it was her duty to marry

Colonel Stubbs. It was only the other day that her aunt was preaching

to her as to the propriety of marrying her cousin Tom. It seemed, she

said to herself, that people thought that a girl was bound to marry

any man who could provide a house for her, and bread to eat, and

clothes to wear. All this passed through her mind as she slowly drew

Lady Albury's letter from the envelope and prepared to read it. The

letter was as follows:--

Stalham, Monday, 18th November, 18--.

DEAR MADAM,

Your niece will return to you, as you request, on

Thursday, but before she reaches you I think it my duty

to inform you of a little circumstance which has occurred

here. My cousin, Colonel Jonathan Stubbs, who is also

the nephew of the Marchesa Baldoni, has made Miss Dormer

an offer. I am bound to add that I did not think it

improbable that it would be so, when I called on your

husband, and begged him to allow your niece to come to

us. I did not then know my cousin's intention as a fact.

I doubt whether he knew it himself; but from what I had

heard I thought it probable, and, as I conceive that any

young lady would be fortunate in becoming my cousin's

wife, I had no scruple.

He has proposed to her, and she has rejected him. He has

set his heart upon the matter, and I am most anxious that

he should succeed, because I know him to be a man who

will not easily brook disappointment where he has set his

heart. Of all men I know he is the most steadfast in his

purpose.

I took the liberty of speaking to your niece on the

subject, and am disposed to think that she is deferred

by some feeling of foolish romance, partly because she

does not like the name, partly because my cousin is not a

handsome man in a girl's eyes;--more probably, however,

she has built up to herself some poetic fiction, and

dreams of she knows not what. If it be so, it is a pity

that she should lose an opportunity of settling herself

well and happily in life. She gave as a reason that she

did not love him. My experience is not so long as yours,

perhaps, but such as I have has taught me to think that

a wife will love her husband when she finds herself used

well at all points. Mercenary marriages are, of course,

bad: but it is a pity, I think, that a girl, such as your

niece, should lose the chance of so much happiness by a

freak of romance.

Colonel Stubbs, who is only twenty-eight years of age, has

a staff appointment at Aldershot. He has private means of

his own, on which alone he would be justified in marrying.

On the death of his uncle, General Stubbs, he will inherit

a considerable accession of fortune. He is not, of course,

a rich man; but he has ample for the wants of a family.

In all other good gifts, temper, manliness, truth, and

tenderness, I know no one to excel him. I should trust any

young friend of my own into his hands with perfect safety.

I have thought it right to tell you this. You will use

your own judgment in saying what you think fit to your

niece. Should she be made to understand that her own

immediate friends approve of the offer, she would probably

be induced to accept it. I have not heard my cousin say

what may be his future plans. I think it possible that,

as he is quite in earnest, he will not take one repulse.

Should he ask again, I hope that your niece may receive

him with altered views.

Pray believe me to be, my dear Madam,

Yours sincerely,

ROSALINE ALBURY.

Ayala read the letter twice over before her aunt returned to her,

and, as she read it, felt something of a feeling of renewed kindness

come upon her in reference to the writer of it;--not that she was

in the least changed in her own resolution, but that she liked Lady

Albury for wishing to change her. The reasons given, however, were

altogether impotent with her. Colonel Stubbs had the means of keeping

a wife! If that were a reason then also ought she to marry her

cousin, Tom Tringle. Colonel Stubbs was good and true; but so also

very probably was Tom Tringle. She would not compare the two men. She

knew that her cousin Tom was altogether distasteful to her, while she

took delight in the companionship of the Colonel. But the reasons

for marrying one were to her thinking as strong as for marrying the

other. There could be only one valid excuse for marriage,--that of

adoring the man;--and she was quite sure that she did not adore

Colonel Jonathan Stubbs. Lady Albury had said in her letter, that a

girl would be sure to love a man who treated her well after marriage;

but that would not suffice for her. Were she to marry at all, it

would be necessary that she should love the man before her marriage.

"Have you read the letter, my dear?" said Mrs. Dosett, as she entered

the room and closed the door carefully behind her. She spoke almost

in a whisper, and seemed to be altogether changed by the magnitude of

the occasion.

"Yes, Aunt Margaret, I have read it."

"I suppose it is true?"

"True! It is true in part."

"You did meet this Colonel Stubbs?"

"Oh, yes; I met him."

"And you had met him before?"

"Yes, Aunt Margaret. He used to come to Brook Street. He is the

Marchesa's nephew."

"Did he--" This question Aunt Margaret asked in a very low whisper,

and her most solemn voice. "Did he make love to you in Brook Street?"

"No," said Ayala, sharply.

"Not at all?"

"Not at all. I never thought of such a thing. I never dreamed of such

a thing when he began talking to me out in the woods at Stalham on

Saturday."

"Had you been--been on friendly terms with him?"

"Very friendly terms. We were quite friends, and used to talk about

all manner of things. I was very fond of him, and never afraid of

anything that he said to me. He was Nina's cousin and seemed almost

to be my cousin too."

"Then you do like him?"

"Of course I do. Everybody must like him. But that is no reason why I

should want to marry him."

Upon this Mrs. Dosett sat silent for awhile turning the great matter

over in her thoughts. It was quite clear to her that every word which

Ayala had spoken was true; and probable also that Lady Albury's words

were true. In her inmost thoughts she regarded Ayala as a fool. Here

was a girl who had not a shilling of her own, who was simply a burden

on relatives whom she did not especially love, who was doomed to

a life which was essentially distasteful to her,--for all this in

respect to herself and her house Mrs. Dosett had sense enough to

acknowledge,--who seemed devoted to the society of rich and gay

people, and yet would not take the opportunities that were offered

her of escaping what she disliked and going to that which she

loved! Two offers had now been made to her, both of them thoroughly

eligible, to neither of which would objection have been made by

any of the persons concerned. Sir Thomas had shown himself to be

absolutely anxious for the success of his son. And now it seemed that

the grand relations of this Colonel Stubbs were in favour of the

match. What it was in Ayala that entitled her to such promotion Mrs.

Dosett did not quite perceive. To her eyes her niece was a fantastic

girl, pretty indeed, but not endowed with that regular tranquil

beauty which she thought to be of all feminine graces the most

attractive. Why Tom Tringle should have been so deeply smitten with

Ayala had been a marvel to her; and now this story of Colonel Stubbs

was a greater marvel. "Ayala," she said, "you ought to think better

of it."

"Think better of what, Aunt Margaret?"

"You have seen what this Lady Albury says about her cousin, Colonel

Stubbs."

"What has that to do with it?"

"You believe what she says? If so why should you not accept him?"

"Because I can't," said Ayala.

"Have you any idea what is to become of your future life?" said Mrs.

Dosett, very gravely.

"Not in the least," said Ayala. But that was a fib, because she had

an idea that in the fullness of time it would be her heavenly fate to

put her hand into that of the Angel of Light.

"Gentlemen won't come running after you always, my dear."

This was almost as bad as being told by her Aunt Emmeline that she

had encouraged her cousin Tom. "It's a great shame to say that. I

don't want anybody to run after me. I never did."

"No, my dear; no. I don't think that you ever did." Mrs. Dosett, who

was justice itself, did acknowledge to herself that of any such fault

as that suggested, Ayala was innocent. Her fault was quite in the

other direction, and consisted of an unwillingness to settle herself

and to free her relations of the burden of maintaining her when

proper opportunities arose for doing so. "I only want to explain

to you that people must,--must,--must make their hay while the sun

shines. You are young now."

"I am not one-and-twenty yet," said Ayala, proudly.

"One-and-twenty is a very good time for a girl to marry,--that is to

say if a proper sort of gentleman asks her."

"I don't think I ought to be scolded because they don't seem to me to

be the proper sort. I don't want anybody to come. Nobody ought to be

talked to about it at all. If I cared about any one that you or Uncle

Reginald did not approve, then you might talk to me. But I don't

think that anything ought to be said about anybody unless I like him

myself." So the conversation was over, and Mrs. Dosett felt that she

had been entirely vanquished.

Lady Albury's letter was shown to Mr. Dosett, but he refused to say

a word to his niece on the subject. In the argument which followed

between him and his wife he took his niece's part, opposing

altogether that idea that hay should be made while the sun shines.

"It simply means selling herself," said Mr. Dosett.

"That is nonsense, Reginald. Of course such a girl as Ayala has to

do the best she can with her good looks. What else has she to depend

upon?"

"My brother-in-law will do something for her."

"I hope he will,--though I do not think that a very safe reed to

depend upon as she has twice offended him. But of course a girl

thinks of marrying. Ayala would be very much disgusted if she were

told that she was to be an old maid, and live upon Â£100 a year

supplied by Sir Thomas's bounty. It might have been that she would

have to do it;--but now that chances are open she ought to take them.

She should choose between her cousin Tom and this Colonel Stubbs;

and you should tell her that, if she will not, you will no longer be

responsible for her."

To this Mr. Dosett turned altogether a deaf ear. He was quite sure

that his responsibility must be continued till Ayala should marry,

or till he should die, and he would not make a threat which he would

certainly be unable to carry out. He would be very glad if Ayala

could bring herself to marry either of the young men. It was a pity

that she should feel herself compelled to refuse offers so excellent.

But it was a matter for her own judgment, and one in which he would

not interfere. For two days this almost led to a coldness between the

man and his wife, during which the sufferings of poor Mrs. Dosett

were heartrending.

Not many days after Ayala's return her sister Lucy came to see her.

Certain reasons had caused Lady Tringle to stay at Glenbogie longer

than usual, and the family was now passing through London on their

way to Merle Park. Perhaps it was the fact that the Trafficks had

been effectually extruded from Glenbogie, but would doubtless turn up

at Merle Park, should Lady Tringle take up her residence there before

the autumn was over. That they should spend their Christmas at Merle

Park was an acknowledged thing;--to mamma Tringle an acknowledged

benefit, because she liked to have her daughter with her; to papa

Tringle an acknowledged evil, because he could not endure to be made

to give more than he intended to give. That they should remain there

afterwards through January, and till the meeting of Parliament, was

to be expected. But it was hoped that they might be driven to find

some home for themselves if they were left homeless by Sir Thomas for

awhile. The little plan was hardly successful, as Mr. Traffick had

put his wife into lodgings at Hastings, ready to pounce down on Merle

Park as soon as Lady Tringle should have occupied the house a few

days. Lady Tringle was now going there with the rest of the family,

Sir Thomas having been in town for the last six weeks.

Lucy took advantage of the day which they passed in London, and

succeeded in getting across to the Crescent. At this time she had

heard nothing of Colonel Stubbs, and was full indeed of her own

troubles.

"You haven't seen him?" she said to her sister.

"Seen who?" asked Ayala, who had two "hims" to her bow,--and thought

at the moment rather of her own two "hims" than of Lucy's one.

"Isadore. He said that he would call here." Ayala explained that she

had not seen him, having been absent from town during the last ten

days,--during which Mr. Hamel had in fact called at the house.

"Ayala," continued Lucy, "what am I to do?"

"Stick to him," said Ayala, firmly.

"Of course I shall. But Aunt Emmeline thinks that I ought to give him

up or--"

"Or what?"

"Or go away," said Lucy, very gravely.

"Where would you go to?"

"Oh, where indeed? Of course he would have me, but it would be ruin

to him to marry a wife without a penny when he earns only enough for

his own wants. His father has quarrelled with him altogether. He says

that nobody can prevent our being married if we please, and that he

is quite ready to make a home for me instantly; but I know that last

year he hardly earned more than two hundred pounds after paying all

his expenses, and were I to take him at his word I should ruin him."

"Would Uncle Tom turn you out?"

"He has been away almost ever since Mr. Hamel came to Glenbogie, and

I do not know what he will say. Aunt Emmeline declares that I can

only stay with them just as though I were her daughter, and that a

daughter would be bound to obey her."

"Does Gertrude obey her about Mr. Houston?"

"Gertrude has her own way with her mother altogether. And of course a

daughter cannot really be turned out. If she tells me to go I suppose

I must go."

"I should ask Uncle Tom," said Ayala. "She could not make you go out

into the street. When she had to get rid of me, she could send me

here in exchange; but she can't say now that you don't suit, and have

me back again."

"Oh, Ayala, it is so miserable. I feel that I do not know what to do

with myself."

"Nor do I," said Ayala, jumping up from the bed on which she was

sitting. "It does seem to be so cross-grained. Nobody will let you

marry, and everybody will make me."

"Do they still trouble you about Tom?"

"It is not Tom now, Lucy. Another man has come up."

"As a lover?"

"Oh, yes; quite so. His name is,--such a name, Lucy,--his name is

Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"That is Isadore's friend,--the man who lives at Drumcaller."

"Exactly. He told me that Mr. Hamel was at Drumcaller with him. And

now he wants me to be his wife."

"Do you not like him?"

"That is the worst part of it all, Lucy. If I did not like him I

should not mind it half so much. It is just because I like him so

very much that I am so very unhappy. His hair is just the colour of

Aunt Emmeline's big shawl."

"What does that signify?"

"And his mouth stretches almost from ear to ear."

"I shouldn't care a bit for his mouth."

"I don't think I do much, because he does look so good-natured when

he laughs. Indeed he is always the most good-natured man that ever

lived."

"Has he got an income enough for marriage?" asked Lucy, whose sorrows

were already springing from that most fertile source of sorrowing.

"Plenty they tell me,--though I do not in the least know what plenty

means."

"Then Ayala why should you not have him?"

"Because I can't," said Ayala. "How is a girl to love a man if she

does not love him. Liking has nothing to do with it. You don't think

liking ought to have anything to do with it?"

This question had not been answered when Aunt Margaret came into the

room, declaring that the Tringle man-servant, who had walked across

the park with Miss Dormer, was waxing impatient. The sisters,

therefore, were separated, and Lucy returned to Queen's Gate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS DOCIMER.

"I tell you fairly that I think you altogether wrong;--that it is

cowardly, unmanly, and disgraceful. I don't mean, you see, to put

what you call a fine point upon it."

"No, you don't."

"It is one of those matters on which a person must speak the truth or

not speak at all. I should not have spoken unless you forced it upon

me. You don't care for her in the least."

"That's true. I do not know that I am especially quick at what you

call caring for young ladies. If I care for anybody it is for you."

"I suppose so; but that may as well be dropped for the present. You

mean to marry this girl simply because she has got a lot of money?"

"Exactly that;--as you before long will marry some gentleman only

because he has got money."

"You have no right to say so because I am engaged to no man. But if

I were so it is quite different. Unless I marry I can be nobody. I

can have no existence that I can call my own. I have no other way of

pushing myself into the world's notice. You are a man."

"You mean to say that I could become a merchant or a lawyer,--be a

Lord Chancellor in time, or perhaps an Archbishop of Canterbury."

"You can live and eat and drink and go where you wish without being

dependent on any one. If I had your freedom and your means do you

think that I would marry for money?"

In this dialogue the main part was taken by Mr. Frank Houston, whose

ambition it was to marry Miss Gertrude Tringle, and the lady's

part by his cousin and intimate friend, Miss Imogene Docimer. The

scene was a walk through a pine-forest on the southern slopes of

the Tyrolean Alps, and the occasion had been made a little more

exhilarating than usual by the fact that Imogene had been strongly

advised both by her brother, Mr. Mudbury Docimer, and by her

sister-in law, Mrs. Mudbury Docimer, not to take any more distant

rambles with her far-away cousin Frank Houston. In the teeth of that

advice this walk was taken, and the conversation in the pine-wood had

at the present moment arrived at the point above given.

"I do not know that any two persons were ever further asunder in

an argument than you and I in this," said Frank, not in the least

disconcerted by the severe epithets which had been applied to him.

"I conceive that you are led away by a desire to deceive yourself,

whereas hypocrisy should only be used with the object of deceiving

others."

"How do I deceive myself?"

"In making believe that men are generally different from what they

are;--in trying to suppose that I ought to be, if I am not, a hero.

You shall not find a man whose main object is not that of securing

an income. The clergyman who preaches against gold licks the ground

beneath the minister's feet in order that he may become a bishop. The

barrister cares not with what case he may foul his hands so long as

he may become rich. The man in trade is so aware of his own daily

dishonesty that he makes two separate existences for himself, and

endeavours to atone for his rascality in the City by his performance

of all duties at the West End. I regard myself to be so infinitely

cleaner in my conscience than other men that I could not bring myself

to be a bishop, an attorney-general, or a great merchant. Of all the

ways open to me this seems to me to be the least sordid. I give her

the only two things which she desires,--myself and a position. She

will give me the only thing I desire, which is some money. When you

marry you'll make an equally fine bargain,--only your wares will be

your beauty."

"You will not give her yourself;--not your heart."

"Yes, I shall. I shall make the most of her, and shall do so by

becoming as fond of her as I can. Of course I like breeding. Of

course I like beauty. Of course I like that aroma of feminine charm

which can only be produced by a mixture of intellect, loveliness,

taste, and early association. I don't pretend to say that my future

would not be much sweeter before me with you as my wife,--if only

either of us had a sufficiency of income. I acknowledge that. But

then I acknowledge also that I prefer Miss Tringle, with Â£100,000,

to you with nothing; and I do not think that I ought to be called

unmanly, disgraceful, and a coward, because I have courage enough

to speak the truth openly to a friend whom I trust. My theory of

life shocks you, not because it is uncommon, but because it is not

commonly declared."

They were silent for a while as they went on through the path, and

then Miss Docimer spoke to him in an altered voice. "I must ask you

not to speak to me again as one who by any possibility could have

been your wife."

"Very well. You will not wish me to abandon the privilege of thinking

of past possibilities?"

"I would,--if it were possible."

"Quite impossible! One's thoughts, I imagine, are always supposed to

be one's own."

"You know what I mean. A gentleman will always spare a woman if he

can do so; and there are cases, such as have been ours, in which it

is a most imperative duty to do so. You should not have followed us

when you had made up your mind about this young lady."

"I took care to let you know, beforehand, that I intended it."

"You should not have thrown the weight upon me. You should not even

have written to me."

"I wonder what you would have said then,--how loudly you would have

abused me,--had I not written! Would you not have told me then that

I had not the courage to be open with you?" He paused for an answer,

but she made none. "But I do recognise the necessity of my becoming

subject to abuse in this state of affairs. I have been in no respect

false, nor in any way wanting in affection. When I suggested to you

that Â£600 a-year between us, with an increasing family, and lodgings

in Marylebone, would be uncomfortable, you shuddered at the prospect.

When I explained to you that you would have the worst of it because

my club would be open to me, you were almost angry with me because I

seemed to imply that there could be any other than one decision."

"There could only be one decision,--unless you were man enough to

earn your bread."

"But I wasn't. But I ain't. You might as well let that accident pass,

sans dire. Was there ever a moment in which you thought that I should

earn my bread?"

"Never for a moment did I endow you with the power of doing anything

so manly."

"Then why throw it in my teeth now? That is not fair. However, I do

own that I have to be abused. I don't see any way in which you and I

are to part without it. But you need not descend to Billingsgate."

"I have not descended to Billingsgate, Mr. Houston."

"Upper-world Billingsgate! Cowardice, as an accusation from a woman

to a man, is upper-world Billingsgate. But it doesn't matter. Of

course I know what it means. Do you think your brother wants me to go

away at once?"

"At once," she said.

"That would be disagreeable and absurd. You mean to sit to me for

that head?"

"Certainly not."

"I cannot in the least understand why not. What has a question of

art to do with marriage or giving in marriage? And why should Mrs.

Docimer be so angry with me, when she has known the truth all along?"

"There are questions which it is of no avail to answer. I have come

out with you now because I thought it well that we should have a

final opportunity of understanding each other. You understand me at

any rate."

"Perfectly," he said. "You have taken especial care on this occasion

to make yourself intelligible."

"So I intended. And as you do understand me, and know how far I am

from approving your philosophy, you can hardly wish to remain with us

longer." Then they walked on together in absolute silence for above a

mile. They had come out of the wood, and were descending, by a steep

and narrow path, to the village in which stood the hotel at which the

party was staying. Another ten minutes would take them down to the

high road. The path here ran by the side of a rivulet, the course

of which was so steep that the waters made their way down in a

succession of little cataracts. From the other side of the path was

a fence, so close to it, that on this particular spot there was room

only for one to walk. Here Frank Houston stepped in front of his

companion, so as to stop her. "Imogene," he said, "if it is intended

that I am to start by the diligence for Innspruck this evening, you

had better bid me farewell at once."

"I have bidden you farewell," she said.

"Then you have done it in so bitter a mood that you had better try

your hand at it again. Heaven only knows in what manner you or I may

meet again."

"What does it matter?" she asked.

"I have always felt that the hearts of men are softer than the hearts

of women. A woman's hand is soft, but she can steel her heart when

she thinks it necessary, as no man can do. Does it occur to you at

this moment that there has been some true affection between you and

me in former days?"

"I wish it did not."

"It may be so that I wish it also; but there is the fact. No wishing

will enable me to get rid of it. No wishing will save me from the

memory of early dreams and sweet longings and vain triumphs. There is

the remembrance of bright glory made very sad to me by the meanness

of the existing truth. I do not say but that I would obliterate it if

I could; but it is not to be obliterated; the past will not be made

more pleasant to me by any pretence of present indignation. I should

have thought that it would have been the same with you."

"There has been no glory," she said, "though I quite acknowledge the

meanness."

"There has been at any rate some love."

"Misplaced. You had better let me pass on. I have, as you say,

steeled myself. I will not condescend to any tenderness. In my

brother's presence and my sister's I will wish you good-bye and

express a hope that you may be successful in your enterprises. Here,

by the brook-side, out upon the mountain-path, where there is no one

to hear us but our two selves, I will bid you no farewell softer than

that already spoken. Go and do as you propose. You have my leave.

When it shall have been done there shall never be a word spoken by me

against it. But, when you ask me whether you are right, I will only

say that I think you to be wrong. It may be that you owe nothing to

me; but you owe something to her, and something also to yourself.

Now, Mr. Houston, I shall be glad to pass on."

He shrugged his shoulders and then stepped out of the path, thinking

as he did so how ignorant he had been, after all that had passed, of

much of the character of Imogene Docimer. It could not be, he had

thought, but that she would melt into softness at last. "I will not

condescend to any tenderness," she had said, and it seemed that she

would be as good as her word. He then walked down before her in

silence, and in silence they reached the inn.

"Mr. Houston," said Mrs. Docimer, before they sat down to dinner

together, "I thought it was understood that you and Imogene should

not go out alone together again."

"I have taken my place to Innspruck by the diligence this evening,"

he answered.

"Perhaps it will be better so, though both Mudbury and I will be

sorry to lose your company."

"Yes, Mrs. Docimer, I have taken my place. Your sister seemed to

think that there would be great danger if I waited till to-morrow

morning when I could have got a pleasant lift in a return carriage. I

hate travelling at night and I hate diligences. I was quite prepared

to post all the way, though it would have ruined me,--only for this

accursed diligence."

"I am sorry you should be inconvenienced."

"It does not signify. What a man without a wife may suffer in that

way never does signify. It's just fourteen hours. You wouldn't like

Docimer to come with me."

"That's nonsense. You needn't go the whole way unless you like. You

could sleep at Brunecken."

"Brunecken is only twelve miles, and it might be dangerous."

"Of course you choose to turn everything into ridicule."

"Better that than tears, Mrs. Docimer. What's the good of crying? I

can't make myself an elder son. I can't endow Imogene with a hundred

thousand pounds. She told me just now that I might earn my bread, but

she knows that I can't. It's very sad. But what can be got by being

melancholy?"

"At any rate you had better be away from her."

"I am going,--this evening. Shall I walk on, half a stage, at once,

without any dinner? I wish you had heard the kind of things she said

to me. You would not have thought that I had gone to walk with her

for my own pleasure."

"Have you not deserved them?"

"I think not;--but nevertheless I bore them. A woman, of course, can

say what she pleases. There's Docimer,--I hope he won't call me a

coward."

Mr. Docimer came out on the terrace, on which the two were standing,

looking as sour as death. "He is going by the diligence to Innspruck

this afternoon," said Mrs. Docimer.

"Why did he come? A man with a grain of feeling would have remained

away."

"Now, Docimer," said Frank, "pray do not make yourself unpleasant.

Your sister has been abusing me all the morning like a pickpocket,

and your wife looks at me as though she would say just as much if she

dared. After all, what is it I have done that you think so wicked?"

"What will everybody think at home," said Mrs. Docimer, "when they

know that you're with us again? What chance is she to have if you

follow her about in this way?"

"I shall not follow her very long," said Frank. "My wings will soon

be cut, and then I shall never fly again." They were at this time

walking up and down the terrace together, and it seemed for awhile

that neither of them had another word to say in the matter of the

dispute between them. Then Houston went on again in his own defence.

"Of course it is all bad," he said. "Of course we have all been

fools. You knew it, and allowed it; and have no right to say a word

to me."

"We thought that when your uncle died there would have been money,"

said Docimer, with a subdued growl.

"Exactly; and so did I. You do not mean to say that I deceived either

you or her?"

"There should have been an end of it when that hope was over."

"Of course there should. There should never have been a dream that

she or I could marry on six hundred a year. Had not all of us been

fools, we should have taken our hats off and bade each other farewell

for ever when the state of the old man's affairs was known. We were

fools; but we were fools together; and none of us have a right to

abuse the others. When I became acquainted with this young lady at

Rome, it had been settled among us that Imogene and I must seek our

fortunes apart."

"Then why did you come after her?" again asked Mr. Docimer.

At this moment Imogene herself joined them on the terrace. "Mary,"

she said to her sister-in-law, "I hope you are not carrying on this

battle with Mr. Houston. I have said what there was to be said."

"You should have held your tongue and said nothing," growled her

brother.

"Be that as it may I have said it, and he quite understands what I

think about it. Let us eat our dinner in peace and quietness, and

then let him go on his travels. He has the world free before him,

which he no doubt will open like an oyster, though he does not carry

a sword." Soon after this they did dine, and contented themselves

with abusing the meat and the wine, and finding fault with Tyrolese

cookery, just as though they had no deeper cares near their hearts.

Precisely at six the heavy diligence stopped before the hotel door,

and Houston, who was then smoking with Docimer on the terrace, got

up to bid them adieu. Mrs. Docimer was kind and almost affectionate,

with a tear in her eye. "Well, old fellow," said Docimer, "take

care of yourself. Perhaps everything will turn up right some of

these days." "Good-bye, Mr. Houston," said Imogene, just giving him

her hand to touch in the lightest manner possible. "God bless you,

Imogene," said he. And there was a tear also in his eye. But there

was none in hers, as she stood looking at him while he prepared

himself for his departure; nor did she say another word to him as he

went. "And now," said she, when the three of them were left upon the

terrace, "I will ask a great favour of you both. I will beg you not

to let there be another word about Mr. Houston among us." After that

she rambled out by herself, and was not seen again by either of them

that evening.

When she was alone she too shed her tears, though she felt impatient

and vexed with herself as they came into her eyes. It was not perhaps

only for her lost love that she wept. Had no one known that her love

had been given and then lost she might have borne it without weeping.

But now, in carrying on this vain affair of hers, in devoting herself

to a lover who had, with her own consent, passed away from her, she

had spent the sweet fresh years of her youth, and all those who knew

her would know that it had been so. He had told her that it would be

her fate to purchase for herself a husband with her beauty. It might

be so. At any rate she did not doubt her own beauty. But, if it were

to be so, then the romance and the charm of her life were gone. She

had quite agreed that six hundred a year, and lodgings in Marylebone,

would be quite unendurable; but what was there left for her that

would be endurable? He could be happy with the prospect of Gertrude

Tringle's money. She could not be happy, looking forward to that

unloved husband who was to be purchased by her beauty.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT MERLE PARK. NO. 1.

Sir Thomas took the real holiday of the year at Glenbogie,--where

he was too far removed from Lombard Street to be drawn daily into

the vortex of his millions. He would stay usually six weeks at

Glenbogie,--which were by no means the happiest weeks of the year. Of

all the grand things of the world which his energy and industry had

produced for him, he loved his millions the best. It was not because

they were his,--as indeed they were not. A considerable filing off

them,--what he regarded as his percentage,--annually became his own;

but it was not this that he loved. In describing a man's character it

is the author's duty to give the man his due. Sir Thomas liked his

own wealth well enough. Where is the rich man who does not?--or where

is the poor man who does not wish that he had it to like? But what he

loved were the millions with which Travers and Treason dealt. He was

Travers and Treason, though his name did not even appear in the firm,

and he dealt with the millions. He could affect the rate of money

throughout Europe, and emissaries from national treasuries would

listen to his words. He had been Governor and Deputy-Governor of the

Bank of England. All the City respected him, not so much because he

was rich, as that he was one who thoroughly understood millions. If

Russia required to borrow some infinite number of roubles, he knew

how to arrange it, and could tell to a rouble at what rate money

could be made by it, and at what rate money would certainly be lost.

He liked his millions, and was therefore never quite comfortable at

Glenbogie. But at Merle Park he was within easy reach of London. At

Merle Park he was not obliged to live, from week's end to week's end,

without a sight of Lombard Street. The family might be at Merle Park,

while he might come down on a Friday and remain till Tuesday morning.

That was the plan proposed for Merle Park. As a fact he would spend

four days in town, and only two down in the country. Therefore,

though he spent his so-named holiday at Glenbogie, Merle Park was the

residence which he loved.

In this autumn he went up to London long before his family, and then

found them at Merle Park on the Saturday after their arrival there.

They had gone down on the previous Wednesday. On the Saturday, when

he entered the house, the first thing he saw was Mr. Traffick's hat

in the hall. This was Saturday, 23rd November, and there would be

three months before Parliament would meet! A curse was not muttered,

but just formed between his teeth, as he saw the hat. Sir Thomas, in

his angriest mood, never went so far as quite to mutter his curses.

Will one have to expiate the anathemas which are well kept within

the barrier of the teeth, or only those which have achieved some

amount of utterance? Sir Thomas went on, with a servant at his heels,

chucking about the doors rather violently, till he found Mr. Traffick

alone in the drawing-room. Mr. Traffick had had a glass of sherry and

bitters brought in for his refreshment, and Sir Thomas saw the glass

on the mantelpiece. He never took sherry and bitters himself. One

glass of wine, with his two o'clock mutton chop, sufficed him till

dinner. It was all very well to be a Member of Parliament, but, after

all, Members of Parliament never do anything. Men who work don't

take sherry and bitters! Men who work don't put their hats in other

people's halls without leave from the master of the house! "Where's

your mistress?" said Sir Thomas, to the man, without taking any

notice of his son-in-law. The ladies had only just come in from

driving, were very cold, and had gone up to dress. Sir Thomas went

out of the room, again banging the door, and again taking no notice

of Mr. Traffick. Mr. Traffick put his hand up to the mantelpiece, and

finished his sherry and bitters.

"My dear," said Mr. Traffick to his wife, up in her bed-room, "your

father has come down in one of his tantrums."

"I knew he would," said Augusta.

"But it does not signify the least. Give him a kiss when you see him,

and don't seem to notice it. There is not a man in the world has a

higher regard for me than your father, but if any one were to see him

in one of his tantrums they would suppose he meant to be uncivil."

"I hope he won't be downright unkind, Septimus," said his wife.

"Never fear! The kindest-hearted man in the world is your father."

"So he's here!" That was the first word of greeting which Sir Thomas

addressed to his wife in her bed-room.

"Yes, Tom;--they're here."

"When did they come?"

"Well;--to tell the truth, we found them here."

"The ----!" But Sir Thomas restrained the word on the right, or

inside, of the teeth.

"They thought we were to be here a day sooner, and so they came on

the Wednesday morning. They were to come, you know."

"I wish I knew when they were to go."

"You don't want to turn your own daughter out of your own house?"

"Why doesn't he get a house of his own for her? For her sake why

doesn't he do it? He has the spending of Â£6,000 a year of my money,

and yet I am to keep him! No;--I don't want to turn my daughter out

of my house; but it'll end in my turning him out."

When a week had passed by Mr. Traffick had not been as yet turned

out. Sir Thomas, when he came back to Merle Park on the following

Friday, condescended to speak to his son-in-law, and to say something

to him as to the news of the day; but this he did in an evident

spirit of preconceived hostility. "Everything is down again," he

said.

"Fluctuations are always common at this time of the year," said

Traffick; "but I observe that trade always becomes brisk a little

before Christmas."

"To a man with a fixed income, like you, it doesn't much matter,"

said Sir Thomas.

"I was looking at it in a public light."

"Exactly. A man who has an income, and never spends it, need not

trouble himself with private views as to the money market." Mr.

Traffick rubbed his hands, and asked whether the new buildings at the

back of the Lombard Street premises were nearly finished.

Mr. Traffick's economy had a deleterious effect upon Gertrude, which

she, poor girl, did not deserve. Sir Thomas, deeply resolving in his

mind that he would, at some not very distant date, find means by

which he would rid himself of Mr. Traffick, declared to himself that

he would not, at any rate, burden himself with another son-in-law

of the same kind. Frank Houston was, to his thinking, of the same

kind, and therefore he hardened his heart against Frank Houston. Now

Frank Houston, could he have got his wife with Â£6,000 a year,--as Mr.

Traffick had done,--would certainly not have troubled the Tringle

mansions with too much of his presence. It would have been his object

to remove himself as far as possible from the Tringles, and to have

enjoyed his life luxuriously with the proceeds of his wife's fortune.

But his hopes in this respect were unjustly impeded by Mr. Traffick's

parsimony. Soon after leaving the hotel in the Tyrol at which we

lately saw him, Frank Houston wrote to his lady-love, declaring the

impatience of his ardour, and suggesting that it would be convenient

if everything could be settled before Christmas. In his letter he

declared to Gertrude how very uncomfortable it was to him to have to

discuss money matters with her father. It was so disagreeable that he

did not think that he could bring himself to do it again. But, if she

would only be urgent with her father, she would of course prevail.

Acting upon this Gertrude determined to be urgent with her father

on his second coming to Merle Park, when, as has been explained,

Sir Thomas was in a frame of mind very much opposed to impecunious

sons-in-law. Previous to attacking her father Gertrude had tried

her hand again upon her mother, but Lady Tringle had declined. "If

anything is to be done you must do it yourself," Lady Tringle had

said.

"Papa," said Gertrude, having followed him into a little sitting-room

where he digested and arranged his telegrams when at Merle Park, "I

wish something could be settled about Mr. Houston."

Sir Thomas at this moment was very angry. Mr. Traffick had not only

asked for the loan of a carriage to take him into Hastings, but had

expressed a wish that there might be a peculiar kind of claret served

at dinner with which he was conversant and to which he was much

attached. "Then," said he, "you may as well have it all settled at

once."

"How, papa?"

"You may understand for good and all that I will have nothing to do

with Mr. Houston."

"Papa, that would be very cruel."

"My dear, if you call me cruel I will not allow you to come and talk

to me at all. Cruel indeed! What is your idea of cruelty?"

"Everybody knows that we are attached to each other."

"Everybody knows nothing of the kind. I know nothing of the kind. And

you are only making a fool of yourself. Mr. Houston is a penniless

adventurer and is only attached to my money. He shall never see a

penny of it."

"He is not an adventurer, papa. He is much less like an adventurer

than Mr. Traffick. He has an income of his own, only it is not much."

"About as much as would pay his bill at the club for cigars and

champagne. You may make your mind at rest, for I will not give

Mr. Houston a shilling. Why should a man expect to live out of my

earnings who never did a day's work in his life?"

Gertrude left the room despondently, as there was nothing more to be

done on the occasion. But it seemed to her as though she were being

used with the utmost cruelty. Augusta had been allowed to marry her

man without a shilling, and had been enriched with Â£120,000. Why

should she be treated worse than Augusta? She was very strongly

of opinion that Frank Houston was very much better than Septimus

Traffick. Mr. Traffick's aptitude for saving his money was already

known to the whole household. Frank would never wish to save. Frank

would spend her income for her like a gentleman. Frank would not hang

about Glenbogie or Merle Park till he should be turned out. Everybody

was fond of Frank. But she, Gertrude, had already learnt to despise

Mr. Traffick, Member of Parliament though he was. She had already

begun to think that having been chosen by Frank Houston, who was

decidedly a man of fashion, she had proved herself to be of higher

calibre than her sister Augusta. But her father's refusal to her had

been not only very rough but very decided. She would not abandon her

Frank. Such an idea never for a moment crossed her mind. But what

step should she next take? Thinking over it during the whole of the

day she did at last form a plan. But she greatly feared that the plan

would not recommend itself to Mr. Frank Houston. She was not timid,

but he might be so. In spite of her father's anger and roughness she

would not doubt his ultimate generosity; but Frank might doubt it. If

Frank could be induced to come and carry her off from Merle Park and

marry her in some manner approved for such occasions, she would stand

the risk of getting the money afterwards. But she was greatly afraid

that the risk would be too much for Frank. She did not, however,

see any other scheme before her. As to waiting patiently till her

father's obdurate heart should be softened by the greater obduracy

of her own love, there was a tedium and a prolonged dulness in such

a prospect which were anything but attractive to her. Had it been

possible she would have made a bargain with her father. "If you won't

give us Â£120,000 let us begin with Â£60,000." But even this she feared

would not altogether be agreeable to Frank. Let her think of it

how she would, that plan of being run away with seemed alone to be

feasible--and not altogether disagreeable.

It was necessary that she should answer her lover's letter. No

embargo had as yet been put upon her correspondence, and therefore

she could send her reply without external difficulty.

"Dear Frank," she said,

I quite agree with you about Christmas. It ought to be

settled. But I have very bad news to send to you. I have

been to papa as you told me, but he was very unkind.

Nothing could be worse. He said that you ought to earn

your bread, which is, of course, all humbug. He didn't

understand that there ought to be some gentlemen who never

earn their bread. I am sure, if you had been earning your

bread by going to Lombard Street every day, I shouldn't

have ever cared for you.

He says that he will not give a single shilling. I think

he is angry because Augusta's husband will come and live

here always. That is disgusting, of course. But it isn't

my fault. It is either that, or else some money has gone

wrong;--or perhaps he had a very bad fit of indigestion.

He was, however, so savage, that I really do not know how

to go to him again. Mamma is quite afraid of him, and does

not dare say a word, because it was she who managed about

Mr. Traffick.

What ought to be done? Of course, I don't like to think

that you should be kept waiting. I am not sure that I

quite like it myself. I will do anything you propose, and

am not afraid of running a little risk. If we could get

married without his knowing anything about it, I am sure

he would give the money afterwards,--because he is always

so good-natured in the long run, and so generous. He can

be very savage, but he would be sure to forgive.

How would it be if I were to go away? I am of age, and

I believe that no one could stop me. If you could manage

that we should get married in that way, I would do my

best. I know people can get themselves married at Ostend.

I do not see what else is to be done. You can write

to me at present here, and nothing wrong will come of

it. But Augusta says that if papa were to begin to

suspect anything about my going away he would stop my

letters.--Dear Frank, I am yours always, and always most

lovingly,

GERTRUDE.

You needn't be a bit afraid but that I should be quite up

to going off if you could arrange it.

"I believe, papa," said Mrs. Traffick, on the afternoon of the day on

which this was written, "that Gertrude is thinking of doing something

wrong, and therefore I feel it to be my duty to bring you this

letter." Augusta had not been enabled to read the letter, but had

discussed with her sister the propriety of eloping. "I won't advise

it," she had said, "but, if you do, Mr. Houston should arrange to be

married at Ostend. I know that can be done." Some second thought had

perhaps told her that any such arrangement would be injurious to the

noble blood of the Traffick family, and she had therefore "felt it to

be her duty" to extract the letter from the family letter-box, and

to give it to her father. A daughter who could so excellently do her

duty would surely not be turned out before Parliament met.

Sir Thomas took the letter and said not a word to his elder child.

When he was alone he doubted. He was half-minded to send the letter

on. What harm could the two fools do by writing to each other? While

he held the strings of the purse there could be no marriage. Then he

bethought himself of his paternal authority, of the right he had to

know all that his daughter did,--and he opened the letter. "There

ought to be gentlemen who don't earn their bread!" "Ought there?"

said he to himself. If so these gentlemen ought not to come to him

for bread. He was already supporting one such, and that was quite

enough. "Mamma is quite afraid of him, and doesn't dare say a word."

That he rather liked. "I am sure he would give the money afterwards."

"I am sure he would do no such thing," he said to himself, and he

reflected that in such a condition he should rather be delighted than

otherwise in watching the impecunious importunities of his baffled

son-in-law. The next sentence reconciled his girl to him almost

entirely. "He is always so good-natured in the long run, and so

generous!" For "good-natured" he did not care much, but he liked to

be thought generous. Then he calmly tore the letter in little bits,

and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

He sat for ten minutes thinking what he had better do, finding

the task thus imposed upon him to be much more difficult than the

distribution of a loan. At last he determined that, if he did

nothing, things would probably settle themselves. Mr. Houston,

when he received no reply from his lady-love, would certainly be

quiescent, and Gertrude, without any assent from her lover, could

hardly arrange her journey to Ostend. Perhaps it might be well that

he should say a word of caution to his wife; but as to that he did

not at present quite make up his mind, as he was grievously disturbed

while he was considering the subject.

"If you please, Sir Thomas," said the coachman, hurrying into the

room almost without the ceremony of knocking,--"if you please,

Phoebe mare has been brought home with both her knees cut down to

the bone."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, who indulged himself in a taste for

horseflesh, and pretended to know one animal from another.

"Yes, indeed, Sir Thomas, down to the bone," said the coachman, who

entertained all that animosity against Mr. Traffick which domestics

feel for habitual guests who omit the ceremony of tipping. "Mr.

Traffick brought her down on Windover Hill, Sir Thomas, and she'll

never be worth a feed of oats again. I didn't think a man was

born who could throw that mare off her feet, Sir Thomas." Now Mr.

Traffick, when he had borrowed the phaeton and pair of horses that

morning to go into Hastings, had dispensed with the services of a

coachman, and had insisted on driving himself.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT MERLE PARK. NO. 2.

Has any irascible reader,--any reader who thoroughly enjoys the

pleasure of being in a rage,--encountered suddenly some grievance

which, heavy as it may be, has been more than compensated by the

privilege it has afforded of blowing-up the offender? Such was the

feeling of Sir Thomas as he quickly followed his coachman out of

the room. He had been very proud of his Phoebe mare, who could trot

with him from the station to the house at the rate of twelve miles

an hour. But in his present frame of mind he had liked the mare

less than he disliked his son-in-law. Mr. Traffick had done him

this injury, and he now had Mr. Traffick on the hip. There are some

injuries for which a host cannot abuse his guest. If your best

Venetian decanter be broken at table you are bound to look as though

you liked it. But if a horse be damaged a similar amount of courtesy

is hardly required. The well-nurtured gentleman, even in that case,

will only look unhappy and say not a word. Sir Thomas was hardly to

be called a well nurtured gentleman; and then it must be remembered

that the offender was his son-in-law. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed,

hurrying into the yard. "What is this?"

The mare was standing out on the pavement with three men around her,

of whom one was holding her head, another was down on his knees

washing her wounds, and the third was describing the fatal nature of

the wounds which she had received. Traffick was standing at a little

distance, listening in silence to the implied rebukes of the groom.

"Good heavens, what is this?" repeated Sir Thomas, as he joined the

conclave.

"There are a lot of loose stones on that hill," said Traffick, "and

she tripped on one and came down, all in a lump, before you could

look at her. I'm awfully sorry, but it might have happened to any

one."

Sir Thomas knew how to fix his darts better than by throwing them

direct at his enemy. "She has utterly destroyed herself," said he,

addressing himself to the head-groom, who was busily employed with

the sponge in his hand.

"I'm afraid she has, Sir Thomas. The joint-oil will be sure to run on

both knees; the gashes is so mortal deep."

"I've driven that mare hundreds of times down that hill," said Sir

Thomas, "and I never knew her to trip before."

"Never, Sir Thomas," said the groom.

"She'd have come down with you to-day," said Mr. Traffick, defending

himself.

"It was my own fault, Bunsum. That's all that can be said about it."

Bunsum the groom, kneeling as he was, expressed, by his grimaces, his

complete agreement with this last opinion of his master. "Of course I

ought to have known that he couldn't drive," said Sir Thomas.

"A horse may fall down with anybody," said Mr. Traffick.

"You'd better take her and shoot her," said Sir Thomas, still

addressing the groom. "She was the best thing we had in the stable,

but now she is done for." With that he turned away from the yard

without having as yet addressed a word to his son-in-law.

This was so intolerable that even Mr. Traffick could not bear it in

silence. "I have told you that I am very sorry," said he, following

Sir Thomas closely, "and I don't know what a man can do more."

"Nothing,--unless it be not to borrow a horse again."

"You may be sure I will never do that."

"I'm not sure of it at all. If you wanted another to-morrow you'd ask

for him if you thought you could get him."

"I call that very uncivil, Sir Thomas,--and very unkind."

"Bother!" said Sir Thomas. "It is no good in being kind to a fellow

like you. Did you ever hear what the cabman did who had a sovereign

given to him for driving a mile. He asked the fool who gave it him to

make it a guinea. I am the fool, and, by George, you are the cabman!"

With this Sir Thomas turned into the house by a small door, leaving

his son-in-law to wander round to the front by himself.

"Your father has insulted me horribly," he said to his wife, whom he

found up in her bed-room.

"What is the matter now, Septimus?"

"That little mare of his, which I have no doubt has come down half a

score of times before, fell with me and cut her knees."

"That's Phoebe," said Augusta. "She was his favourite."

"It's a kind of thing that might happen to anyone, and no gentleman

thinks of mentioning it. He said such things to me that upon my word

I don't think I can stop in the house any longer."

"Oh, yes, you will," said the wife.

"Of course, it is a difference coming from one's father-in-law. It's

almost the same as from one's father."

"He didn't mean it, Septimus."

"I suppose not. If he had, I really couldn't have borne it. He does

become very rough sometimes, but I know that at bottom he has a

thorough respect for me. It is only that induces me to bear it." Then

it was settled between husband and wife that they should remain in

their present quarters, and that not a word further should be said

at any rate by them about the Phoebe mare. Nor did Sir Thomas say

another word about the mare, but he added a note to those already

written in the tablets of his memory as to his son-in-law, and

the note declared that no hint, let it be ever so broad, would be

effectual with Mr. Traffick.

The next day was a Sunday, and then another trouble awaited Sir

Thomas. At this time it was not customary with Tom to come often to

Merle Park. He had his own lodgings in London and his own club, and

did not care much for the rural charms of Merle Park. But on this

occasion he had condescended to appear, and on the Sunday afternoon

informed his father that there was a matter which he desired to

discuss with him. "Father," said he, "I am getting confoundedly sick

of all this."

"Confounded," said Sir Thomas, "is a stupid foolish word, and it

means nothing."

"There is a sort of comfort in it, Sir," said Tom; "but if it's

objectionable I'll drop it."

"It is objectionable."

"I'll drop it, Sir. But nevertheless I am very sick of it."

"What are you sick of, Tom?"

"All this affair with my cousin."

"Then, if you take my advice, you'll drop that too."

"I couldn't do that, father. A word is all very well. A man can drop

a word; but a girl is a different sort of thing. One can't drop a

girl, even if one tries."

"Have you tried, Tom?"

"Yes, I have. I've done my best to try. I put it out of my mind for

a fortnight and wouldn't think of her. I had a bottle of champagne

every day at dinner and then went to the theatre. But it was all of

no use. I have set my heart on it and I can't give her up. I'll tell

you what I'd like to do. I'd like to give her a diamond necklace."

"It wouldn't be the slightest use," said Sir Thomas, shaking his

head.

"Why not? It's what other men do. I mean it to be something

handsome;--about three hundred pounds."

"That's a large sum of money for a necklace."

"Some of them cost a deal more than that."

"And you'd only throw away your money."

"If she took it, she'd take me too. If she didn't,--why I should

still have the diamonds. I mean to try any way."

"Then it's of no use your coming to me."

"I thought you'd let me have the money. It's no good running into

debt for them. And then if you'd add something of your own,--a

locket, or something of that kind,--I think it would have an effect.

I have seen a necklace at Ricolay's, and if I could pay ready money

for it I could have 20 per cent. off it. The price named is three

hundred guineas. That would make it Â£254 5\_s\_. Â£250 would buy it if

the cheque was offered."

There was a spirit about the son which was not displeasing to the

father. That idea that the gift, if accepted, would be efficacious,

or if not that it would be rejected,--so that Tom would not lose his

hopes and his diamonds together,--seemed to be sound. Sir Thomas,

therefore, promised the money, with the distinct understanding that

if the gift were not accepted by Ayala it should be consigned to

his own hands. But as for any present from himself, he felt that

this would not be the time for it. He had called upon his niece and

solicited her himself, and she had been deaf to his words. After that

he could not condescend to send her gifts. "Should she become my

promised daughter-in-law then I would send her presents," said Sir

Thomas.

The poor man certainly received less pleasure from his wealth than

was credited to him by those who knew his circumstances. Yet he

endeavoured to be good to those around him, and especially good to

his children. There had been present to him ever since the beginning

of his successes,--ever since his marriage,--a fixed resolution that

he would not be a curmudgeon with his money, that he would endeavour

to make those happy who depended on him, and that he would be liberal

in such settlements for his children as might be conducive to their

happiness and fortunes in life. In this way he had been very generous

to Mr. Traffick. The man was a Member of Parliament, the son of a

peer, and laborious. Why should he expect more? Money was wanting,

but he could supply the money. So he had supplied it, and had been

content to think that a good man should be propped up in the world

by his means. What that had come to the reader knows. He thoroughly

detested his son-in-law, and would have given much to have had his

money back again,--so that Mr. Traffick should have had no share in

it.

Then there was his second daughter! What should be done with

Gertrude? The money should be forthcoming for her too if the fitting

man could be found. But he would have nothing further to do with a

penniless lover, let his position in the world of fashion, or even in

the world of politics, be what it might. The man should either have

wealth of his own, or should be satisfied to work for it. Houston had

been unfortunate in the moment of his approaches. Sir Thomas had been

driven by his angry feelings to use hard, sharp words, and now was

forced to act up to his words. He declared roughly that Mr. Houston

should not have a shilling of his money,--as he had certainly

been justified for doing; and his daughter, who had always been

indulged in every kind of luxury, had at once concocted a plot for

running away from her home! As he thought of the plot it seemed

to be wonderful to him that she should be willing to incur such a

danger,--to be ready without a penny to marry a penniless man,--till

he confessed to himself that, were she to do so, she would certainly

have the money sooner or later. He was capable of passion, capable

of flying out and saying a very severe thing to Septimus Traffick or

another when his temper was hot; but he was incapable of sustained

wrath. He was already aware that if Mr. Traffick chose to stay he

would stay;--that if Mr. Houston were brave enough to be persistent

he might have both the money and the girl. As he thought of it all

he was angry with himself, wishing that he were less generous, less

soft, less forgiving.

And now here was Tom,--whom at the present moment he liked the best

of all his children, who of the three was the least inclined to run

counter to him,--ready to break his heart, because he could not get

a little chit of a girl of whom he would probably be tired in twelve

months after he possessed her! Remembering what Tom had been, he was

at a loss to understand how such a lad should be so thoroughly in

love. At the present moment, had Ayala been purchaseable, he would

have been willing to buy her at a great price, because he would fain

have pleased Tom had it been possible. But Ayala, who had not a penny

in the world,--who never would have a penny unless he should give it

her,--would not be purchased, and would have nothing to do with Tom!

The world was running counter to him, so that he had no pleasure in

his home, no pleasure in his money, no pleasure in his children. The

little back-parlour in Lombard Street was sweeter to him than Merle

Park, with all its charms. His daughter Gertrude wanted to run away

from him, while by no inducement could he get Mr. Traffick to leave

the house.

While he was in this humour he met his niece Lucy roaming about the

garden. He knew the whole story of Lucy's love, and had been induced

by his wife to acknowledge that her marriage with the sculptor was

not to be sanctioned. He had merely expressed his scorn when the

unfortunate circumstances of Hamel's birth had been explained to him

again and again. He had ridiculed the horror felt by his wife at the

equally ill-born brothers and sisters in Rome. He had merely shaken

his head when he was told that Hamel's father never went inside of

any place of worship. But when it was explained to him that the

young man had, so to say, no income at all, then he was forced to

acknowledge that the young man ought not to be allowed to marry his

niece.

To Lucy herself he had as yet said nothing on the subject since he

had asked the lover in to lunch at Glenbogie. He heard bad accounts

of her. He had been told by his wife, on different occasions,--not

in the mere way of conversation, but with a premeditated energy of

fault-finding,--that Lucy was a disobedient girl. She was worse than

Ayala. She persisted in saying that she would marry the penniless

artist as soon as he should profess himself to be ready. It had been

different, she had tried to explain to her aunt, before she had been

engaged to him. Now she considered herself to be altogether at his

disposal. This had been her plea, but her plea had been altogether

unacceptable to Aunt Emmeline. "She can do as she pleases, of

course," Sir Thomas had said. That might be all very well; but Aunt

Emmeline was strongly of opinion that an adopted daughter of Queen's

Gate, of Glenbogie, and Merle Park, ought not to be allowed to do as

she pleased with herself. A girl ought not to be allowed to have the

luxuries of palatial residences, and the luxuries of free liberty of

choice at the same time. More than once it had occurred to Sir Thomas

that he would put an end to all these miseries by a mere scratch of

his pen. It need not be Â£120,000, or Â£100,000, as with a daughter.

A few modest thousands would do it. And then this man Hamel, though

the circumstances of his birth had been unfortunate, was not an idler

like Frank Houston. As far as Sir Thomas could learn, the man did

work, and was willing to work. The present small income earned would

gradually become more. He had a kindly feeling towards Lucy, although

he had been inclined to own that her marriage with Hamel was out of

the question. "My dear," he said to her, "why are you walking about

alone?" She did not like to say that she was walking alone because

she had no one to walk with her,--no such companion as Isadore would

be if Isadore were allowed to come to Merle Park; so she simply

smiled, and went on by her uncle's side. "Do you like this place as

well as Glenbogie?" he asked.

"Oh; yes."

"Perhaps you will be glad to get back to London again?"

"Oh; no."

"Which do you like best, then?"

"They are all so nice, if--"

"If what, Lucy?"

"CÃ¦lum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt," Lucy might have

said, had she known the passage. As it was she put the same feeling

into simpler words, "I should like one as well as the other, Uncle

Tom, if things went comfortably."

"There's a great deal in that," he said. "I suppose the meaning is,

that you do not get on well with your aunt?"

"I am afraid she is angry with me, Uncle Tom."

"Why do you make her angry, Lucy? When she tells you what is your

duty, why do you not endeavour to do it?"

"I cannot do what she tells me," said Lucy; "and, as I cannot, I

think I ought not to be here."

"Have you anywhere else to go to?" To this she made no reply, but

walked on in silence. "When you say you ought not to be here, what

idea have you formed in your own mind as to the future?"

"That I shall marry Mr. Hamel, some day."

"Do you think it would be well to marry any man without an income

to live upon? Would it be a comfort to him seeing that he had just

enough to maintain himself, and no more?" These were terrible

questions to her,--questions which she could not answer, but yet as

to which her mind entertained an easy answer. A little help from him,

who was willing to indulge her with so many luxuries while she was

under his roof, would enable her to be an assistance rather than a

burden to her lover. But of this she could not utter a word. "Love

is all very well," continued Sir Thomas, in his gruffest voice;

"but love should be regulated by good sense. It is a crime when

two beggars think of marrying each other,--two beggars who are not

prepared to live as beggars do."

"He is not a beggar," said Lucy, indignantly. "He has begged nothing;

nor have I."

"Pshaw!" said Sir Thomas; "I was laying down a general rule. I did

not mean to call anybody a beggar. You shouldn't take me up like

that."

"I beg your pardon, Uncle Tom," she said piteously.

"Very well; very well; that will do." But still he went on walking

with her, and she felt she could not leave him till he gave her some

signal that she was to go. They continued in this way till they

had come nearly round the large garden; when he stopped, as he

was walking, and addressed her again. "I suppose you write to him

sometimes."

"Yes," said Lucy, boldly.

"Write to him at once, and tell him to come and see me in Lombard

Street on Tuesday, at two o'clock. Give me the letter, and I will

take care it is sent to him directly I get to town. Now you had

better go in, for it is getting very cold."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

Tom went up to London intent upon his diamonds. To tell the truth

he had already made the purchase subject to some question of ready

money. He now paid for it after considerable chaffering as to the odd

pounds, which he succeeded in bringing to a successful termination.

Then he carried the necklace away with him, revolving in his mind the

different means of presentation. He thought that a letter might be

best if only he was master of the language in which such a letter

should properly be written. But he entirely doubted his own powers of

composition. He was so modest in this respect that he would not even

make an attempt. He knew himself well enough to be aware that he was

in many respects ignorant. He would have endeavoured to take the

bracelet personally to Ayala had he not been conscious that he could

not recommend his present with such romantic phrases and touches of

poetry as would be gratifying to her fine sense. Were he to find

himself in her presence with the necklace he must depend on himself

for his words; but a letter might be sent in his own handwriting, the

poetry and romance of which might be supplied by another.

Now it had happened that Tom had formed a marvellous friendship in

Rome with Colonel Stubbs. They had been hunting together in the

Campagna, and Tom had been enabled to accommodate the Colonel with

the loan of a horse when his own had been injured. They had since met

in London, and Stubbs had declared to more than one of his friends

that Tom, in spite of his rings and his jewelry, was a very good

fellow at bottom. Tom had been greatly flattered by the intimacy,

and had lately been gratified by an invitation to Aldershot in order

that the military glories of the camp might be shown to him. He

had accepted the invitation, and a day in the present week had been

fixed. Then it occurred to him suddenly that he knew no one so

fitted to write such a letter as that demanded as his friend Colonel

Jonathan Stubbs. He had an idea that the Colonel, in spite of his red

hair and in spite of a certain aptitude for drollery which pervaded

him, had a romantic side to his character; and he felt confident

that, as to the use of language, the Colonel was very great indeed.

He therefore, when he went to Aldershot, carefully put the bracelet

in his breast-pocket and determined to reveal his secret and to ask

for aid.

The day of his arrival was devoted to the ordinary pursuits of

Aldershot and the evening to festivities, which were prolonged too

late into the night to enable him to carry out his purpose before

he went to bed. He arranged to leave on the next morning by a train

between ten and eleven, and was told that three or four men would

come in to breakfast at half-past nine. His project then seemed to be

all but hopeless. But at last with great courage he made an effort.

"Colonel," said he, just as they were going to bed, "I wonder if you

could give me half-an-hour before breakfast. It is a matter of great

importance." Tom, as he said this, assumed a most solemn face.

"An hour if you like, my dear boy. I am generally up soon after six,

and am always out on horseback before breakfast as soon as the light

serves."

"Then if you'll have me called at half-past seven I shall be ever so

much obliged to you."

The next morning at eight the two were closeted together, and Tom

immediately extracted the parcel from his pocket and opened the

diamonds to view. "Upon my word that is a pretty little trinket,"

said the Colonel, taking the necklace in his hand.

"Three hundred guineas!" said Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

"I daresay."

"That is, it would have been three hundred guineas unless I had come

down with the ready. I made the fellow give me twenty per cent. off.

You should always remember this when you are buying jewelry."

"And what is to be done with this pretty thing? I suppose it is

intended for some fair lady's neck."

"Oh, of course."

"And why has it been brought down to Aldershot? There are plenty of

fellows about this place who will get their hands into your pocket if

they know that you have such a trinket as that about you."

"I will tell you why I brought it," said Tom, very gravely. "It is,

as you say, for a young lady. I intend to make that young lady my

wife. Of course this is a secret, you know."

"It shall be sacred as the Pope's toe," said Stubbs.

"Don't joke about it, Colonel, if you please. It's life and death to

me."

"I'll keep your secret and will not joke. Now what can I do for you."

"I must send this as a present with a letter. I must first tell you

that she has,--well, refused me."

"That never means much the first time, old boy."

"She has refused me half-a-dozen times, but I mean to go on with it.

If she refuses me two dozen times I'll try her a third dozen."

"Then you are quite in earnest?"

"I am. It's a kind of thing I know that men laugh about, but I don't

mind telling you that I am downright in love with her. The governor

approves of it."

"She has got money, probably?"

"Not a shilling;--not as much as would buy a pair of gloves. But I

don't love her a bit the less for that. As to income, the governor

will stump up like a brick. Now I want you to write the letter."

"It's a kind of thing a third person can't do," said the Colonel,

when he had considered the request for a moment.

"Why not? Yes, you can."

"Do it yourself, and say just the simplest words as they come up.

They are sure to go further with any girl than what another man may

write. It is impossible that another man should be natural on such a

task as that."

"Natural! I don't know about natural," said Tom, who was anxious now

to explain the character of the lady in question. "I don't know that

a letter that was particularly natural would please her. A touch of

poetry and romance would go further than anything natural."

"Who is the lady?" asked the Colonel, who certainly was by this time

entitled to be so far inquisitive.

"She is my cousin,--Ayala Dormer."

"Who?"

"Ayala Dormer;--my cousin. She was at Rome, but I do not think you

ever saw her there."

"I have seen her since," said the Colonel.

"Have you? I didn't know."

"She was with my aunt, the Marchesa Baldoni."

"Dear me! So she was. I never put the two things together. Don't you

admire her?"

"Certainly I do. My dear fellow, I can't write this letter for you."

Then he put down the pen which he had taken up as though he had

intended to comply with his friend's request. "You may take it as

settled that I cannot write it."

"No?"

"Impossible. One man should never write such a letter for another

man. You had better give the thing in person,--that is, if you mean

to go on with the matter."

"I shall certainly go on with it," said Tom, stoutly.

"After a certain time, you know, reiterated offers do, you

know,--do,--do,--partake of the nature of persecution."

"Reiterated refusals are the sort of persecution I don't like."

"It seems to me that Ayala,--Miss Dormer. I mean,--should be

protected by a sort of feeling,--feeling of--of what I may perhaps

call her dependent position. She is peculiarly,--peculiarly

situated."

"If she married me she would be much better situated. I could give

her everything she wants."

"It isn't an affair of money, Mr. Tringle."

Tom felt, from the use of the word Mister, that he was in some way

giving offence; but felt also that there was no true cause for

offence. "When a man offers everything," he said, "and asks for

nothing, I don't think he should be said to persecute."

"After a time it becomes persecution. I am sure Ayala would feel it

so."

"My cousin can't suppose that I am ill-using her," said Tom, who

disliked the "Ayala" quite as much as he did the "Mister."

"Miss Dormer, I meant. I can have nothing further to say about it. I

can't write the letter, and I should not imagine that Ayala,--Miss

Dormer,--would be moved in the least by any present that could

possibly be made to her. I must go out now, if you don't mind, for

half-an-hour; but I shall be back in time for breakfast."

Then Tom was left alone with the necklace lying on the table before

him. He knew that something was wrong with the Colonel, but could not

in the least guess what it might be. He was quite aware that early

in the interview the Colonel had encouraged him to persevere with

the lady, and had then, suddenly, not only advised him to desist,

but had told him in so many words that he was bound to desist out of

consideration for the lady. And the Colonel had spoken of his cousin

in a manner that was distasteful to him. He could not analyse his

feelings. He did not exactly know why he was displeased, but he was

displeased. The Colonel, when asked for his assistance, was, of

course, bound to talk about the lady,--would be compelled, by the

nature of the confidence, to mention the lady's name;--would even

have been called on to write her Christian name. But this he should

have done with a delicacy;--almost with a blush. Instead of that

Ayala's name had been common on his tongue. Tom felt himself to be

offended, but hardly knew why. And then, why had he been called

Mister Tringle? The breakfast, which was eaten shortly afterwards

in the company of three or four other men, was not eaten in

comfort;--and then Tom hurried back to London and to Lombard Street.

After this failure Tom felt it to be impossible to go to another

friend for assistance. There had been annoyance in describing his

love to Colonel Stubbs, and pain in the treatment he had received.

Even had there been another friend to whom he could have confided the

task, he could not have brought himself to encounter the repetition

of such treatment. He was as firmly fixed as ever in his conviction

that he could not write the letter himself. And, as he thought of the

words with which he should accompany a personal presentation of the

necklace, he reflected that in all probability he might not be able

to force his way into Ayala's presence. Then a happy thought struck

him. Mrs. Dosett was altogether on his side. Everybody was on his

side except Ayala herself, and that pigheaded Colonel. Would it not

be an excellent thing to entrust the necklace to the hands of his

Aunt Dosett, in order that she might give it over to Ayala with all

the eloquence in her power. Satisfied with this project he at once

wrote a note to Mrs. Dosett.

MY DEAR AUNT,

I want to see you on \_most important business\_. If I shall

not be troubling you, I will call upon you to-morrow at

ten o'clock, before I go to my place of business.

Yours affectionately,

T. TRINGLE, Junior.

On the following morning he apparelled himself with all his rings.

He was a good-hearted, well-intentioned young man, with excellent

qualities; but he must have been slow of intellect when he had not

as yet learnt the deleterious effect of all those rings. On this

occasion he put on his rings, his chains, and his bright waistcoat,

and made himself a thing disgusting to be looked at by any

well-trained female. As far as his aunt was concerned he would have

been altogether indifferent as to his appearance, but there was

present to his mind some small hope that he might be allowed to see

Ayala, as the immediate result of the necklace. Should he see Ayala,

then how unfortunate it would be that he should present himself

before the eyes of his mistress without those adornments which he did

not doubt would be grateful to her. He had heard from Ayala's own

lips that all things ought to be pretty. Therefore he endeavoured

to make himself pretty. Of course he failed,--as do all men who

endeavour to make themselves pretty,--but it was out of the question

that he should understand the cause of his failure.

"Aunt Dosett, I want you to do me a very great favour," he began,

with a solemn voice.

"Are you going to a party, Tom," she said.

"A party! No,--who gives a party in London at this time of the day?

Oh, you mean because I have just got a few things on. When I call

anywhere I always do. I have got another lady to see, a lady of rank,

and so I just made a change." But this was a fib.

"What can I do for you, Tom?"

"I want you to look at that." Then he brought out the necklace, and,

taking it out of the case, displayed the gems tastefully upon the

table.

"I do believe they are diamonds," said Mrs. Dosett.

"Yes; they are diamonds. I am not the sort of fellow to get anything

sham. What do you think that little thing cost, Aunt Dosett?"

"I haven't an idea. Sixty pounds, perhaps!"

"Sixty pounds! Do you go into a jeweller's shop and see what you

could do among diamonds with sixty pounds!"

"I never do go into jewellers' shops, Tom."

"Nor I, very often. It's a sort of place where a fellow can drop a

lot of money. But I did go into one after this. It don't look much,

does it?"

"It is very pretty."

"I think it is pretty. Well, Aunt Dosett, the price for that little

trifle was three--hundred--guineas!" As he said this he looked into

his aunt's face for increased admiration.

"You gave three hundred guineas for it!"

"I went with ready money in my hand, when I tempted the man with a

cheque to let me have it for two hundred and fifty pounds. In buying

jewelry you should always do that."

"I never buy jewelry," said Mrs. Dosett, crossly.

"If you should, I mean. Now, I'll tell you what I want you to do.

This is for Ayala."

"For Ayala!"

"Yes, indeed. I am not the fellow to stick at a trifle when I want to

carry my purpose. I bought this the other day and gave ready money

for it,--two hundred and fifty pounds,--on purpose to give it to

Ayala. In naming the value,--of course you'll do that when you give

it her,--you might as well say three hundred guineas. That was the

price on the ticket. I saw it myself,--so there won't be any untruth

you know."

"Am I to give it her?"

"That's just what I want. When I talk to her she flares up, and, as

likely as not, she'd fling the necklace at my head."

"She wouldn't do that, I hope."

"It would depend upon how the thing went. When I do talk to her it

always seems that nothing I say can be right. Now, if you will give

it her you can put in all manner of pretty things."

"This itself will be the prettiest thing," said Mrs. Dosett.

"That's just what I was thinking. Everybody agrees that diamonds will

go further with a girl than anything else. When I told the governor

he quite jumped at the idea."

"Sir Thomas knows you are giving it?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I had to get the rhino from him. I don't go about

with two hundred and fifty pounds always in my own pocket."

"If he had sent the money to Ayala how much better it would have

been," said poor Mrs. Dosett.

"I don't think that at all. Who ever heard of making a present to a

young lady in money. Ayala is romantic, and that would have been the

most unromantic thing out. That would not have done me the least good

in the world. It would simply have gone to buy boots and petticoats

and such like. A girl would never be brought to think of her lover

merely by putting on a pair of boots. When she fastens such a

necklace as this round her throat he ought to have a chance. Don't

you think so, Aunt Dosett?"

"Tom, shall I tell you something?" said the aunt.

"What is it, Aunt Dosett?"

"I don't believe that you have a chance."

"Do you mean that?" he asked, sorrowfully.

"I do."

"You think that the necklace will do no good?"

"Not the least. Of course I will offer it to her if you wish it,

because her uncle and I quite approve of you as a husband for Ayala.

But I am bound to tell you the truth. I do not think the necklace

will do you any good." Then he sat silent for a time, meditating upon

his condition. It might be imprudent;--it might be a wrong done to

his father to jeopardise the necklace. How could it be if Ayala were

to take the necklace and not to take him? "Am I to give it?" she

asked.

"Yes," said he, bravely, but with a sigh; "give it her all the same."

"From you or from Sir Thomas?"

"Oh, from me;--from me. If she were told it came from the governor

she'd keep it whether or no. I am sure I hope she will keep it," he

said, trying to remove the bad impression which his former words

might perhaps have left.

"You may be sure she will not keep it," said Mrs. Dosett, "unless she

should intend to accept your hand. Of that I can hold out no hope to

you. There is a matter, Tom, which I think I should tell you as you

are so straightforward in your offer. Another gentleman has asked her

to marry him."

"She has accepted him!" exclaimed Tom.

"No, she has not accepted him. She has refused him."

"Then I'm just where I was," said Tom.

"She has refused him, but I think that she is in a sort of way

attached to him; and though he too has been refused I imagine that

his chance is better than yours."

"And who the d---- is he?" said Tom, jumping up from his seat in

great excitement.

"Tom!" exclaimed Mrs. Dosett.

"I beg your pardon; but you see this is very important. Who is the

fellow?"

"He is one Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"Who?"

"Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"Impossible! It can't be Colonel Stubbs. I know Colonel Stubbs."

"I can assure you it is true, Tom. I have had a letter from a

lady,--a relative of Colonel Stubbs,--telling me the whole story."

"Colonel Stubbs!" he said. "That passes anything I ever heard. She

has refused him?"

"Yes, she has refused him."

"And has not accepted him since?"

"She certainly has not accepted him yet."

"You may give her the bracelet all the same," said Tom, hurrying out

of the room. That Colonel Stubbs should have made an offer to Ayala,

and yet have accepted his, Tom Tringle's, confidence!

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOM'S DESPAIR.

The reader will understand that the fate of the necklace was very

soon decided. Ayala declared that it was very beautiful. She had,

indeed, a pretty taste for diamonds, and would have been proud enough

to call this necklace her own; but, as she declared to her aunt, she

would not accept Tom though he were made of diamonds from head to

foot. Accept Tom, when she could not even bring herself to think of

becoming the wife of Jonathan Stubbs! If Colonel Stubbs could not be

received by her imagination as an Angel of Light, how immeasurably

distant from anything angelic must be Tom Tringle! "Of course it must

go back," she said, when the question had to be decided as to the

future fate of the necklace. As a consequence poor Mr. Dosett was

compelled to make a special journey into the City, and to deposit a

well-sealed parcel in the hands of Tom Tringle himself. "Your cousin

sends her kind regards," he said, "but cannot bring herself to accept

your magnificent present."

Tom had been very much put about since his visit to the Crescent. Had

his aunt merely told him that his present would be inefficacious,

he would have taken that assurance as being simply her opinion, and

would have still entertained some hopes in the diamonds. But these

tidings as to another lover crushed him altogether. And such a lover!

The very man whom he had asked to write his letter for him! Why

had not Colonel Stubbs told him the truth when thus his own secret

had become revealed by an accident? He understood it all now,--the

"Ayala," and the "Mister," and the reason why the Colonel could not

write the letter. Then he became very angry with the Colonel, whom he

bitterly accused of falsehood and treason. What right had the Colonel

to meddle with his cousin at all? And how false he had been to say

nothing of what he himself had done when his rival had told him

everything! In this way he made up his mind that it was his duty

to hate Colonel Stubbs, and if possible to inflict some personal

punishment upon him. He was reckless of himself now, and, if he could

only get one good blow at the Colonel's head with a thick stick,

would be indifferent as to what the law might do with him afterwards.

Or perhaps he might be able to provoke Colonel Stubbs to fight with

him. He had an idea that duels at present were not in fashion. But

nevertheless, in such a case as this, a man ought to fight. He could

at any rate have the gratification of calling the Colonel a coward if

he should refuse to fight.

He was the more wretched because his spirit within him was cowed

by the idea of the Colonel. He did acknowledge to himself that his

chance could be but bad while such a rival as Colonel Stubbs stood in

his way. He tried to argue with himself that it was not so. As far as

he knew, Colonel Stubbs was and would remain a very much less rich

man than himself. He doubted very much whether Colonel Stubbs could

keep a carriage in London for his wife, while it had been already

arranged that he was to be allowed to do so should he succeed in

marrying Ayala. To be a partner in the house of Travers and Treason

was a much greater thing than to be a Colonel. But, though he assured

himself of all this again and again, still he was cowed. There was

something about the Colonel which did more than redeem his red

hair and ugly mouth. And of this something poor Tom was sensible.

Nevertheless, if occasion should arise he thought that he could

"punch the Colonel's head";--not without evil consequence to

himself;--but still that he could "punch the Colonel's head," not

minding the consequences.

Such had been his condition of mind when he left the Crescent, and it

was not improved by the receipt of the parcel. He hardly said a word

when his uncle put it into his hands, merely muttering something and

consigning the diamonds to his desk. He did not tell himself that

Ayala must now be abandoned. It would have been better for him if he

could have done so. But all real, springing, hopeful hope departed

from his bosom. This came from the Colonel, rather than from the

rejected necklace.

"Did you send that jewelry?" his father asked him some days

afterwards.

"Yes; I sent it."

"And what has now become of it?"

"It is in my desk there."

"Did she send it back again?"

"It came back. My Uncle Dosett brought it. I do not want to say

anything more about it, if you please."

"I am sorry for that, Tom;--very sorry. As you had set your heart

upon it I wish it could have been as you would have it. But the

necklace should not be left there." Tom shook his head in despair.

"You had better let me have the necklace. It is not that I should

grudge it to you, Tom, if it could do you any good."

"You shall have it, Sir."

"It will be better so. That was the understanding." Then the necklace

was transferred to some receptacle belonging to Sir Thomas himself,

the lock of which might probably be more secure than that of Tom's

desk, and there it remained in its case, still folded in the various

papers in which Mrs. Dosett had encased it.

Then Tom found it necessary to adopt some other mode of life for his

own consolation and support. He had told his father on one occasion

that he had devoted himself for a fortnight to champagne and the

theatres. But this had been taken as a joke. He had been fairly

punctual at his place of business and had shown no symptoms of fast

living. But now it occurred to him that fast living would be the only

thing for him. He had been quite willing to apply himself to marriage

and a steady life; but fortune had not favoured him. If he drank

too much now, and lay in bed, and became idle, it was not his fault.

There came into his head an idea that Ayala and Colonel Stubbs

between them must look to that. Could he meet Ayala he would explain

to her how his character as a moral man had been altogether destroyed

by her conduct;--and should he meet Colonel Stubbs he would explain

something to him also.

A new club had been established in London lately called the

Mountaineers, which had secured for itself handsome lodgings in

Piccadilly, and considered itself to be, among clubs, rather a

comfortable institution than otherwise. It did not as yet affect

much fashion, having hitherto secured among its members only two

lords,--and they were lords by courtesy. But it was a pleasant,

jovial place, in which the delights of young men were not impeded

by the austerity of their elders. Its name would be excused only on

the plea that all other names available for a club had already been

appropriated in the metropolis. There was certainly nothing in the

club peculiarly applicable to mountains. But then there are other

clubs in London with names which might be open to similar criticism.

It was the case that many young men engaged in the City had been

enrolled among its members, and it was from this cause, no doubt,

that Tom Tringle was regarded as being a leading light among the

Mountaineers. It was here that the champagne had been drunk to which

Tom had alluded when talking of his love to his father. Now, in his

despair, it seemed good to him to pass a considerable portion of his

time among the Mountaineers.

"You'll dine here, Faddle?" he said one evening to a special friend

of his, a gentleman also from the City, with whom he had been dining

a good deal during the last week.

"I suppose I shall," said Faddle, "but ain't we coming it a little

strong? They want to know at the Gardens what the deuce it is I'm

about." The Gardens was a new row of houses, latterly christened

Badminton Gardens, in which resided the father and mother of Faddle.

"I've given up all that kind of thing," said Tom.

"Your people are not in London."

"It will make no difference when they do come up. I call an evening

in the bosom of one's family about the slowest thing there is. The

bosom must do without me for the future."

"Won't your governor cut up rough?"

"He must cut up as he pleases. But I rather fancy he knows all about

it. I shan't spend half as much money this way as if I had a house

and wife and family,--and what we may call a bosom of one's own."

Then they had dinner and went to the theatre, and played billiards,

and had supper, and spent the night in a manner very delightful, no

doubt, to themselves, but of which their elder friends could hardly

have approved.

There was a good deal of this following upon the episode of the

necklace, and it must be told with regret that our young hero fell

into certain exploits which were by no means creditable to him. More

than one good-humoured policeman had helped him home to his lodgings;

but alas, on Christmas Eve, he fell into the hands of some guardian

of the peace who was not quite sufficiently good-natured, and Tom

passed the night and the greater part of the following morning,

recumbent, he in one cell, and his friend Faddle in the next, with an

intimation that they would certainly be taken before a magistrate on

the day after Christmas Day.

Oh, Ayala! Ayala! It must be acknowledged that you were in a measure

responsible;--and not only for the lamentable condition of your

lover, but also of that of his friend. For, in his softer moments,

Tom had told every thing to Faddle, and Faddle had declared that

he would be true to the death to a friend suffering such unmerited

misfortune. Perhaps the fidelity of Faddle may have owed something

to the fact that Tom's pecuniary allowances were more generous than

those accorded to himself. To Ayala must be attributed the occurrence

of these misfortunes. But Tom in his more fiery moments,--those

moments which would come between the subsidence of actual sobriety

and the commencement of intoxication,--attributed all his misfortunes

to the Colonel. "Faddle," he would say in these moments, "of course

I know that I'm a ruined man. Of course I'm aware that all this is

only a prelude to some ignominious end. I have not sunk to this

kind of thing without feeling it." "You'll be right enough some day,

old fellow," Faddle would reply. "I shall live to be godfather to

the first boy." "Never, Faddle!" Tom replied. "All those hopes have

vanished. You'll never live to see any child of mine. And I know well

where to look for my enemy. Stubbs indeed! I'll Stubbs him. If I can

only live to be revenged on that traitor then I shall die contented.

Though he shot me through the heart, I should die contented."

This had happened a little before that unfortunate Christmas Eve. Up

to this time Sir Thomas, though he had known well that his son had

not been living as he should do, had been mild in his remonstrances,

and had said nothing at Merle Park to frighten Lady Tringle. But the

affair of Christmas Eve came to his ears with all its horrors. A

policeman whom Tom had struck with his fist in the pit of the stomach

had not been civil enough to accept this mark of familiarity with

good humour. He had been much inconvenienced by the blow, and had

insisted upon giving testimony to this effect before the magistrate.

There had been half-an-hour, he said, in which he had hung dubious

between this world and the next, so great had been the violence of

the blow, and so deadly its direction! The magistrate was one of

those just men who find a pleasure and a duty in protecting the

police of the metropolis. It was no case, he declared, for a fine.

What would be a fine to such a one as Thomas Tringle, junior! And

Tom,--Tom Tringle, the only son of Sir Thomas Tringle, the senior

partner in the great house of Travers and Treason,--was ignominiously

locked up for a week. Faddle, who had not struck the blow, was

allowed to depart with a fine and a warning. Oh, Ayala, Ayala, this

was thy doing!

When the sentence was known Sir Thomas used all his influence to

extricate his unfortunate son, but in vain. Tom went through his

penalty, and, having no help from champagne, doubtless had a bad time

of it. Ayala, Stubbs, the policeman, and the magistrate, seemed to

have conspired to destroy him. But the week at last dragged itself

out, and then Tom found himself confronted with his father in the

back-parlour of the house in Queen's Gate. "Tom," he said, "this is

very bad!"

"It is bad, Sir," said Tom.

"You have disgraced me, and your mother, and yourself. You have

disgraced Travers and Treason!" Poor Tom shook his head. "It will be

necessary, I fear, that you should leave the house altogether." Tom

stood silent without a word. "A young man who has been locked up in

prison for a week for maltreating a policeman can hardly expect to be

entrusted with such concerns as those of Travers and Treason. I and

your poor mother cannot get rid of you and the disgrace which you

have entailed upon us. Travers and Treason can easily get rid of

you." Tom knew very well that his father was, in fact, Travers and

Treason, but he did not yet feel that an opportunity had come in

which he could wisely speak a word. "What have you got to say for

yourself, Sir?" demanded Sir Thomas.

"Of course, I'm very sorry," muttered Tom.

"Sorry, Tom! A young man holding your position in Travers and Treason

ought not to have to be sorry for having been locked up in prison for

a week for maltreating a policeman! What do you think must be done,

yourself?"

"The man had been hauling me about in the street."

"You were drunk, no doubt."

"I had been drinking. I am not going to tell a lie about it. But he

needn't have done as he did. Faddle knows that, and can tell you."

"What can have driven you to associate with such a young man as

Faddle? That is the worst part of it. Do you know what Faddle and

Company are,--stock jobbers, who ten years ago hadn't a thousand

pounds in the way of capital among them! They've been connected with

a dozen companies, none of which are floating now, and have made

money out of them all! Do you think that Travers and Treason will

accept a young man as a partner who associates with such people as

that?"

"I have seen old Faddle's name and yours on the same prospectus

together, Sir."

"What has that to do with it? You never saw him inside our counter.

What a name to appear along with yours in such an affair as this! If

it hadn't been for that, you might have got over it. Young men will

be young men. Faddle! I think you will have to go abroad for a time,

till it has been forgotten."

"I should like to stay, just at present, Sir," said Tom.

"What good can you do?"

"All the same, I should like to stay, Sir."

"I was thinking that, if you were to take a tour through the United

States, go across to San Francisco, then up to Japan, and from thence

through some of the Chinese cities down to Calcutta and Bombay,

you might come back by the Euphrates Valley to Constantinople, see

something of Bulgaria and those countries, and so home by Vienna and

Paris. The Euphrates Valley Railway will be finished by that time,

perhaps, and Bulgaria will be as settled as Hertfordshire. You'd see

something of the world, and I could let it be understood that you

were travelling on behalf of Travers and Treason. By the time that

you were back, people in the City would have forgotten the policeman,

and if you could manage to write home three or four letters about our

trade with Japan and China, they would be willing to forget Faddle."

"But, Sir--"

"Shouldn't you like a tour of that kind?"

"Very much indeed, Sir;--only--"

"Only what, Tom?"

"Ayala!" said Tom, hardly able to suppress a sob as he uttered the

fatal name.

"Tom, don't be a fool. You can't make a young woman have you if she

doesn't choose. I have done all that I could for you, because I saw

that you'd set your heart upon it. I went to her myself, and then I

gave two hundred and fifty pounds for that bauble. I am told I shall

have to lose a third of the sum in getting rid of it."

"Ricolay told me that he'd take it back at two hundred and twenty,"

said Tom, whose mind, prostrate as it was, was still alive to

consideration of profit and loss.

"Never mind that for the present," said Sir Thomas. "Don't you

remember the old song?--'If she will, she will, you may depend on't.

And if she won't she won't; and there's an end on't.' You ought to be

a man and pluck up your spirits. Are you going to allow a little girl

to knock you about in that way?" Tom only shook his head, and looked

as if he was very ill. In truth, the champagne, and the imprisonment,

and Ayala together, had altogether altered his appearance. "We've

done what we could about it, and now it is time to give it over. Let

me hear you say that you will give it over." Tom stood speechless

before his father. "Speak the word, and the thing will be done,"

continued Sir Thomas, endeavouring to encourage the young man.

"I can't," said Tom, sighing.

"Nonsense!"

"I have tried, and I can't."

"Tom, do you mean to say that you are going to lose everything

because a chit of a girl like that turns up her nose at you?"

"It's no use my going while things are like this," said Tom. "If I

were to get to New York, I should come back by the next ship. As for

letters about business, I couldn't settle my mind to anything of the

kind."

"Then you're not the man I took you to be," said the father.

"I could be man enough," said Tom, clenching his fist, "if I could

get hold of Colonel Stubbs."

"Colonel who?"

"Stubbs! Jonathan Stubbs! I know what I'm talking about. I'm not

going to America, nor China, nor anything else, till I've polished

him off. It's all very well your abusing me, but you don't know what

it is I have suffered. As for being called a man I don't care about

it. What I should like best would be to get Ayala on one side and

Stubbs on the other, and then all three to go off the Duke of York's

Column together. It's no good talking about Travers and Treason. I

don't care for Travers and Treason as I am now. If you'll get Ayala

to say that she'll have me, I'll go to the shop every morning at

eight and stay till nine; and as for the Mountaineers it may all go

to the d---- for me." Then he rushed out of the room, banging the

door after him.

Sir Thomas, when he was thus left, stood for awhile with his hands

in his trousers' pockets, contemplating the condition of his son. It

was wonderful to him that a boy of his should be afflicted in this

manner. When he had been struck by the juvenile beauties of Emmeline

Dosett he had at once asked the young lady to share his fortunes with

him, and the young lady had speedily acceded to his request. Then he

had been married, and that was all he had ever known of the troubles

of love. He could not but think, looking back at it as he did now

from a distance, that had Emmeline been hard-hearted he would have

endured the repulse and have passed on speedily to some other

charmer. But Tom had been wounded after a fashion which seemed

to him to have been very uncommon. It might be possible that he

should recover in time, but while undergoing recovery he would be

ruined;--so great were the young man's sufferings! Now Sir Thomas,

though he had spoken to Tom with all the severity which he had been

able to assume, though he had abused Faddle, and had vindicated the

injured dignity of Travers and Treason with all his eloquence; though

he had told Tom it was unmanly to give way to his love, yet, of

living creatures, Tom was at this moment the dearest to his heart. He

had never for an instant entertained the idea of expelling Tom from

Travers and Treason because of the policeman, or because of Faddle.

What should he do for the poor boy now? Was there any argument, any

means of persuasion, by which he could induce that foolish little

girl to accept all the good things which he was ready to do for her?

Could he try yet once again himself, with any chance of success?

Thinking of all this, he stood there for an hour alone with his hands

in his trousers' pockets.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ISADORE HAMEL IN LOMBARD STREET.

In following the results of Tom's presentation of the necklace we

have got beyond the period which our story is presumed to have

reached. Tom was in durance during the Christmas week, but we must go

back to the promise which had been made by her uncle, Sir Thomas, to

Lucy about six weeks before that time. The promise had extended only

to an undertaking on the part of Sir Thomas to see Isadore Hamel if

he would call at the house in Lombard Street at a certain hour on a

certain day. Lucy was overwhelmed with gratitude when the promise was

made. A few moments previously she had been indignant because her

uncle had appeared to speak of her and her lover as two beggars,--but

Sir Thomas had explained and in some sort apologised, and then had

come the promise which to Lucy seemed to contain an assurance of

effectual aid. Sir Thomas would not have asked to see the lover had

he intended to be hostile to the lover. Something would be done to

solve the difficulty which had seemed to Lucy to be so grave. She

would not any longer be made to think that she should give up either

her lover or her home under her uncle's roof. This had been terribly

distressing to her because she had been well aware that on leaving

her uncle's house she could be taken in only by her lover, to whom an

immediate marriage would be ruinous. And yet she could not undertake

to give up her lover. Therefore her uncle's promise had made her very

happy, and she forgave the ungenerous allusion to the two beggars.

The letter was written to Isadore in high spirits. "I do not know

what Uncle Tom intends, but he means to be kind. Of course you must

go to him, and if I were you I would tell him everything about

everything. He is not strict and hard like Aunt Emmeline. She means

to be good too, but she is sometimes so very hard. I am happier

now because I think something will be done to relieve you from the

terrible weight which I am to you. I sometimes wish that you had

never come to me in Kensington Gardens, because I have become such a

burden to you."

There was much more in which Lucy no doubt went on to declare that,

burden as she was, she intended to be persistent. Hamel, when he

received this letter, was resolved to keep the appointment made for

him, but his hopes were not very high. He had been angry with Lady

Tringle,--in the first place, because of her treatment of himself at

Glenbogie, and then much more strongly, because she had been cruel

to Lucy. Nor did he conceive himself to be under any strong debt

of gratitude to Sir Thomas, though he had been invited to lunch.

He was aware that the Tringles had despised him, and he repaid

the compliment with all his heart by despising the Tringles. They

were to him samples of the sort of people which he thought to be of

all the most despicable. They were not only vulgar and rich, but

purse-proud and conceited as well. To his thinking there was nothing

of which such people were entitled to be proud. Of course they

make money,--money out of money, an employment which he regarded

as vile,--creating nothing either useful or beautiful. To create

something useful was, to his thinking, very good. To create something

beautiful was almost divine. To manipulate millions till they should

breed other millions was the meanest occupation for a life's energy.

It was thus, I fear, that Mr. Hamel looked at the business carried on

in Lombard Street, being as yet very young in the world and seeing

many things with distorted eyes.

He was aware that some plan would be proposed to him which might

probably accelerate his marriage, but was aware also that he would be

very unwilling to take advice from Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas, no doubt,

would be coarse and rough, and might perhaps offer him pecuniary

assistance in a manner which would make it impossible for him to

accept it. He had told himself a score of times that, poor as he was,

he did not want any of the Tringle money. His father's arbitrary

conduct towards him had caused him great misery. He had been brought

up in luxury, and had felt it hard enough to be deprived of his

father's means because he would not abandon the mode of life that

was congenial to him. But having been thus, as it were, cast off

by his father, he had resolved that it behoved him to depend only

on himself. In the matter of his love he was specially prone to be

indignant and independent. No one had a right to dictate to him,

and he would follow the dictation of none. To Lucy alone did he

acknowledge any debt, and to her he owed everything. But even for

her sake he could not condescend to accept Sir Thomas's money, and

with his money his advice. Lucy had begged him in her letter to tell

everything to her uncle. He would tell Sir Thomas everything as to

his income, his prospects, and his intentions, because Sir Thomas as

Lucy's uncle would be entitled to such information. But he thought it

very improbable that he should accept any counsel from Sir Thomas.

Such being the condition of Hamel's mind it was to be feared that but

little good would come from his visit to Lombard Street. Lucy had

simply thought that her uncle, out of his enormous stores, would

provide an adequate income. Hamel thought that Sir Thomas, out of his

enormous impudence, would desire to dictate everything. Sir Thomas

was, in truth, anxious to be good-natured, and to do a kindness to

his niece; but was not willing to give his money without being sure

that he was putting it into good hands.

"Oh, you're Hamel," said a young man to him, speaking to him across

the counter in the Lombard Street office. This was Tom, who, as the

reader will remember, had not yet got into his trouble on account of

the policeman.

Tom and Hamel had never met but once before, for a few moments in the

Coliseum at Rome, and the artist, not remembering him, did not know

by whom he was accosted in this familiar manner. "That is my name,

Sir," said Hamel. "Here is my card. Perhaps you will do me the

kindness to take it to Sir Thomas Tringle."

"All right, old fellow; I know all about it. He has got Puxley with

him from the Bank of England just at this moment. Come through into

this room. He'll soon have polished off old Puxley." Tom was no more

to Hamel than any other clerk, and he felt himself to be aggrieved;

but he followed Tom into the room as he was told, and then prepared

to wait in patience for the convenience of the great man. "So you and

Lucy are going to make a match of it," said Tom.

This was terrible to Hamel. Could it be possible that all the clerks

in Lombard Street talked of his Lucy in this way, because she was the

niece of their senior partner? Were all the clerks, as a matter of

course, instructed in the most private affairs of the Tringle family?

"I am here in obedience to directions from Sir Thomas," said Hamel,

ignoring altogether the impudent allusion which the young man had

made.

"Of course you are. Perhaps you don't know who I am?"

"Not in the least," said Hamel.

"I am Thomas Tringle, junior," said Tom, with a little accession of

dignity.

"I beg your pardon; I did not know," said Hamel.

"You and I ought to be thick," rejoined Tom, "because I'm going in

for Ayala. Perhaps you've heard that before?"

Hamel had heard it and was well aware that Tom was to Ayala an

intolerable burden, like the old man of the sea. He had heard of Tom

as poor Ayala's pet aversion,--as a lover not to be shaken off though

he had been refused a score of times. Ayala was to the sculptor only

second in sacredness to Lucy. And now he was told by Tom himself that

he was--"going in for Ayala." The expression was so distressing to

his feelings that he shuddered when he heard it. Was it possible that

any one should say of him that he was "going in" for Lucy? At that

moment Sir Thomas opened the door, and grasping Hamel by the hand led

him away into his own sanctum.

"And now, Mr. Hamel," said Sir Thomas, in his cheeriest voice, "how

are you?" Hamel declared that he was very well, and expressed a hope

that Sir Thomas was the same. "I am not so young as I was, Mr. Hamel.

My years are heavier and so is my work. That's the worst of it. When

one is young and strong one very often hasn't enough to do. I daresay

you find it so sometimes."

"In our profession," said Hamel, "we go on working, though very often

we do not sell what we do."

"That's bad," said Sir Thomas.

"It is the case always with an artist before he has made a name for

himself. It is the case with many up to the last day of a life of

labour. An artist has to look for that, Sir Thomas."

"Dear me! That seems very sad. You are a sculptor, I believe?"

"Yes, Sir Thomas."

"And the things you make must take a deal of room and be very heavy."

At this Mr. Hamel only smiled. "Don't you think if you were to call

an auction you'd get something for them?" At this suggestion the

sculptor frowned but condescended to make no reply. Sir Thomas went

on with his suggestion. "If you and half-a-dozen other beginners made

a sort of gallery among you, people would buy them as they do those

things in the Marylebone Road and stick them up somewhere about their

grounds. It would be better than keeping them and getting nothing."

Hamel had in his studio at home an allegorical figure of Italia

United, and another of a Prostrate Roman Catholic Church, which

in his mind's eye he saw for a moment stuck here or there about

the gardens of some such place as Glenbogie! Into them had been

infused all the poetry of his nature and all the conviction of his

intelligence. He had never dreamed of selling them. He had never

dared to think that any lover of Art would encourage him to put into

marble those conceptions of his genius which now adorned his studio,

standing there in plaster of Paris. But to him they were so valuable,

they contained so much of his thoughts, so many of his aspirations,

that even had the marble counterparts been ordered and paid for

nothing would have induced him to part with the originals. Now he was

advised to sell them by auction in order that he might rival those

grotesque tradesmen whose business it is to populate the gardens of

wealthy but tasteless Britons! It was thus that the idea represented

itself to him. He simply smiled; but Sir Thomas did not fail to

appreciate the smile.

"And now about this young lady?" said Sir Thomas, not altogether in

so good a humour as he had been when he began his suggestion. "It's a

bad look out for her when, as you say, you cannot sell your work when

you've done it."

"I think you do not quite understand the matter, Sir Thomas."

"Perhaps not. It certainly does seem unintelligible that a man should

lumber himself up with a lot of things which he cannot sell. A

tradesman would know that he must get into the bankruptcy court if

he were to go on like that. And what is sauce for the goose will

be sauce for the gander also." Mr. Hamel again smiled but held his

tongue. "If you can't sell your wares how can you keep a wife?"

"My wares, as you call them, are of two kinds. One, though no doubt

made for sale, is hardly saleable. The other is done to order. Such

income as I make comes from the latter."

"Heads," suggested Sir Thomas.

"Busts they are generally called."

"Well, busts. I call them heads. They are heads. A bust, I take it,

is--well, never mind." Sir Thomas found a difficulty in defining his

idea of a bust. "A man wants to have something more or less like some

one to put up in a church and then he pays you."

"Or perhaps in his library. But he can put it where he likes when he

has bought it."

"Just so. But there ain't many of those come in your way, if I

understand right."

"Not as many as I would wish."

"What can you net at the end of the year? That's the question."

Lucy had recommended him to tell Sir Thomas everything; and he had

come there determined to tell at any rate everything referring to

money. He had not the slightest desire to keep the amount of his

income from Sir Thomas. But the questions were put to him in so

distasteful a way that he could not bring himself to be confidential.

"It varies with various circumstances, but it is very small."

"Very small? Five hundred a year?" This was ill-natured, because Sir

Thomas knew that Mr. Hamel did not earn five hundred a year. But he

was becoming acerbated by the young man's manner.

"Oh dear, no," said Hamel.

"Four hundred?"

"Nor four hundred,--nor three. I have never netted three hundred in

one year after paying the incidental expenses."

"That seems to me to be uncommonly little for a young man who is

thinking of marrying. Don't you think you had better give it up?"

"I certainly think nothing of the kind."

"Does your father do anything for you?"

"Nothing at all."

"He also makes heads?"

"Heads,--and other things."

"And sells them when he has made them."

"Yes, Sir Thomas; he sells them. He had a hard time once, but now he

is run after. He refuses more orders than he can accept."

"And he won't do anything for you."

"Nothing. He has quarreled with me."

"That is very bad. Well now, Mr. Hamel, would you mind telling me

what your ideas are?" Sir Thomas, when he asked the question, still

intended to give assistance, was still minded that the young people

should by his assistance be enabled to marry. But he was strongly of

opinion that it was his duty, as a rich and protecting uncle, to say

something about imprudence, and to magnify difficulties. It certainly

would be wrong for an uncle, merely because he was rich, to give

away his money to dependent relatives without any reference to those

hard principles which a possessor of money always feels it to be his

business to inculcate. And up to this point Hamel had done nothing

to ingratiate himself. Sir Thomas was beginning to think that the

sculptor was an impudent prig, and to declare to himself that, should

the marriage ever take place, the young couple would not be made

welcome at Glenbogie or Merle Park. But still he intended to go on

with his purpose, for Lucy's sake. Therefore he asked the sculptor as

to his ideas generally.

"My idea is that I shall marry Miss Dormer, and support her on the

earnings of my profession. My idea is that I shall do so before long,

in comfort. My idea also is, that she will be the last to complain

of any discomfort which may arise from my straitened circumstances

at present. My idea is that I am preparing for myself a happy

and independent life. My idea also is,--and I assure you that of

all my ideas this is the one to which I cling with the fondest

assurance,--that I will do my very best to make her life happy when

she comes to grace my home."

There was a manliness in this which would have touched Sir Thomas

had he been in a better humour, but, as it was, he had been so much

irritated by the young man's manner, that he could not bring himself

to be just. "Am I to understand that you intend to marry on something

under three hundred a year?"

Hamel paused a moment before he made his reply. "How am I to answer

such a question," he said, at last, "seeing that Miss Dormer is in

your hands, and that you are unlikely to be influenced by anything

that I may say?"

"I shall be very much influenced," said Sir Thomas.

"Were her father still alive, I think we should have put our heads

together, and between us decided on what might have been best for

Lucy's happiness."

"Do you think that I'm indifferent to her happiness?" demanded Sir

Thomas.

"I should have suggested to him," continued Hamel, not noticing the

last question, "that she should remain in her own home till I could

make one for her worthy of her acceptance. And then we should have

arranged among us what would have been best for her happiness. I

cannot do this with you. If you tell her to-morrow that she must give

up either your protection or her engagement with me, then she must

come to me, and make the best of all the little that I can do for

her."

"Who says that I'm going to turn her out?" said Sir Thomas, rising

angrily from his chair.

"I do not think that any one has said this of you."

"Then why do you throw it in my teeth?"

"Because your wife has threatened it."

Then Sir Thomas boiled over in his anger. "No one has threatened it.

It is untrue. You are guilty both of impertinence and untruth in

saying so." Here Hamel rose from his chair, and took up his hat.

"Stop, young man, and hear what I have to say to you. I have done

nothing but good to my niece."

"Nevertheless, it is true, Sir Thomas, that she has been told by your

wife that she must either abandon me or the protection of your roof.

I find no fault with Lady Tringle for saying so. It may have been the

natural expression of a judicious opinion. But when you ask after my

intentions in reference to your niece I am bound to tell you that I

propose to subject her to the undoubted inconveniences of my poor

home, simply because I find her to be threatened with the loss of

another."

"She has not been threatened, Sir."

"You had better ask your wife, Sir Thomas. And, if you find that what

I have said is true, I think you will own that I have been obliged to

explain myself as I have done. As you have told me to my face that

I have been guilty of untruth, I shall now leave you." With this he

walked out of the room, and the words which Sir Thomas threw after

him had no effect in recalling him.

It must be acknowledged that Hamel had been very foolish in referring

to Aunt Emmeline's threat. Who does not know that words are

constantly used which are intended to have no real effect? Who does

not know that an angry woman will often talk after this fashion?

But it was certainly the fact that Aunt Emmeline had more than once

declared to Lucy that she could not be allowed to remain one of

that family unless she would give up her lover. Lucy, in her loyal

endeavours to explain to her lover her own position, had told him of

the threat, and he, from that moment, had held himself prepared to

find a home for his future wife should that threat be carried into

execution. Sir Thomas was well aware that such words had been spoken,

but he knew his wife, and knew how little such words signified. His

wife, without his consent, would not have the power to turn a dog

from Merle Park. The threat had simply been an argument intended to

dissuade Lucy from her choice; and now it had been thrown in his

teeth just when he had intended to make provision for this girl, who

was not, in truth, related to him, in order that he might ratify her

choice! He was very angry with the young prig who had thus rushed out

of his presence. He was angry, too, with his wife, who had brought

him into his difficulty by her foolish threat. But he was angry,

also, with himself, knowing that he had been wrong to accuse the man

of a falsehood.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I NEVER THREATENED TO TURN YOU OUT."

Then there were written the following letters, which were sent and

received before Sir Thomas went to Merle Park, and therefore, also,

before he again saw Lucy.

DEAREST, DEAREST LOVE,

I have been, as desired, to Lombard Street, but I fear

that my embassy has not led to any good. I know myself

to be about as bad an ambassador as any one can send. An

ambassador should be soft and gentle,--willing to make

the best of everything, and never prone to take offence,

nor should he be addicted specially to independence. I

am ungentle, and apt to be suspicious,--especially if

anything be said derogatory to my art. I am proud of being

an artist, but I am often ashamed of myself because I

exhibit my pride. I may say the same of my spirit of

independence. I am determined to be independent if I

live,--but I find my independence sometimes kicking up its

heels, till I hate it myself.

From this you will perceive that I have not had a success

in Lombard Street. I was quite willing to answer your

uncle any questions he could ask about money. Indeed,

I had no secret from him on any subject. But when he

subjected me to cross-examination, forcing me into a

bathos of poverty, as he thought, I broke down. "Not five

hundred a-year!" "Not four!!" "Not three!!!" "Oh, heavens!

and you propose to take a wife!" You will understand how I

writhed and wriggled under the scorn.

And then there came something worse than this,--or rather,

if I remember rightly, the worst thing came first. You

were over in my studio, and will remember, perhaps,

some of my own abortive treasures, those melancholy but

soul-inspiring creations of which I have thought so much,

and others have thought so little? That no one else should

value them is natural, but to me it seems unnatural,

almost cruel, that any one should tell me to my face that

they were valueless. Your uncle, of course, had never seen

them, but he knew that sculptors are generally burdened

with these "wares," as he called them; and he suggested

that I should sell them by auction for what they might

fetch,--in order that the corners which they occupy might

be vacant. He thought that, perhaps, they might do for

country gentlemen to stick about among their shrubs.

You, knowing my foolish soreness on the subject, will

understand how well I must have been prepared by this to

endure your uncle's cross-examination.

Then he asked me as to my ideas,--not art ideas, but ideas

as to bread and cheese for the future. I told him as

exactly as I could. I explained to him that if you were

left in possession of a comfortable home, such as would

have been that of your father, I should think it best for

your sake to delay our marriage till I should be prepared

to do something better for you than I can at present;

but that I hold myself ready to give you all that I have

to give at a moment's notice, should you be required to

leave his house. And, Lucy, speaking in your name, I said

something further, and declared my belief that you, for

my sake, would bear the inconveniences of so poor a home

without complaining.

Then there arose anger both on his side and on mine; and I

must say, insult on his. He told me that I had no business

to suggest that you would be expelled from his house. I

replied that the threat had come, if not from him, then

from Lady Tringle. Upon this he accused me of positive

falsehood, asserting that your aunt had said nothing of

the kind. I then referred him to Lady Tringle herself, but

refused to stay any longer in the room with him, because

he had insulted me.

So you will see that I did less than nothing by my

embassy. I told myself that it would be so as I descended

into the underground cavern at the Gloucester Road

Station. You are not to suppose that I blame him more, or,

indeed, so much as I do myself. It was not to be expected

that he should behave as a gentleman of fine feeling. But,

perhaps, it ought to have been expected that I should

behave as a man of common sense. I ought to have taken

his advice about the auction, apparently, in good part.

I ought not to have writhed when he scorned my poor

earnings. When he asked as to my ideas, I should not have

alluded to your aunt's threat as to turning you out. I

should have been placid and humble; and then his want of

generous feeling would have mattered nothing. But spilt

milk and broken eggs are past saving. Whatever good things

may have come from your uncle's generosity had I brushed

his hair for him aright, are now clean gone, seeing that I

scrubbed him altogether the wrong way.

For myself, I do not know that I should regret it very

much. I have an idea that no money should be sweet to a

man except that which he earns. And I have enough belief

in myself to be confident that sooner or later I shall

earn a sufficiency. But, dearest, I own that I feel

disgusted with myself when I think that I have diminished

your present comfort, or perhaps lessened for the future

resources which would have been yours rather than mine.

But the milk has been spilt, and now we must only think

what we can best do without it. It seems to me that only

two homes are possible for you,--one with Sir Thomas

as his niece, and the other with me as my wife. I am

conceited enough to think that you will prefer the latter

even with many inconveniences. Neither can your uncle

or your aunt prevent you from marrying at a very early

day, should you choose to do so. There would be some

preliminary ceremony, of the nature of which I am

thoroughly ignorant, but which could, I suppose, be

achieved in a month. I would advise you to ask your aunt

boldly whether she wishes you to go or to stay with her,

explaining, of course, that you intend to hold to your

engagement, and explaining at the same time that you are

quite ready to be married at once if she is anxious to be

quit of you. That is my advice.

And now, dear, one word of something softer! For did any

lover ever write to the lady of his heart so long a letter

so abominably stuffed with matters of business? How shall

I best tell you how dearly I love you? Perhaps I may do it

by showing you that as far as I myself am concerned I long

to hear that your Aunt Emmeline and your Uncle Tom are

more hard-hearted and obdurate than were ever uncle and

aunt before them. I long to hear that you have been turned

out into the cold, because I know that then you must come

to me, though it be even less than three hundred a-year.

I wish you could have seen your uncle's face as those

terribly mean figures reached his ears. I do not for a

moment fear that we should want. Orders come slow enough,

but they come a little quicker than they did. I have never

for a moment doubted my own ultimate success, and if

you were with me I should be more confident than ever.

Nevertheless, should your aunt bid you to stay, and should

you think it right to comply with her desire, I will not

complain.

Adieu! This comes from one who is altogether happy in his

confidence that at any rate before long you will have

become his wife.

ISADORE HAMEL.

I quite expect to be scolded for my awkwardness. Indeed I

shall be disappointed if I am not.

The same post which brought Hamel's long letter to Lucy brought also

a short but very angry scrawl from Sir Thomas to his wife. No eyes

but those of Lady Tringle saw this epistle, and no other eyes shall

see it. But the few words which it contained were full of marital

wrath. Why had she threatened to turn her own niece out of his doors?

Why had she subjected him to the necessity of defending her by a

false assertion? Those Dormer nieces of hers were giving him an

amount of trouble and annoyance which he certainly had not deserved.

Lucy, though not a word was said to her of this angry letter, was

conscious that something had been added to her aunt's acerbity.

Indeed, for the last day or two her aunt's acerbity towards her

had been much diminished. Lady Tringle had known that her husband

intended to do something by which the Hamel marriage would be

rendered possible; and she, though she altogether disapproved of

the Hamel marriage, would be obliged to accede to it if Sir Thomas

acceded to it and encouraged it by his money. Let them be married,

and then, as far as the Tringles were concerned, let there be an end

of these Dormer troubles for ever. To that idea Lady Tringle had

reconciled herself as soon as Sir Thomas had declared his purpose,

but now,--as she declared to herself,--"all the fat was again in the

fire." She received Lucy's salutations on that morning with a very

bad grace.

But she had been desired to give no message, and therefore she was

silent on the subject to Lucy. To the Honourable Mrs. Traffick she

said a few words. "After all Ayala was not half as bad as Lucy," said

Lady Tringle.

"There, mamma, I think you are wrong," said the Honourable Mrs.

Traffick. "Of all the upsetting things I ever knew Ayala was the

worst. Think of her conduct with Septimus." Lady Tringle made a

little grimace, which, however, her daughter did not see. "And then

with that Marchesa!"

"That was the Marchesa's fault."

"And with Tom!"

"I don't think she was so much to blame with Tom. If she were, why

doesn't she take him now she can have him? He is just as foolish

about her as ever. Upon my word I think Tom will make himself ill

about it."

"You haven't heard it all, mamma."

"What haven't I heard?"

"Ayala has been down with the Alburys at Stalham."

"I did hear that."

"And another man has turned up. What on earth they see in her is what

I can't understand."

"Another man has offered to her! Who is he?"

"There was a Colonel Stubbs down there. Septimus heard it all from

young Batsby at the club. She got this man to ride about the country

with her everywhere, going to the meets with him and coming home. And

in this way she got him to propose to her. I don't suppose he means

anything; but that is why she won't have anything to do with Tom now.

Do you mean to say she didn't do all she could to catch Tom down at

Glenbogie, and then at Rome? Everybody saw it. I don't think Lucy has

ever been so bad as that."

"It's quite different, my dear."

"She has come from a low father," said the Honourable Mrs. Traffick,

proudly, "and therefore she has naturally attached herself to a low

young man. There is nothing to be wondered at in that. I suppose they

are fond of each other, and the sooner they are married the better."

"But he can't marry her because he has got nothing."

"Papa will do something."

"That's just what your papa won't. The man has been to your father

in the City and there has been ever such a row. He spoke ill of me

because I endeavoured to do my duty by the ungrateful girl. I am

sure I have got a lesson as to taking up other people's children. I

endeavoured to do an act of charity, and see what has come of it. I

don't believe in charity."

"That is wicked, mamma. Faith, Hope, and Charity! But you've got to

be charitable before you begin the others."

"I don't think it is wicked. People would do best if they were made

to go along on what they've got of their own." This seemed to Augusta

to be a direct blow at Septimus and herself. "Of course I know what

you mean, mamma."

"I didn't mean anything."

"But, if people can't stay for a few weeks in their own parents'

houses, I don't know where they are to stay."

"It isn't weeks, Augusta; it's months. And as to parents, Lord

Boardotrade is Mr. Traffick's parent. Why doesn't he go and stay with

Lord Boardotrade?" Then Augusta got up and marched with stately step

out of the room. After this it was not possible that Lucy would find

much immediate grace in her aunt's eyes.

From the moment that Lucy had received her letter there came upon her

the great burden of answering it. She was very anxious to do exactly

as Hamel had counselled her. She was quite alive to the fact that

Hamel had been imprudent in Lombard Street; but not the less was she

desirous to do as he bade her,--thinking it right that a woman should

obey some one, and that her obedience could be due only to him. But

in order to obey him she must consult her aunt. "Aunt Emmeline," she

said that afternoon, "I want to ask you something?"

"What is it now?" said Aunt Emmeline, crossly.

"About Mr. Hamel."

"I don't want to hear any more about Mr. Hamel. I have heard quite

enough of Mr. Hamel."

"Of course I am engaged to him, Aunt Emmeline."

"So I hear you say. I do not think it very dutiful of you to come and

talk to me about him, knowing as you do what I think about him."

"What I want to ask is this. Ought I to stay here or ought I to go

away?"

"I never heard such a girl! Where are you to go to? What makes you

ask the question?"

"Because you said that I ought to go if I did not give him up."

"You ought to give him up."

"I cannot do that, aunt."

"Then you had better hold your tongue and say nothing further about

it. I don't believe he earns enough to give you bread to eat and

decent clothes to wear. What would you do if children were to come

year after year? If you really love him I wonder how you can think of

being such a millstone round a man's neck!"

This was very hard to bear. It was so different from the delicious

comfort of his letter. "I do not for a moment believe that we should

want." "I have never for one moment doubted my own ultimate success."

But after all was there not more of truth in her aunt's words, hard

and cruel as they were? And on these words, such as they were, she

must found her answer to her lover; for he had bade her ask her

aunt what she was to do as to staying or preparing herself for an

immediate marriage. Then, before the afternoon was over, she wrote to

Hamel as follows;--

DEAR ISADORE,

I have got ever so much to say, but I shall begin by doing

as you told me in your postscript. I won't quite scold

you, but I do think you might have been a little gentler

with poor Uncle Tom. I do not say this because I at all

regret anything which perhaps he might have done for us.

If you do not want assistance from him certainly I do

not. But I do think that he meant to be kind; and, though

he may not be quite what you call a gentleman of fine

feeling, yet he has taken me into his house when I had no

other to go to, and in many respects has been generous to

me. When he said that you were to go to him in Lombard

Street, I am sure that he meant to be generous. And,

though it has not ended well, yet he meant to be kind to

both of us.

There is what you will call my scolding; though, indeed,

dearest, I do not intend to scold at all. Nor am I in the

least disappointed except in regard to you. This morning

I have been to Aunt Emmeline, as you desired, and I must

say that she was very cross. Of course I know that it is

because she is my own aunt that Uncle Tom has me here at

all; and I feel that I ought to be very grateful to her.

But, in spite of all that you say, laughing at Uncle Tom

because he wants you to sell your grand work by auction,

he is much more good-natured than Aunt Emmeline. I am

quite sure my aunt never liked me, and that she will

not be comfortable till I am gone. But when I asked her

whether I ought to stay, or to go, she told me to hold my

tongue, and say nothing further about it. Of course, by

this, she meant that I was to remain, at any rate for the

present.

My own dearest, I do think this will be best, though I

need not tell you how I look forward to leaving this, and

being always with you. For myself I am not a bit afraid,

though Aunt Emmeline said dreadful things about food

and clothes, and all the rest of it. But I believe much

more in what you say, that success will be sure to come.

But still will it not be wise to wait a little longer?

Whatever I may have to bear here, I shall think that I am

bearing it for your dear sake; and then I shall be happy.

Believe me to be always and always your own

LUCY.

This was written and sent on a Wednesday, and nothing further was

said either by Lucy herself, or by her aunt, as to the lover, till

Sir Thomas came down to Merle Park on the Saturday evening. On his

arrival he seemed inclined to be gracious to the whole household,

even including Mr. Traffick, who received any attention of that kind

exactly as though the most amicable arrangements were always existing

between him and his father-in-law. Aunt Emmeline, when it seemed that

she was to encounter no further anger on account of the revelation

which Hamel had made in Lombard Street, also recovered her temper,

and the evening was spent as though there were no causes for serious

family discord. In this spirit, on the following morning, they all

went to church, and it was delightful to hear the flattering words

with which Mr. Traffick praised Merle Park, and everything belonging

to it, during the hour of lunch. He went so far as to make some

delicately laudatory hints in praise of hospitality in general, and

especially as to that so nobly exercised by London merchant-princes.

Sir Thomas smiled as he heard him, and, as he smiled, he resolved

that, as soon as the Christmas festivities should be over, the

Honourable Septimus Traffick should certainly be turned out of that

house.

After lunch there came a message to Lucy by a page-boy, who was

supposed to attend generally to the personal wants of Aunt Emmeline,

saying that her uncle would be glad of her attendance for a walk. "My

dear," said he, "have you got your thick boots on? Then go and put

'em on. We will go down to the Lodge, and then come home round by

Windover Hill." She did as she was bade, and then they started. "I

want to tell you," said he, "that this Mr. Hamel of yours came to me

in Lombard Street."

"I know that, Uncle Tom."

"He has written to you, then, and told you all about it?"

"He has written to me, certainly, and I have answered him."

"No doubt. Well, Lucy, I had intended to be kind to your Mr. Hamel,

but, as you are probably aware, I was not enabled to carry out my

intentions. He seems to be a very independent sort of young man."

"He is independent, I think."

"I have not a word to say against it. If a man can be independent it

is so much the better. If a man can do everything for himself, so

as to require neither to beg nor to borrow, it will be much better

for him. But, my dear, you must understand that a man cannot be

independent with one hand, and accept assistance with the other, at

one and the same time."

"That is not his character, I am sure," said Lucy, striving to hide

her indignation while she defended her lover's character.

"I do not think it is. Therefore he must remain independent, and I

can do nothing for him."

"He knows that, Uncle Tom."

"Very well. Then there's an end of it. I only want to make you

understand that I was willing to assist him, but that he was

unwilling to be assisted. I like him all the better for it, but there

must be an end of it."

"I quite understand, Uncle Tom."

"Then there's one other thing I've got to say. He accused me of

having threatened to turn you out of my house. Now, my dear--"

Hereupon Lucy struggled to say a word, hardly knowing what word she

ought to say, but he interrupted her,--"Just hear me out till I've

done, and then there need not be another word about it. I never

threatened to turn you out."

"Not you, Uncle Tom," she said, endeavouring to press his arm with

her hand.

"If your aunt said a word in her anger you should not have made

enough of it to write and tell him."

"I thought she meant me to go, and then I didn't know whom else to

ask."

"Neither I nor she, nor anybody else, ever intended to turn you out.

I have meant to be kind to you both,--to you and Ayala; and if things

have gone wrong I cannot say that it has been my fault. Now, you had

better stay here, and not say a word more about it till he is ready

to take you. That can't be yet for a long time. He is making, at

present, not more than two hundred a year. And I am sure it must be

quite as much as he can do to keep a coat on his back with such an

income as that. You must make up your mind to wait,--probably for

some years. As I told you before, if a man chooses to have the glory

of independence he must also bear the inconvenience. Now, my dear,

let there be an end of this, and never say again that I want to turn

you out of my house."

CHAPTER XXXV.

TOM TRINGLE SENDS A CHALLENGE.

The next six weeks went on tranquilly at Merle Park without a word

spoken about Hamel. Sir Thomas, who was in the country as little as

possible, showed his scorn to his son-in-law simply by the paucity

of his words, speaking to him, when he did speak to him, with

a deliberate courtesy which Mr. Traffick perfectly understood.

It was that dangerous serenity which so often presages a storm.

"There is something going to be up with your father," he said to

Augusta. Augusta replied that she had never seen her father so civil

before. "It would be a great convenience," continued the Member of

Parliament, "if he could be made to hold his tongue till Parliament

meets; but I'm afraid that's too good to expect." In other respects

things were comfortable at Merle Park, though they were not always

comfortable up in London. Tom, as the reader knows, was misbehaving

himself sadly at the Mountaineers. This was the period of unlimited

champagne, and of almost total absence from Lombard Street. It was

seldom that Sir Thomas could get hold of his son, and when he did

that broken-hearted youth would reply to his expostulations simply

by asserting that if his father would induce Ayala to marry him

everything should go straight in Lombard Street. Then came the final

blow. Tom was of course expected at Merle Park on Christmas Eve,

but did not make his appearance either then or on Christmas Day.

Christmas fell on a Wednesday, and it was intended that the family

should remain in the country till the following Monday. On the

Thursday Sir Thomas went up to town to make inquiries respecting his

heir, as to whom Lady Tringle had then become absolutely unhappy. In

London he heard the disastrous truth. Tom, in his sportive mood, had

caused serious inconvenience to a most respectable policeman, and

was destined to remain another week in the hands of the Philistines.

Then, for a time, all the other Tringle troubles were buried and

forgotten in this great trouble respecting Tom. Lady Tringle was

unable to leave her room during the period of incarceration. Mr.

Traffick promised to have the victim liberated by the direct

interference of the Secretary of State, but failed to get anything

of the kind accomplished. The girls were completely cowed by the

enormity of the misfortune; so that Tom's name was hardly mentioned

except in sad and confidential whispers. But of all the sufferers Sir

Thomas suffered the most. To him it was a positive disgrace, weighing

down every moment of his life. At Travers and Treason he could not

hold up his head boldly and open his mouth loudly as had always been

his wont. At Travers and Treason there was not a clerk who did not

know that "the governor" was an altered man since this misfortune had

happened to the hope of the firm. What passed between Sir Thomas and

his son on the occasion has already been told in a previous chapter.

That Sir Thomas, on the whole, behaved with indulgence must be

acknowledged; but he felt that his son must in truth absent himself

from Lombard Street for a time.

Tom had been advised by his father to go forth and see the world. A

prolonged tour had been proposed to him which to most young men might

seem to have great attraction. To him it would have had attraction

enough, had it not been for Ayala. There would have been hardly any

limit to the allowance made to him, and he would have gone forth

armed with introductions, which would have made every port a happy

home to him. But as soon as the tour was suggested he resolved at

once that he could not move himself to a distance from Ayala. What he

expected,--what he even hoped,--he could not tell himself. But while

Ayala was in London, and Ayala was unmarried, he could not be made to

take himself far away.

He was thoroughly ashamed of himself. He was not at all the man who

could bear a week of imprisonment and not think himself disgraced.

For a day or two he shut himself up altogether in his lodgings, and

never once showed himself at the Mountaineers. Faddle came to him,

but he snubbed Faddle at first, remembering all the severe things his

father had said about the Faddles in general. But he soon allowed

that feeling to die away when the choice seemed to be between Faddle

and solitude. Then he crept out in the dark and ate his dinners with

Faddle at some tavern, generally paying the bill for both of them.

After dinner he would play half-a-dozen games of billiards with his

friend at some unknown billiard-room, and then creep home to his

lodgings,--a blighted human being!

At last, about the end of the first week in January, he was induced

to go down to Merle Park. There Mr. and Mrs. Traffick were still

sojourning, the real grief which had afflicted Sir Thomas having

caused him to postpone his intention in regard to his son-in-law.

At Merle Park Tom was cosseted and spoilt by the women very

injudiciously. It was not perhaps the fact that they regarded him

as a hero simply because he had punched a policeman in the stomach

and then been locked up in vindication of the injured laws of his

country; but that incident in combination with his unhappy love did

seem to make him heroic. Even Lucy regarded him with favour because

of his constancy to her sister; whereas the other ladies measured

their admiration for his persistency by the warmth of their anger

against the silly girl who was causing so much trouble. His mother

told him over and over again that his cousin was not worth his

regard; but then, when he would throw himself on the sofa in an agony

of despair,--weakened perhaps as much by the course of champagne as

by the course of his love,--then she, too, would bid him hope, and at

last promised that she herself would endeavour to persuade Ayala to

look at the matter in a more favourable light. "It would all be right

if it were not for that accursed Stubbs," poor Tom would say to his

mother. "The man whom I called my friend! The man I lent a horse to

when he couldn't get one anywhere else! The man to whom I confided

everything, even about the necklace! If it hadn't been for Stubbs

I never should have hurt that policeman! When I was striking him

I thought that it was Stubbs!" Then the mother would heap feminine

maledictions on the poor Colonel's head, and so together they would

weep and think of revenge.

From the moment Tom had heard Colonel Stubbs's name mentioned as that

of his rival he had meditated revenge. It was quite true when he said

that he had been thinking of Stubbs when he struck the policeman. He

had consumed the period of his confinement in gnashing his teeth, all

in regard to our poor friend Jonathan. He told his father that he

could not go upon his long tour because of Ayala. But in truth his

love was now so mixed up with ideas of vengeance that he did not

himself know which prevailed. If he could first have slaughtered

Stubbs then perhaps he might have started! But how was he to

slaughter Stubbs? Various ideas occurred to his mind. At first

he thought that he would go down to Aldershot with the biggest

cutting-whip he could find in any shop in Piccadilly; but then it

occurred to him that at Aldershot he would have all the British army

against him, and that the British army might do something to him

worse even than the London magistrate. Then he would wait till the

Colonel could be met elsewhere. He ascertained that the Colonel was

still at Stalham, where he had passed the Christmas, and he thought

how it might be if he were to attack the Colonel in the presence of

his friends, the Alburys. He assured himself that, as far as personal

injury went, he feared nothing. He had no disinclination to be hit

over the head himself, if he could be sure of hitting the Colonel

over the head. If it could be managed that they two should fly at

each other with their fists, and be allowed to do the worst they

could to each other for an hour, without interference, he would be

quite satisfied. But down at Stalham that would not be allowed. All

the world would be against him, and nobody there to see that he got

fair play. If he could encounter the man in the streets of London it

would be better; but were he to seek the man down at Stalham he would

probably find himself in the County Lunatic Asylum. What must he do

for his revenge? He was surely entitled to it. By all the laws of

chivalry, as to which he had his own ideas, he had a right to inflict

an injury upon a successful--even upon an unsuccessful--rival. Was it

not a shame that so excellent an institution as duelling should have

been stamped out? Wandering about the lawns and shrubberies at Merle

Park he thought of all this, and at last he came to a resolution.

The institution had been stamped out, as far as Great Britain was

concerned. He was aware of that. But it seemed to him that it had not

been stamped out in other more generous countries. He had happened to

notice that a certain enthusiastic politician in France had enjoyed

many duels, and had never been severely repressed by the laws of his

country. Newspaper writers were always fighting in France, and were

never guillotined. The idea of being hanged was horrible to him,--so

distasteful that he saw at a glance that a duel in England was out

of the question. But to have his head cut off, even if it should

come to that, would be a much less affair. But in Belgium, in Italy,

in Germany, they never did cut off the heads of the very numerous

gentlemen who fought duels. And there were the Southern States of the

American Union, where he fancied that men might fight duels just as

they pleased. He would be ready to go even to New Orleans at a day's

notice if only he could induce Colonel Stubbs to meet him there. And

he thought that, if Colonel Stubbs really possessed half the spirit

which seemed to be attributed to him by the British army generally,

he would come, if properly invoked, and fight such a duel as this,

whether at New Orleans or at some other well-chosen blood-allowing

spot on the world's surface. Tom was prepared to go anywhere for

blood.

But the invocation must be properly made. When he had wanted another

letter of another kind to be written for him, the Colonel himself

was the man to whom he had gone for assistance. And, had his present

enemy been any other than the Colonel himself, he would have gone

to the Colonel in preference to any one else for aid in this matter.

There was no one, in truth, in whom he believed so thoroughly as in

the Colonel. But that was out of the question. Then he reflected

what friend might now stand him in stead. He would have gone to

Houston, who wanted to marry his sister; but Houston seemed to have

disappeared, and he did not know where he might be found. There was

his brother-in-law, Traffick,--but he feared lest Traffick might give

him over once more into the hands of the police. He thought of Hamel,

as being in a way connected with the family; but he had seen so

little of Hamel, and had so much disliked what he had seen, that he

was obliged to let that hope go by. There was no one left but Faddle

whom he could trust. Faddle would do anything he was told to do.

Faddle would carry the letter, no doubt, or allow himself to be named

as a proposed second. But Faddle could not write the letter. He felt

that he could write the letter himself better than Faddle.

He went up to town, having sent a mysterious letter to Faddle,

bidding his friend attend him in his lodgings. He did not yet dare

to go to the Mountaineers, where Faddle would have been found. But

Faddle came, true to the appointment. "What is it, now?" said the

faithful friend. "I hope you are going back to Travers and Treason's.

That is what I should do, and walk in just as though nothing had

happened."

"Not if you were me, you wouldn't."

"That does make a difference, of course."

"There is something else to be done before I can again darken the

doors of Travers and Treason,--if I should ever do so!"

"Something particular?"

"Something very particular. Faddle, I do think you are a true

friend."

"You may say that. I have stuck to you always,--though you don't know

the kind of things my people say to me about it. They say I am going

to ruin myself because of you. The governor threatened to put me out

of the business altogether. But I'm a man who will be true to my

friend, whatever happens. I think you have been a little cool to me,

lately; but even that don't matter."

"Cool! If you knew the state that I'm in you wouldn't talk of a

fellow being cool! I'm so knocked about it all that I don't know what

I'm doing."

"I do take that into consideration."

"Now, I'll tell you what I am going to do." Then he stood still, and

looked Faddle full in the face. Faddle, sitting awe-struck on his

chair, returned the gaze. He knew that a moment of supreme importance

was at hand. "Faddle, I'll shoot that fellow down like a dog."

"Will you, indeed?"

"Like a dog;--if I can get at him. I should have no more compunction

in taking his life than a mere worm. Why should I, when I know that

he has sapped the very juice of my existence?"

"Do you mean,--do you mean,--that you would--murder him?"

"It would not be murder. Of course it might be that he would shoot me

instead. Upon the whole, I think I should like that best."

"Oh; a duel!" said Faddle.

"That's what I mean. Murder him! Certainly not. Though I should like

nothing half so well as to thrash him within an inch of his life.

I would not murder him. My plan is this,--I shall write to him a

letter inviting him to meet me in any corner of the globe that he

may select. Torrid zone or Arctic circle will be all the same to me.

You will have to accompany me as my second." Faddle shivered with

excitement and dread of coming events. Among other ideas there came

the thought that it might be difficult to get back from the Arctic

circle without money if his friend Tom should happen to be shot dead

in that locality. "But first of all," continued Tom, "you will have

to carry a letter."

"To the Colonel?" suggested Faddle.

"Of course. The man is now staying with friends of his named Albury

at a place called Stalham. From what I hear they are howling swells.

Sir Harry Albury is Master of the Hounds, and Lady Albury when she

is up in London has all the Royal Family constantly at her parties.

Stubbs is a cousin of his; but you must go right away up to him among

'em all, and deliver the letter into his hands without minding 'em a

bit."

"Couldn't it go by post?"

"No; this kind of letter musn't go by post. You have to be able to

swear that you delivered it yourself into his own hands. And then you

must wait for an answer. Even though he should want a day to think of

it, you must wait."

"Where am I to stay, Tom?"

"Well; it may be they'll ask you to the house, because, though you

carry the letter for me, you are not supposed to be his enemy. If so,

put a jolly face on it, and enjoy yourself as well as you can. You

must seem, you know, to be just as big a swell as anybody there. But

if they don't ask you, you must go to the nearest inn. I'll pay the

bill."

"Shall I go to-day?" asked Faddle.

"I've got to write the letter first. It'll take a little time, so

that you'd better put it off till to-morrow. If you will leave me

now I'll write it, and if you will come back at six we'll go and

have a bit of dinner at Bolivia's." This was an eating-house in the

neighbourhood of Leicester Square, to which the friends had become

partial during this troubled period of their existence.

"Why not come to the Mountaineers, old boy?" Tom shook his head,

showing that he was not yet up to such festivity as that; and then

Faddle took his departure.

Tom at once got out his pen and paper, and began to write his letter.

It may be imagined that it was not written off-hand, or without many

struggles. When it was written it ran as follows;--

SIR,

You will not, I think, be surprised to hear from me in

anything but a friendly spirit. I went down to you at

Aldershot as to a friend whom I could trust with my

bosom's dearest secret, and you have betrayed me. I told

you of my love, a love which has long burned in my heart,

and you received my confidence with a smile, knowing all

the time that you were my rival. I leave it to you to

say what reply you can make as to conduct so damning, so

unmanly, so dastardly,--and so very unlike a friend as

this!

However, there is no place here for words. You have

offered me the greatest insult and the greatest injury

which one man can inflict upon another! There is no

possibility of an apology, unless you are inclined to

say that you will renounce for ever your claim upon the

hand of Miss Ayala Dormer. This I do not expect, and,

therefore, I call upon you to give me that satisfaction

which is all that one gentleman can offer to another.

After the injury you have done me I think it quite

impossible that you should refuse.

Of course, I know that duels cannot be fought in England

because of the law. I am sorry that the law should have

been altered, because it allows so many cowards to escape

the punishment they deserve.

Tom, as he wrote this, was very proud of the keenness of the

allusion. "I am quite sure, however, that a man who bears the colours

of a colonel in the British army will not try to get off by such a

pretext." He was proud, too, about the colours.

France, Belgium, Italy, the United States, and all the

world, are open! I will meet you wherever you may choose

to arrange a meeting. I presume that you will prefer

pistols.

I send this by the hands of my friend, Mr. Faddle, who

will be prepared to make arrangements with you, or with

any friend on your behalf. He will bring back your reply,

which no doubt will be satisfactory.--I am, Sir, your most

obedient servant,

THOMAS TRINGLE, junior.

When, after making various copies, Tom at last read the letter as

finally prepared, he was much pleased with it, doubting whether the

Colonel himself could have written it better, had the task been

confided to his hands. When Faddle came, he read it to him with much

pride, and then committed it to his custody. After that they went out

and ate their dinner at Bolivia's with much satisfaction, but still

with a bearing of deep melancholy, as was proper on such an occasion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOM TRINGLE GETS AN ANSWER.

Faddle as he went down into the country made up his mind that the law

which required such letters to be delivered by hand was an absurd

law. The post would have done just as well, and would have saved a

great deal of trouble. These gloomy thoughts were occasioned by a

conviction that he could not carry himself easily or make himself

happy among such "howling swells" as these Alburys. If they should

invite him to the house the matter would be worse that way than the

other. He had no confidence in his dress coat, which he was aware

had been damaged by nocturnal orgies. It is all very well to tell a

fellow to be as "big a swell" as anybody else, as Tom had told him.

But Faddle acknowledged to himself the difficulty of acting up to

such advice. Even the eyes of Colonel Stubbs turned upon him after

receipt of the letter would oppress him.

Nevertheless he must do his best, and he took a gig at the station

nearest to Albury. He was careful to carry his bag with him, but

still he lived in hope that he would be able to return to London the

same day. When he found himself within the lodges of Stalham Park

he could hardly keep himself from shivering, and, when he asked the

footman at the door whether Colonel Stubbs were there, he longed to

be told that Colonel Stubbs had gone away on the previous day to

some--he did not care what--distant part of the globe. But Colonel

Stubbs had not gone away. Colonel Stubbs was in the house.

Our friend the Colonel had not suffered as Tom had suffered since his

rejection;--but nevertheless he had been much concerned. He had set

his heart upon Ayala before he had asked her, and could not bring

himself to change his heart because she had refused him. He had

gone down to Aldershot and had performed his duties, abstaining for

the present from repeating his offer. The offer of course must be

repeated, but as to the when, the where, and the how, he had not as

yet made up his mind. Then Tom Tringle had come to him at Aldershot

communicating to him the fact that he had a rival;--and also the

other fact that the other rival like himself had hitherto been

unsuccessful. It seemed improbable to him that such a girl as

Ayala should attach herself to such a man as her cousin Tom. But

nevertheless he was uneasy. He regarded Tom Tringle as a miracle of

wealth, and felt certain that the united efforts of the whole family

would be used to arrange the match. Ayala had refused him also, and

therefore, up to the present moment, the chances of the other man

were no better than his own. When Tom left him at Aldershot he hardly

remembered that Tom knew nothing of his secret, whereas Tom had

communicated to him his own. It never for a moment occurred to him

that Tom would quarrel with him; although he had seen that the poor

fellow had been disgusted because he had refused to write the letter.

On Christmas Eve he had gone down to Stalham, and there he had

remained discussing the matter of his love with Lady Albury. To no

one else in the house had the affair been mentioned, and by Sir Harry

he was supposed to remain there only for the sake of the hunting.

With Sir Harry he was of all guests the most popular, and thus it

came to pass that his prolonged presence at Stalham was not matter

of special remark. Much of his time he did devote to hunting, but

there were half hours devoted in company with Lady Albury to Ayala's

perfection and Ayala's obstinacy.

Lady Albury was almost inclined to think that Ayala should be given

up. Married ladies seldom estimate even the girls they like best at

their full value. It seems to such a one as Lady Albury almost a

pity that such a one as Colonel Stubbs should waste his energy upon

anything so insignificant as Ayala Dormer. The speciality of the

attraction is of course absent to the woman, and unless she has

considered the matter so far as to be able to clothe her thoughts in

male vestments, as some women do, she cannot understand the longing

that is felt for so small a treasure. Lady Albury thought that young

ladies were very well, and that Ayala was very well among young

ladies; but Ayala in getting Colonel Stubbs for a husband would, as

Lady Albury thought, have received so much more than her desert that

she was now almost inclined to be angry with the Colonel. "My dear

friend," he said to her one day, "you might as well take it for

granted. I shall go after my princess with all the energy which a

princess merits."

"The question is whether she be a princess," said Lady Albury.

"Allow me to say that that is a point on which I cannot admit a

doubt. She is a princess to me, and just at present I must be

regarded as the only judge in the matter."

"She shall be a goddess, if you please," said Lady Albury.

"Goddess, princess, pink, or pearl;--any name you please supposed to

convey perfection shall be the same to me. It may be that she is in

truth no better, or more lovely, or divine, than many another young

lady who is at the present moment exercising the heart of many

another gentleman. You know enough of the world to be aware that

every Jack has his Gill. She is my Gill, and that's an end of it."

"I hope then that she may be your Gill."

"And, in order that she may, you must have her here again. I should

absolutely not know how to go to work were I to find myself in the

presence of Aunt Dosett in Kingsbury Crescent." In answer to this

Lady Albury assured him that she would be quite willing to have the

girl again at Stalham if it could be managed. She was reminding him,

however, how difficult it had been on a previous occasion to overcome

the scruples of Mrs. Dosett, when a servant brought in word to

Colonel Stubbs that there was a man in the hall desirous of seeing

him immediately on particular business. Then the servant presented

our friend Faddle's card.

MR. SAMUEL FADDLE,

1, Badminton Gardens.

"Yes, Sir;" said the servant. "He says he has a letter which he must

put into your own particular hands."

"That looks like a bailiff," said Lady Albury, laughing. Colonel

Stubbs, declaring that he had no special reason to be afraid of any

bailiff, left the room and went down into the hall.

At Stalham the real hall of the house was used as a billiard-room,

and here, leaning against the billiard table, the Colonel found

poor Faddle. When a man is compelled by some chance circumstance to

address another man whom he does not know, and whom by inspection he

feels he shall never wish to know, he always hardens his face, and

sometimes also his voice. So it was with the Colonel when he looked

at Faddle. A word he did say, not in words absolutely uncivil, as to

the nature of the business in hand. Then Faddle, showing his emotion

by a quaver in his voice, suggested that as the matter was one of

extreme delicacy some more private apartment might be provided. Upon

this Stubbs led the way into a little room which was for the most

part filled with hunting-gear, and offered the stranger one of the

three chairs which it contained. Faddle sat down, finding himself

so compelled, though the Colonel still remained standing, and then

extracted the fatal epistle from his pocket. "Colonel Stubbs," said

he, handing up the missive, "I am directed by my friend, Mr. Thomas

Tringle, junior, to put this letter into your own hand. When you have

read it I shall be ready to consult with you as to its contents."

These few words he had learnt by heart on his journey down, having

practised them continually.

The Colonel took the letter, and turning to the window read it with

his back to the visitor. He read it twice from beginning to end in

order that he might have time to resolve whether he would laugh aloud

at both Faddle and Tringle, or whether it might not be better to

endeavour to soften the anger of poor Tom by a message which should

be at any rate kindly worded. "This is from my friend, Tom Tringle,"

he said.

"From Mr. Thomas Tringle, junior," said Faddle, proudly.

"So I perceive. I am sorry to think that he should be in so much

trouble. He is one of the best fellows I know, and I am really

grieved that he should be unhappy. This, you know, is all nonsense."

"It is not nonsense at all, Colonel Stubbs."

"You must allow me to be the judge of that, Mr. Faddle. It is at

any rate nonsense to me. He wants me to go somewhere and fight a

duel,--which I should not do with any man under any circumstances.

Here there is no possible ground for any quarrel whatsoever,--as

I will endeavour to explain, myself, to my friend, Mr. Tringle. I

shall be sure to write to him at once,--and so I will bid you good

afternoon."

But this did not at all suit poor Faddle after so long a journey.

"I thought it probable that you would write, Colonel Stubbs, and

therefore I am prepared to wait. If I cannot be accommodated here I

will wait,--will wait elsewhere."

"That will not be at all necessary. We have a post to London twice a

day."

"You must be aware, Colonel Stubbs, that letters of this sort should

not be sent by post."

"The kind of letter I shall write may be sent by post very well. It

will not be bellicose, and therefore there can be no objection."

"I really think, Colonel Stubbs, that you are making very little of a

very serious matter."

"Mr. Faddle, I really must manage my own affairs after my own way.

Would you like a glass of sherry? If not, I need hardly ask you to

stay here any longer." Upon that he went out into the billiard-room

and rang the bell. Poor Faddle would have liked the glass of sherry,

but he felt that it would be incompatible with the angry dignity

which he assumed, and he left the house without another word or even

a gesture of courtesy. Then he returned to London, having taken his

bag and dress coat all the way to Stalham for nothing.

Tom's letter was almost too good to be lost, but there was no one to

whom the joke could be made known except Lady Albury. She, he was

sure, would keep poor Tom's secret as well as his own, and to her he

showed the letter. "I pity him from the bottom of my heart," he said.

Lady Albury declared that the writer of such a letter was too absurd

for pity. "Not at all. Unless he really loved her he wouldn't have

been so enraged. I suppose he does think that I injured him. He did

tell me his story, and I didn't tell him mine. I can understand it

all, though I didn't imagine he was such a fool as to invite me

to travel all round the world because of the harsh laws of Great

Britain. Nevertheless, I shall write to him quite an affectionate

letter, remembering that, should I succeed myself, he will be my

first cousin by marriage."

Before he went to bed that night he wrote his letter, and the reader

may as well see the whole correspondence;--

MY DEAR TRINGLE,

If you will think of it all round you will see that you

have got no cause of quarrel with me any more than I have

with you. If it be the case that we are both attached to

your cousin, we must abide her decision whether it be in

favour of either of us, or, as may be too probably the

case, equally adverse to both of us. If I understand your

letter rightly, you think that I behaved unfairly when I

did not tell you of my own affairs upon hearing yours from

your own lips. Why should I? Why should I have been held

to be constrained to tell my secret because you, for

your own sake, had told me yours? Had I been engaged to

your cousin,--which I regret to say is very far from the

case,--I should have told you, naturally. I should have

regarded the matter as settled, and should have acquainted

you with a fact which would have concerned you. But as

such was not a fact, I was by no means bound to tell you

how my affairs stood. This ought to be clear to you, and I

hope will be when you have read what I say.

I may as well go on to declare that under no circumstances

should I fight a duel with you. If I thought I had done

wrong in the matter I would beg your pardon. I can't

do that as it is,--though I am most anxious to appease

you,--because I have done you no wrong.

Pray forget your animosity,--which is in truth

unfounded,--and let us be friends as we were before.

Yours very sincerely,

JONATHAN STUBBS.

Faddle reached London the evening before the Colonel's letter, and

again dined with his friend at Bolivia's. At first they were both

extremely angry, acerbating each other's wrath. Now that he was safe

back in London Faddle thought that he would have enjoyed an evening

among the "swells" of Stalham, and felt himself to be injured by the

inhospitable treatment he had received--"after going all the way down

there, hardly to be asked to sit down!"

"Not asked to sit down!"

"Well, yes, I was;--on a miserable cane-bottomed chair in a sort of

cupboard. And he didn't sit down. You may call them swells, but I

think your Colonel Stubbs is a very vulgar sort of fellow. When I

told him the post isn't the proper thing for such a letter, he only

laughed. I suppose he doesn't know what is the kind of thing among

gentlemen."

"I should think he does know," said Tom.

"Then why doesn't he act accordingly? Would you believe it; he never

so much as asked me whether I had a mouth on. It was just luncheon

time, too."

"I suppose they lunch late."

"They might have asked me. I shouldn't have taken it. He did say

something about a glass of sherry, but it was in that sort of tone

which tells a fellow that he is expected not to take it. And then

he pretended to laugh. I could see that he was shaking in his shoes

at the idea of having to fight. He go to the torrid zone! He would

much rather go to a police office if he thought that there was any

fighting on hand. I should dust his jacket with a stick if I were

you."

Later on in the evening Tom declared that this was what he would

do, but, before he came to that, a third bottle of Signor Bolivia's

champagne had been made to appear. The evening passed between them

not without much enjoyment. On the opening of that third cork the

wine was declared to be less excellent than what had gone before, and

Signor Bolivia was evoked in person. A gentleman named Walker, who

looked after the establishment, made his appearance, and with many

smiles, having been induced to swallow a bumper of the compound

himself, declared, with a knowing shake of the head and an astute

twinkle of the eye, that the wine was not equal to the last. He took

a great deal of trouble, he assured them, to import an article which

could not be surpassed, if it could be equalled, in London, always

visiting Epernay himself once a-year for the purpose of going through

the wine-vaults. Let him do what he would an inferior bottle,--or,

rather, a bottle somewhat inferior,--would sometimes make its way

into his cellar. Would Mr. Tringle let him have the honour of drawing

another cork, so that the exact amount of difference might be

ascertained? Tom gave his sanction; the fourth cork was drawn; and

Mr. Walker, sitting down and consuming the wine with his customers,

was enabled to point out to a hair's breadth the nature and the

extent of the variation. Tringle still thought that the difference

was considerable. Faddle was, on the whole, inclined to agree with

Signor Bolivia. It need hardly be said that the four bottles were

paid for,--or rather scored against Tringle, who at the present time

had a little account at the establishment.

"Show a fellar fellar's letters morrer." Such or something like it

was Faddle's last request to his friend as they bade each other

farewell for the night in Pall Mall. But Faddle was never destined

to see the Colonel's epistle. On his attempting to let himself in at

Badminton Gardens, he was kidnapped by his father in his night-shirt

and dressing-gown; and was sent out of London on the following

morning by long sea down to Aberdeen, whither he was intrusted to

the charge of a stern uncle. Our friend Tom saw nothing more of his

faithful friend till years had rolled over both their heads.

By the morning post, while Tom was still lying sick with

headache,--for even with Signor Bolivia's wine the pulling of many

corks is apt to be dangerous,--there came the letter from the

Colonel. Bad as Tom was, he felt himself constrained to read it at

once, and learned that neither the Torrid zone or Arctic circle

would require his immediate attendance. He was very sick, and

perhaps, therefore, less high in courage than on the few previous

days. Partly, perhaps, from that cause, but partly, also, from the

Colonel's logic, he did find that his wrath was somewhat abated.

Not but what it was still present to his mind that if two men loved

the same girl as ardently, as desperately, as eternally as he loved

Ayala, the best thing for them would be to be put together like the

Kilkenny cats, till whatever remnant should be left of one might have

its chance with the young lady. He still thought that it would be

well that they should fight to the death, but a glimmering of light

fell upon his mind as to the Colonel's abnegation of all treason in

the matter. "I suppose it wasn't to be expected that he should tell,"

he said to himself. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told in the same place.

But as to forgetting animosity that is out of the question! How is

a man to forget his animosity when two men want to marry the same

girl?"

About three o'clock on that day he dressed himself, and sat waiting

for Faddle to come to him. He knew how anxious his friend would be

to see the Colonel's letter. But Faddle by this time had passed

the Nore, and had added sea-sickness to his other maladies. Faddle

came to him no more, and the tedious hours of the afternoon wore

themselves away in his lodgings till he found his solitude to be

almost more unbearable than his previous misfortunes. At last came

the time when he must go out for his dinner. He did not dare to

attempt the Mountaineers. And as for Bolivia, Bolivia with his corks,

and his eating-house, and his vintages, was abominable to him. About

eight o'clock he slunk into a quiet little house on the north side of

Oxford Street, and there had two mutton chops, some buttered toast,

and some tea. As he drank his tea he told himself that on the morrow

he would go back to his mother at Merle Park, and get from her such

consolation as might be possible.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GERTRUDE IS UNSUCCESSFUL.

It was now the middle of January, and Gertrude Tringle had received

no reply from her lover to the overture which she had made him. Nor,

indeed, had she received any letter from him since that to which

this overture had been a reply. It was now two months since her

proposition had been made, and during that time her anger had waxed

very hot against Mr. Houston. After all, it might be a question

whether Mr. Houston was worth all the trouble which she, with her

hundred thousand pounds, was taking on his behalf. She did not like

the idea of abandoning him, because, by doing so, she would seem to

yield to her father. Having had a young man of her own, it behoved

her to stick to her young man in spite of her parents. But what is

a girl to do with a lover who, at the end of two months, has made

no reply to an offer from herself that he should run away with her,

and take her to Ostend? She was in this frame of mind when, lo

and behold, she found her own letter, still inclosed in her own

envelope,--but opened, and thrust in amongst some of her father's

papers. It was evident enough that the letter had never passed from

out of the house. There had been treachery on the part of some

servant;--or perhaps her father might have condescended to search the

little box;--or, more probable still, Augusta had betrayed her! Then

she reflected that she had communicated her purpose to her sister,

that her sister had abstained from any questions since the letter

had been written, and that her sister, therefore, no doubt, was the

culprit. There, however, was the letter, which had never reached her

lover's hands, and, as a matter of course, her affections returned

with all their full ardour to the unfortunate ill-used man. That her

conduct was now watched would, she thought, be a matter of course.

Her father knew her purpose, and, like stern parents in general,

would use all his energies to thwart it. Sir Thomas had, in truth,

thought but little about the matter since he had first thrust the

letter away. Tom's troubles, and the disgrace brought by them upon

Travers and Treason generally, had so occupied his mind that he cared

but little for Gertrude and her lover. But Gertrude had no doubt

that she was closely watched, and in these circumstances was driven

to think how she could best use her wits so as to countermine her

father. To run away from Queen's Gate would, she thought, be more

difficult, and more uncomfortable, than to perform the same operation

at Merle Park. It was intended that the family should remain in the

country, at any rate, till Easter, and Gertrude resolved that there

might yet be time for another effort before Easter should be past, if

only she could avoid those hundred Argus eyes, which were, no doubt,

fixed upon her from all sides.

She prepared another letter to her lover, which she addressed to him

at his club in London. In this she told him nothing of her former

project, except that a letter written by her in November had fallen

into the hands of enemies. Then she gave him to understand that there

was need of the utmost caution; but that, if adequate caution were

used, she did not doubt they might succeed. She said nothing about

her great project, but suggested to him that he should run down

into Sussex, and meet her at a certain spot indicated, outside

the Park-palings, half-an-hour after dusk. It might be, she said,

impossible that the meeting should be effected, but she thought that

she could so manage as to leave the house unwatched at the appointed

hour. With the object of being especially safe she began and

concluded her letter without any names, and then managed to deposit

it herself in the box of the village post-office.

Houston, when he received this letter, at once made up his mind that

he would not be found on the outer side of the Park-palings on the

evening named. He told himself that he was too old for the romance

of love-making, and that should he be received, when hanging about

in the dark, by some custodian with a cudgel, he would have nothing

to thank but his own folly. He wrote back therefore to say that he

regarded the outside of the Park-palings as indiscreet, but that he

would walk up through the lodge-gate to the house at three o'clock in

the afternoon of the day named, and he would take it as an additional

mark of her favour if she would meet him on the road. Gertrude

had sent him a mysterious address; he was to direct the letter to

"O. P. Q., Post Office, Hastings," and she was prepared to hire a

country boy to act as Love's messenger on the occasion. But of this

instruction Frank took no notice, addressing the letter to Merle Park

in the usual way.

Gertrude received her letter without notice from any one. On that

occasion Argus, with all his eyes, was by chance asleep. She was very

angry with her lover,--almost determined to reject him altogether,

almost disposed to yield to her angry parents and look out for some

other lover who might be accepted in better part; but still, when

the day came she put on her hat and walked down the road towards the

lodge.

As Fortune had it,--Fortune altogether unfavourable to those perils

for which her soul was longing,--no one watched her, no one dogged

her steps, no one took any notice of her, till she met Frank Houston

when he had passed about a hundred yards on through the gates. "And

so you have come," she said.

"Oh, yes; I have come. I was sure to come when I said so. No man

is more punctual than I am in these matters. I should have come

before,--only I did not get your letter."

"Oh, Frank!"

"Well, my darling. You are looking uncommonly well, and I am so glad

to see you. How are they all?"

"Frank!"

"What is it?"

"Oh, Frank, what are we to do?"

"The governor will give way at last, I should say."

"Never;--that is while we are as we are now. If we were married--"

"Ah,--I wish we were! Wouldn't it be nice?"

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do. I'm ready to-morrow for the matter of that."

"But could you do something great?"

"Something great! As to earning my bread, you mean? I do not think I

could do that. I didn't turn my hand to it early enough."

"I wasn't thinking of--your bread."

"You said,--could I do something great?"

"Frank, I wrote you a letter and described it all. How I got the

courage to do it I do not know. I feel as though I could not bring

myself to say it now. I wonder whether you would have the courage."

"I should say so. I don't know quite what sort of thing it is; but I

generally have pluck enough for anything in a common way."

"This is something in an uncommon way."

"I couldn't break open Travers and Treason, and get at the safe, or

anything in that way."

"It is another sort of safe of which you must break the lock, Frank;

another treasure you must steal. Do you not understand me?"

"Not in the least."

"There is Tom," said Gertrude. "He is always wandering about the

place now like a ghost. Let us go back to the gate." Then Frank

turned. "You heard, I suppose, of that dreadful affair about the

policeman."

"There was a row, I was told."

"Did you feel that the family were disgraced?"

"Not in the least. He had to pay five shillings,--hadn't he,--for

telling a policeman to go about his business?"

"He was--locked up," said Gertrude, solemnly.

"It's just the same. Nobody thinks anything about that kind of thing.

Now, what is it I have got to do? We had better turn back again as

soon as we can, because I must go up to the house before I go."

"You will?"

"Certainly. I will not leave it to your father to say that I came

skulking about the place, and was ashamed to show my face. That would

not be the way to make him give you your money."

"I am sure he'd give it,--if we were once married."

"If we were married without having it assured before hand we should

look very blue if things went wrong afterwards."

"I asked you whether you had courage."

"Courage enough, I think, when my body is concerned; but I am an

awful coward in regard to money. I wouldn't mind hashed mutton and

baked potatoes for myself, but I shouldn't like to see you eating

them, dearest, after all the luxuries to which you have been

accustomed."

"I should think nothing of it."

"Did you ever try? I never came absolutely to hashed mutton, but I've

known how very uncomfortable it is not to be able to pay for the hot

joints. I'm willing to own honestly that married life without an

income would not have attractions for me."

"But if it was sure to come?"

"Ah, then indeed,--with you! I have just said how nice it would be."

"Have you ever been at Ostend?" she asked, suddenly.

"Ostend. Oh, yes. There was a man there who used to cheat horribly at

Ã©cartÃ©. He did me out of nearly a hundred pounds one night."

"But there's a clergyman there, I'm told."

"I don't think this man was in orders. But he might have been.

Parsons come out in so many shapes! This man called himself a count.

It was seven years ago."

"I am speaking of to-day."

"I've not been there since."

"Would you like to go there,--with me?"

"It isn't a nice sort of place, I should say, for a honeymoon. But

you shall choose. When we are married you shall go where you like."

"To be married!" she exclaimed.

"Married at Ostend! Would your mother like that?"

"Mother! Oh, dear!"

"I'll be shot if I know what you're after, Gertrude. If you've got

anything to say you'd better speak out. I want to go up to the house

now."

They had now taken one or two turns between the lodge and a point in

the road from which the house could be observed, and at which Tom

could still be seen wandering about, thinking no doubt of Ayala. Here

Frank stopped as though determined not to turn to the lodge again. It

was wonderful to Gertrude that he should not have understood what she

had already said. When he talked of her mother going with them to the

Ostend marriage she was almost beside herself. This lover of hers was

a man of the world and must have heard of elopements. But now had

come a time in which she must be plain, unless she made up her mind

to abandon her plan altogether. "Frank," she said, "if you were to

run away with me, then we could be married at Ostend."

"Run away with you!"

"It wouldn't be the first time that such a thing has been done."

"The commonest thing in the world, my dear, when a girl has got her

money in her own hands. Nothing I should like so much."

"Money! It's always money. It's nothing but the money, I believe."

"That's unkind, Gertrude."

"Ain't you unkind? You won't do anything I ask."

"My darling, that hashed mutton and those baked potatoes are too

clear before my eyes."

"You think of nothing, I believe, but your dinner."

"I think, unfortunately, of a great many other things. Hashed mutton

is simply symbolical. Under the head of hashed mutton I include poor

lodgings, growlers when we get ourselves asked to eat a dinner at

somebody's table, limited washing-bills, table-napkins rolled up in

their dirt every day for a week, antimacassars to save the backs of

the chairs, a picture of you darning my socks while I am reading

a newspaper hired at a halfpenny from the public-house round the

corner, a pint of beer in the pewter between us,--and perhaps two

babies in one cradle because we can't afford to buy a second."

"Don't, Sir."

"In such an emergency I am bound to give you the advantage both of my

experience and imagination."

"Experience!"

"Not about the cradles! That is imagination. My darling, it won't do.

You and I have not been brought up to make ourselves happy on a very

limited income."

"Papa would be sure to give us the money," she said, eagerly.

"In such a matter as this, where your happiness is concerned, my

dear, I will trust no one."

"My happiness!"

"Yes, my dear, your happiness! I am quite willing to own the truth. I

am not fitted to make you happy, if I were put upon the hashed mutton

regime as I have described to you. I will not run the risk,--for your

sake."

"For your own, you mean," she said.

"Nor for my own, if you wish me to add that also."

Then they walked up towards the house for some little way in silence.

"What is it you intend, then?" she asked.

"I will ask your father once again."

"He will simply turn you out of the house," she said. Upon this

he shrugged his shoulders, and they walked on to the hall-door in

silence.

Sir Thomas was not at Merle Park, nor was he expected home that

evening. Frank Houston could only therefore ask for Lady Tringle,

and her he saw together with Mr. and Mrs. Traffick. In presence of

them all nothing could be said of love affairs; and, after sitting

for half-an-hour, during which he was not entertained with much

cordiality, he took his leave, saying that he would do himself the

honour of calling on Sir Thomas in the City. While he was in the

drawing-room Gertrude did not appear. She had retired to her room,

and was there resolving that Frank Houston was not such a lover as

would justify a girl in breaking her heart for him.

And Frank as he went to town brought his mind to the same way of

thinking. The girl wanted something romantic to be done, and he was

not disposed to do anything romantic for her. He was not in the least

angry with her, acknowledging to himself that she had quite as much a

right to her way of looking at things as he had to his. But he felt

almost sure that the Tringle alliance must be regarded as impossible.

If so, should he look out for another heiress, or endeavour to

enjoy life, stretching out his little income as far as might be

possible;--or should he assume altogether a new character, make a

hero of himself, and ask Imogene Docimer to share with him a little

cottage, in whatever might be the cheapest spot to be found in the

civilised parts of Europe? If it was to be hashed mutton and a united

cradle, he would prefer Imogene Docimer to Gertrude Tringle for his

companion.

But there was still open to him the one further chance with Sir

Thomas; and this chance he could try with the comfortable feeling

that he might be almost indifferent as to what Sir Thomas might say.

To be prepared for either lot is very self-assuring when any matter

of difficulty has to be taken in hand. On arriving at the house in

Lombard Street he soon found himself ushered once more into Sir

Thomas's presence. "Well, Mr. Houston, what can I do for you to-day?"

asked the man of business, with a pleasant smile.

"It is the old story, Sir Thomas."

"Don't you think, Mr. Houston, that there is something,--a

little,--unmanly shall I call it, in coming so often about the same

thing?"

"No, Sir Thomas, I do not. I think my conduct has been manly

throughout."

"Weak, perhaps, would have been a better word. I do not wish to be

uncourteous, and I will therefore withdraw unmanly. Is it not weak to

encounter so many refusals on the same subject?"

"I should feel myself to have been very strong if after so many

refusals I were to be successful at last."

"There is not the least chance of it."

"Why should there be no chance if your daughter's happiness depends

upon it?"

"There is no chance, because I do not believe that my daughter's

happiness does depend upon it. She is foolish, and has made a foolish

proposition to you."

"What proposition?" asked Houston, in surprise, having heard nothing

of that intercepted letter.

"That journey to Ostend, with the prospect of finding a good-natured

clergyman in the town! I hardly think you would be fool enough for

that."

"No, Sir Thomas, I should not do that. I should think it wrong." This

he said quite gravely, asking no questions; but was very much at a

loss to know where Sir Thomas had got his information.

"I am sure you would think it foolish: and it would be foolish. I

pledge you my word, that were you to do such a thing I should not

give you a shilling. I should not let my girl starve; but I should

save her from suffering in such a manner as to let you have no share

of the sustenance I provided for her."

"There is no question of that kind," said Frank, angrily.

"I hope not;--only as I know that the suggestion has been made I

have thought it well to tell you what would be my conduct if it were

carried out."

"It will not be carried out by me," said Frank.

"Very well; I am glad to hear it. To tell the truth, I never thought

that you would run the risk. A gentleman of your sort, when he

is looking for a wife with money, likes to have the money quite

certain."

"No doubt," said Frank, determined not to be browbeaten.

"And now, Mr. Houston, let me say one word more to you and then we

may part, as I hope, good friends. I do not mean my daughter Gertrude

to marry any man such as you are;--by that I mean an idle gentleman

without means. Should she do so in my teeth she would have to bear

the punishment of sharing that poor gentleman's idleness and poverty.

While I lived she would not be allowed absolutely to want, and when I

died there would be some trifle for her, sufficient to keep the wolf

from the door. But I give you my solemn word and honour that she

shall never be the means of supplying wealth and luxury to such a

husband as you would be. I have better purposes for my hard-earned

money. Now, good-day." With that he rose from his chair and put out

his hand. Frank rose also from his chair, took the hand that was

offered him, and stepped out of Travers and Treason into Lombard

Street, with no special desire to shake the dust off his feet as he

did so. He felt that Sir Thomas had been reasonable,--and he felt

also that Gertrude Tringle would perhaps have been dear at the money.

Two or three days afterwards he despatched the following little note

to poor Gertrude at Merle Park;--

DEAR GERTRUDE,

I have seen your father again, and found him to be

absolutely obdurate. I am sure he is quite in earnest

when he tells me that he will not give his daughter to an

impoverished idle fellow such as I am. Who shall say that

he is wrong? I did not dare to tell him so, anxious as I

was that he should change his purpose.

I feel myself bound in honour, believing, as I do, that he

is quite resolved in his purpose, to release you from your

promise. I should feel that I was only doing you an injury

were I to ask you to be bound by an engagement which could

not, at any rate for many years, be brought to a happy

termination.

As we may part as sincere friends I hope you will consent

to keep the little token of my regard which I gave you.

FRANK HOUSTON.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FRANK HOUSTON IS PENITENT.

"And now the Adriatic's free to wed another," said Houston to

himself, as he put himself into a cab, and had himself carried to

his club. There he wrote that valedictory letter to Gertrude which

is given at the end of the last chapter. Had he reason to complain

of his fate, or to rejoice? He had looked the question of an

establishment full in the face,--an establishment to be created by

Sir Thomas Tringle's money, to be shared with Sir Thomas Tringle's

daughter, and had made up his mind to accept it, although the

prospects were not, as he told himself, "altogether rosy." When he

first made up his mind to marry Gertrude,--on condition that Gertrude

should bring with her, at any rate, not less than three thousand

a-year,--he was quite aware that he would have to give up all his

old ways of life, and all his little pleasures. He would become

son-in-law to Sir Thomas Tringle, with a comfortable house to live

in; with plenty to eat and drink, and, probably, a horse or two to

ride. If he could manage things at their best, perhaps he might be

able to settle himself at Pau, or some other place of the kind, so as

to be as far away as possible from Tringle influences. But his little

dinners at one club, his little rubbers of whist at the other club,

his evenings at the opera, the pleasant smiles of the ladies, whom he

loved in a general way,--these would be done with for ever! Earn his

own bread! Why, he was going to earn his bread, and that in a most

disagreeable manner. He would set up an establishment, not because

such an establishment would have any charms for him, but because he

was compelled by lack of money to make some change in his present

manner of life. And yet the time had been when he had looked forward

to a marriage as the happiest thing that could befall him. As far as

his nature could love, he had loved Imogene Docimer. There had come a

glimpse upon him of something better than the little dinners and the

little rubbers. There had been a prospect of an income,--not ample,

as would have been that forthcoming from Sir Thomas,--but sufficient

for a sweet and modest home, in which he thought that it would have

sufficed for his happiness to paint a few pictures, and read a few

books, and to love his wife and children. Even as to that there had

been a doubt. There was a regret as to the charms of London life.

But, nevertheless, he had made up his mind,--and she, without any

doubt, had made up hers. Then that wicked uncle had died, and was

found to have expended on his own pursuits the money which was to

have been left to his nephew. Upon that there was an explanation

between Frank and Imogene; and it was agreed that their engagement

should be over, while a doubtful and dangerous friendship was to be

encouraged between them.

Such was the condition of things when Frank first met Gertrude

Tringle at Rome, now considerably more than twelve months since.

When Gertrude had first received his proposition favourably he had

written to Imogene a letter in that drolling spirit common to him, in

which he declared his purpose;--or rather, not his purpose, but his

untoward fate, should the gods be unkind to him. She had answered him

after the same fashion, saying, that in regard to his future welfare

she hoped that the gods would prove unkind. But had he known how to

read all that her letter expressed between the lines, he would have

perceived that her heart was more strongly moved than his own. Since

that time he had learned the lesson. There had been a letter or two;

and then there had been that walk in the wood on the Italian side of

the Tyrolese Alps. The reader may remember how he was hurried away

in the diligence for Innspruck, because it was considered that his

further sojourn in the same house with Imogene was dangerous. He had

gone, and even as he went had attempted to make a joke of the whole

affair. But it had not been quite a joke to him even then. There

was Imogene's love and Imogene's anger,--and together with these an

aversion towards the poor girl whom he intended to marry,--which

became the stronger the more strongly he was convinced both of

Imogene's love and of her anger.

Nevertheless, he persevered,--not with the best success, as has

already been told. Now, as he left the house in Lombard Street, and

wrote what was intended to be his last epistle to Gertrude, he was

driven again to think of Miss Docimer. Indeed, he had in his pocket,

as he sat at his club, a little note which he had lately received

from that lady, which, in truth, had disturbed him much when he made

his last futile efforts at Merle Park and in Lombard Street. The

little note was as follows;--

DEAR FRANK,

One little friendly word in spite of our storm on

the Tyrolese hill-side! If Miss Tringle is to be the

arbiter of your fate;--why, then, let there be an end of

everything between us. I should not care to be called upon

to receive such a Mrs. Frank Houston as a dear friend.

But if Tringle pÃ¨re should at the last moment prove

hard-hearted, then let me see you again.--Yours,

I.

With this letter in his pocket he had gone down to Merle Park,

determined to put an end to the Tringle affair in one way or

the other. His duty, as he had planned it to himself, would not

be altered by Imogene's letter; but if that duty should become

impracticable, why, then, it would be open to him to consider

whatever Imogene might have to say to him.

The Docimers were now in London, where it was their custom to live

during six months of the year; but Houston had not been at their

house since he had parted from them in the Tyrol. He had spent but

little of his time in London since the autumn, and, when there, had

not been anxious to see people who had, at any rate, treated him

somewhat roughly. But now it would be necessary that he should

answer Imogene's letter. What should be the nature of such answer he

certainly had not as yet decided, nor could he have decided before

those very convincing assurances of Sir Thomas Tringle. That matter

was at any rate over, and now the "Adriatic might wed another,"--if

the Adriatic thought well to do so. The matter, however, was one

which required a good deal of consideration. He gave to it ten

minutes of intense thought, during which he consumed a cup of coffee

and a cigarette; and then, throwing away the burnt end of the paper,

he hurried into the morning-room, and wrote to the lady as follows;--

DEAR IMOGENE,

You will not have to press to your bosom as my wife the

second daughter of Sir Thomas Tringle, Bart. The high

honour of that alliance has at last been refused by him in

very plain language. Had she become Mrs. Frank Houston, I

do not doubt but you would have done your duty to your own

cousin. That lot, however, has not been written for me in

the Book of Fates. The father is persistent in looking

upon me as an idle profligate adventurer; and though he

has been kind enough to hint more than once that it might

be possible for me to achieve the young lady, he has

succeeded in convincing me that I never should achieve

anything beyond the barren possession of her beauty. A

wife and family on my present very moderate income would

be burdensome; and, therefore, with infinite regrets, I

have bade adieu to Miss Tringle.

I have not hitherto been to see either you or your brother

or Mrs. Docimer because I have been altogether unaware

whether you or your brother or Mrs. Docimer would be glad

to see me. As you say yourself, there was a storm on the

Tyrolese hill-side,--in which there was more than one

wind blowing at the same time. I do not find fault with

anybody,--perhaps a storm was needed to clear the air. But

I hate storms. I do not pretend to be a very grand fellow,

but I do endeavour not to be disagreeable. Your brother,

if you remember, was a little hard. But, in truth, I say

this only to account for my apparent incivility.

And, perhaps, with another object;--to gain a little time

before I plunge into the stern necessity of answering all

that you say in your very comprehensive letter of five

lines. The first four lines I have answered. There will be

no such Mrs. Frank Houston as that suggested. And then, as

to the last line. Of course, you will see me again, and

that very speedily. So it would seem that the whole letter

is answered.

But yet it is not answered. There is so much in it that

whole sheets would not answer it. A quire of note-paper

stuffed full would hardly contain all that I might find

to say in answer to it,--on one side and the other. Nay,

I might fill as many reams of folio as are required for a

three-volume novel. And then I might call it by one of two

names, "The Doubts of Frank Houston," or "The Constancy of

Imogene Docimer,"--as I should at last bring my story to

one ending or the other. But the novel would contain that

fault which is so prevalent in the novels of the present

day. The hero would be a very namby-mamby sort of a

fellow, whereas the heroine would be too perfect for human

nature.

The hero would be always repeating to himself a certain

line out of a Latin poet, which, of all lines, is the most

heart-breaking;--

The better course I see and know;--

The worser one is where I go.

But then in novels the most indifferent hero comes out

right at last. Some god comes out of a theatrical cloud

and leaves the poor devil ten thousand a-year and a title.

He isn't much of a hero when he does go right under such

inducements, but he suffices for the plot, and everything

is rose-coloured. I would be virtuous at a much cheaper

rate;--if only a young man with his family might have

enough to eat and drink. What is your idea of the lowest

income at which a prudent,--say not idiotically-quixotic

hero,--might safely venture to be heroic?

Now I have written to you a long letter, and think

that I have indicated to you the true state of my

feelings. Whatever may turn up I do not think I shall go

fortune-hunting again. If half-a-million in female hands

were to throw itself at my head, there is no saying

whether I might not yield. But I do not think that I shall

again make inquiry as to the amount of booty supposed

to be within the walls of a city, and then sit down to

besiege the city with regular lines of approach. It is a

disgusting piece of work. I do not say but what I can lie,

and did lie foully on the last siege operation; but I do

not like it. And then to be told that one is unmanly by

the father, and a coward by the young lady, as occurred to

me in this affair, is disheartening. They were both right,

though I repudiated their assertions. This might be borne

as a prelude to success; but, as part of a failure, it is

disgusting. At the present moment I am considering what

economy might effect as to a future bachelor life, and

am meditating to begin with a couple of mutton chops and

half-a-pint of sherry for my dinner to-day. I know I shall

break down and have a woodcock and some champagne.

I will come to you about three on Sunday. If you can

manage that your brother should go out and make his calls,

and your sister attend divine service in the afternoon, it

would be a comfort.

Yours always,

F. HOUSTON.

It was a long rambling letter, without a word in it of solid

clearly-expressed meaning; but Imogene, as she read it, understood

very well its real purport. She understood more than its purport, for

she could see by it,--more clearly than the writer did himself,--how

far her influence over the man had been restored, and how far she

might be able to restore it. But was it well that she should regain

her influence? Her influence regained would simply mean a renewed

engagement. No doubt the storm on the hill-side had come from the

violence of true love on her part! No doubt her heart had been

outraged by the idea that he should give himself up to another woman

after all that had passed between them. She had been devoted to him

altogether; but yet she had been taught by him to regard her love as

a passion which of its nature contained something of the ridiculous.

He had never ceased gently to laugh at himself, even in her presence,

because he had subjected himself to her attraction. She had caught

up the same spirit,--or at any rate the expression of spirit,--and,

deceived by that, he had thought that to relieve herself from the

burden of her love would be as easy to her as to him. In making this

mistake he had been ignorant of the intrinsic difference in the

nature of a man's and of a woman's heart, and had been unaware that

that, which to a man at his best can only be a part of his interest

in his life's concerns, will to a woman be everything. She had

attempted to follow his lead when it did not seem that by doing so

she would lose anything. But when the moment of trial came she had

not in truth followed his lead at all. She made the attempt, and in

making the attempt gave him her permission to go from her; but when

she realised the fact that he was gone,--or going,--then she broke

down utterly. Then there came these contentions between her and her

brother, and that storm on the hill-side.

After that she passed some months of wretchedness. There was no

possibility for her to droll away her love. She had taught herself to

love the man whether he were good or whether he were bad,--whether

he were strong-hearted or whether he were fickle,--and the thing

was there present to her, either as a permanent blessing, or, much

more probably, a permanent curse. As the months went on she learned,

though she never saw Frank himself, that his purpose of marrying

Gertrude Tringle was not likely to be carried out. Then at last she

wrote that comprehensive letter of five lines,--as Houston had called

it. It had been intended to be comprehensive, and did, in fact,

contain much more than it seemed to say. "If you can bring yourself

to return to me, and to endure whatever inconveniences may be

incidental to your doing so, I hereby declare that I will do the

same; and I declare also that I can find for myself no other content

in the world except what may come to me from such an agreement

between us." It was this that she said in that last line, in which

she had begged him to come to her, if at the last moment "Tringle

pÃ¨re" should prove to be hard-hearted. All troubles of poverty, all

the lingering annoyance of waiting, all her possible doubts as to his

future want of persistency, would be preferable to the great loss

which she found herself unable to endure.

Yes; it would be very well that both her brother and her

sister-in-law should be absent when he came to her. To neither of

them had she said a word of her last correspondence;--to neither of

them a word of her renewed hopes. For the objections which might be

raised by either of them would she care little if she could succeed

with Frank. But while that success was still doubtful it would be

well to get at any rate the assistance of her sister-in-law. On the

Sunday afternoon Mr. Docimer would certainly be away from the house.

It was his custom to go off among his friends almost immediately

after lunch, and his absence might be counted on as assured. But with

his wife it was different. That project of sending her to church was

quite out of the question. Mrs. Docimer generally went to church of a

Sunday morning, and then always considered herself to have performed

the duties of the day. Nor did Imogene like the idea of this

appointment with her lover without a word spoken about it to her

sister-in-law. "Mary," she said, "Frank Houston is coming here on

Sunday."

"Frank!" exclaimed Mrs. Docimer. "I thought we were to consider

ourselves as altogether separated from that fortunate youth."

"I don't see why."

"Well; he left us not with the kindest possible feelings in the

Tyrol; and he has allowed ever so many months to pass by without

coming to see us. I asked Mudbury whether we should have him to

dinner one day last week, and he said it would be better to let him

go his own way."

"Nevertheless, he is coming here on Sunday."

"Has he written to you?"

"Yes, he has written to me,--in answer to a line from me. I told him

that I wished to see him."

"Was that wise?"

"Wise or not, I did so."

"Why should you wish to see him?"

"Am I to tell you the truth or a lie?"

"Not a lie, certainly. I will not ask for the truth if the truth be

unpalatable to you."

"It is unpalatable;--but yet I might as well tell it you. I wrote to

ask him to come and see me, because I love him so dearly."

"Oh, Imogene!"

"It is the truth."

"Did you tell him so?"

"No; I told him nothing. I merely said, that, if this match was over

between him and that girl of Sir Thomas Tringle, then he might come

and see me again. That was all that I said. His letter was very much

longer, but yet it did not say much. However, he is to come, and I am

prepared to renew our engagement should he declare that he is willing

to do so."

"What will Mudbury say?"

"I do not care very much what he says. I do not know that I am

bound to care. If I have resolved to entangle myself with a long

engagement, and Mr. Houston is willing to do the same, I do not

think that my brother should interfere. I am my own mistress, and am

dealing altogether with my own happiness."

"Imogene, we have discussed this so often before."

"Not a doubt; and with such effect that with my permission Frank was

enabled to ask this young woman with a lot of money to marry him. Had

it been arranged, I should have had no right to find fault with him,

however sore of heart I might have been. All that has fallen through,

and I consider myself quite entitled to renew my engagement again. I

shall not ask him, you may be sure of that."

"It comes to the same thing, Imogene."

"Very likely. It often happens that ladies mean that to be expressed

which it does not become them to say out loud. So it may be with me

on this occasion. Nevertheless, the word, if it have to be spoken,

will have to be spoken by him. What I want you to do now is to let me

have the drawing-room alone at three o'clock on Sunday. If anything

has to be said it will have to be said without witnesses."

With some difficulty Mrs. Docimer was induced to accede to the

request, and to promise that, at any rate for the present, nothing

should be said to her husband on the subject.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAPTAIN BATSBY.

In the meantime, poor Ayala, whose days were running on in a very

melancholy manner under her aunt's wings in Kingsbury Crescent, was

creating further havoc and disturbing the bosom of another lover. At

Stalham she had met a certain Captain Batsby, and had there attracted

his attention. Captain Batsby had begged her to ride with him on one

of those hunting-days, and had offered to give her a lead,--having

been at the moment particularly jealous of Colonel Stubbs. On that

day both Ayala and Nina had achieved great honour;--but this, to the

great satisfaction of Captain Batsby, had not been achieved under the

leadership of Colonel Stubbs. Larry Twentyman, long famous among the

riding-men of the Ufford and Rufford United Hunt, had been the hero

of the hour. Thus Captain Batsby's feelings had been spared, and

after that he had imagined that any kindly feelings which Ayala might

have had for the Colonel had sunk into abeyance. Then he had sought

some opportunity to push himself into Ayala's favour, but hitherto

his success in that direction had not been great.

Captain Batsby was regarded by the inhabitants of Stalham as a

nuisance,--but as a nuisance which could not be avoided. He was

half-brother to Sir Harry, whose mother had married, as her second

husband, a certain opulent Mr. Batsby out of Lancashire. They were

both dead now, and nothing of them remained but this Captain. He

was good-natured, simple, and rich, and in the arrangement of the

Albury-cum-Batsby affairs, which took place after the death of Mrs.

Batsby, made himself pleasant to everybody concerned. Sir Harry, who

certainly had no particular affection for his half-brother, always

bore with him on this account; and Lady Albury was equally gracious,

mindful of the wisdom of keeping on good terms with a rich relation.

It was as yet quite on the cards that the Batsby money might come to

some of the Albury scions.

But the Captain was anxious to provide himself with a wife who might

be the mother of scions of his own. In fact he had fallen fearfully

in love with Ayala, and was quite resolved to ask her to be his wife

when he found that she was just on the point of flying from Stalham.

He had intended to be quicker in his operations, but had lacked

opportunity. On that last hunting-day the Colonel had always been

still in his way, and circumstances had never seemed to favour him

when he endeavoured to have a few words in private with the young

lady. Then she was gone, and he could only learn respecting her that

she lived with her aunt, Mrs. Dosett, in Kingsbury Crescent.

"I'm blessed if Benjamin isn't smitten with that girl!" Benjamin was

Captain Batsby, and that girl was of course Ayala Dormer. The man

who blessed himself was Sir Harry Albury, and the observation was

addressed to his wife. This took place within an hour of Ayala's

departure from Stalham.

"Benjamin in love with Ayala Dormer! I don't believe a word of it,"

said Lady Albury. It was not surprising that she should not believe

it. There was her special favourite, Colonel Stubbs, infatuated

by the same girl; and, as she was aware, Tom Tringle, the heir of

Travers and Treason, was in the same melancholy condition. And, after

all, according to her thinking, there was nothing in the girl to

justify all this fury. In her eyes Ayala was pretty, but no more. She

would have declared that Ayala had neither bearing, nor beauty, nor

figure. A bright eye, a changing colour, and something of vivacity

about her mouth, was all of which Ayala had to boast. Yet here were

certainly the heir of the man of millions, and that Crichton of a

Colonel, both knocked off their legs. And now she was told that

Captain Batsby, who always professed himself hard to please in the

matter of young ladies, was in the same condition. "Do you mean to

say he told you?" she asked.

"No," said Sir Harry; "he is not at all the man to do that. In such a

matter he is sure to have a great secret, and be sure also to let his

secret escape in every word that he speaks. You will find that what I

say is truth."

Before the day was out Lady Albury did find her husband to be

correct. Captain Batsby, though he was very jealous of his secret,

acknowledged to himself the necessity of having one confidant. He

could hardly, he thought, follow Ayala without some assistance. He

knew nothing of Mrs. Dosett, nothing of Kingsbury Crescent, and very

little as to Ayala herself. He regarded Lady Albury as his chosen

friend, and generally communicated to her whatever troubles he might

have. These had consisted chiefly of the persecutions to which he had

been subjected by the mothers of portionless young ladies. How not to

get married off against his will had been the difficulty of his life.

His half sister-in-law had hitherto preserved him, and therefore to

her he now went for assistance in this opposite affair. "Rosalind,"

he said in his gravest voice, "what do you think I have to tell you?"

Lady Albury knew what was coming, but of course she hid her

knowledge. "I hope Mrs. Motherly has not written to you again," she

said. Mrs. Motherly was a lady who had been anxious that her daughter

should grace Captain Batsby's table, and had written to him letters,

asking him his intentions.

"Oh, dear; nothing of that kind. I do not care a straw for Mrs.

Motherly or the girl either. I never said a word to her that any one

could make a handle of. But I want to say a word to somebody now."

"What sort of word is it to be, Ben?"

"Ah," he groaned. "Rosalind, you must understand that I never was so

much in earnest in my life!"

"You are always in earnest."

Then he sighed very deeply. "I shall expect you to help me through

this matter, Rosalind."

"Do I not always help you?"

"Yes; you do. But you must stick to me now like wax. What do you

think of that young lady, Miss Dormer?"

"I think she is a pretty girl; and the gentlemen tell me that she

rides bravely."

"Don't you consider her divine?" he asked.

"My dear Ben, one lady never considers another to be divine. Among

ourselves we are terribly human, if not worse. Do you mean to tell me

that you are in love with Ayala Dormer?"

"You have guessed it," said he. "You always do guess everything."

"I generally do guess as much as that, when young gentlemen find

young ladies divine. Do you know anything about Miss Dormer?"

"Nothing but her beauty;--nothing but her wit;--nothing but her

grace! I know all that, and I don't seem to want to know any more."

"Then you must be in love! In the first place she hasn't got a

sixpence in the world."

"I don't want sixpences," said the Captain, proudly.

"And in the next place I am not at all sure that you would like her

people. Father and mother she has none."

"Then I cannot dislike them."

"But she has uncles and aunts, who are, I am afraid, objectionable.

She lives with a Mr. Dosett, who is a clerk in Somerset House,--a

respectable man, no doubt, but one whom you would not perhaps want at

your house very often."

"I don't care about uncles and aunts," said Captain Batsby. "Uncles

and aunts can always be dropped much easier than fathers and mothers.

At any rate I am determined to go on, and I want you to put me in the

way. How must I find her?"

"Go to No. 10, Kingsbury Crescent, Bayswater. Ask for Mrs. Dosett and

tell her what you've come about. When she knows that you are well

off she will not turn a deaf ear to you. What the girl may do it is

beyond me to say. She is very peculiar."

"Peculiar?" said the Captain with another sigh.

Lady Albury did, in truth, think Ayala was very peculiar, seeing that

she had refused two such men as Tom Tringle in spite of his wealth,

and Colonel Stubbs in spite of his position. This she had done though

she had no prospects of her own before her, and no comfortable home

at the present. Might it not be more than probable that she would

also refuse Captain Batsby, who was less rich than the one and

certainly less known to the world than the other? But as to this it

was not necessary that she should say anything. To assist Colonel

Stubbs she was bound by true affection for the man. In regard to her

husband's half-brother she was only bound to seem to assist him. "I

can write a line to Mrs. Dosett, if you wish it," she said, "or to

Miss Dormer."

"I wish you would. It would be best to the aunt, and just tell her

that I am fairly well off. She'll tell Ayala I could make quite a

proper settlement on her. That kind of thing does go a long way with

young ladies."

"It ought to do at any rate," said Lady Albury. "It certainly does

with the old ladies." Then the matter was settled. She was to write

to Mrs. Dosett and inform that lady that Captain Batsby intended to

call in Kingsbury Crescent in the form of a suitor for Miss Ayala

Dormer's hand. She would go on to explain that Captain Batsby was

quite in a position to marry and maintain a wife.

"And if she should accept me you'll have her down here, Rosalind?"

Here was a difficulty, as it was already understood that Ayala was to

be again brought down to Stalham on the Colonel's account; but Lady

Albury could make the promise, as, should the Captain be accepted,

no harm would in that case be done to the Colonel. She was, however,

tolerably sure that the Captain would not be accepted. "And, if she

shouldn't take me all at once, still you might have her," suggested

the lover. As to this, which was so probable, there would be a great

difficulty. Ayala was to be seduced into coming again to Stalham if

possible,--but specially on the Colonel's behoof. In such a case it

must be done behind the Captain's back. Lady Albury saw the troubles

which were coming, but nevertheless she promised that she would see

what could be done. All this having been settled, Captain Batsby took

his leave and went off to London.

Mrs. Dosett, when she received Lady Albury's letter, was very much

surprised. She too failed to understand what there was in Ayala to

produce such a multiplicity of suitors, one after another. When

Lucy came to her and had begun to be objectionable, she had thought

that she might some day be relieved from her troubles by the girl's

marriage. Lucy, to her eyes, was beautiful, and mistress of a manner

likely to be winning in a man's eyes, though ungracious to herself.

But in regard to Ayala she had expressed nothing of the kind. Ayala

was little, and flighty, and like an elf,--as she had remarked to her

husband. But now, within twelve months, three lovers had appeared,

and each of them suitable for matrimonial purposes. She could only

tell her husband, and then tell Ayala.

"Captain Batsby! I don't believe it!" said Ayala, almost crying. If

Colonel Stubbs could not be made to assume the garb of an Angel of

Light what was she to think of Captain Batsby?

"You can read Lady Albury's letter."

"I don't want to read Lady Albury's letter. I won't see him. I don't

care what my uncle says. I don't care what anybody says. Yes, I do

know him. I remember him very well. I spoke to him once or twice, and

I did not like him at all."

"You said the same of Colonel Stubbs."

"I didn't say the same of Colonel Stubbs. He is a great deal worse

than Colonel Stubbs."

"And you said just the same of Tom."

"He is the same as Tom;--just as bad. It is no good going on about

him, Aunt Margaret. I won't see him. If I were locked up in a room

with him I wouldn't speak a word to him. He has no right to come."

"A gentleman, my dear, has always a right to ask a lady to be his

wife if he has got means."

"You always say so, Aunt Margaret, but I don't believe it. There

should be,--there should have been,--I don't know what; but I am

quite sure the man has no right to come to me, and I won't see him."

To this resolution Ayala clung, and, as she was very firm about it,

Mrs. Dosett, after consultation with her husband, at last gave way,

and consented to see Captain Batsby herself.

In due time Captain Batsby came. At any knock heard at the door

during this period Ayala flew out of the drawing-room into her own

chamber; and at the Captain's knock she flew with double haste,

feeling sure that this was the special knock. The man was shown

up, and in a set speech declared his purpose to Mrs. Dosett, and

expressed a hope that Lady Albury might have written on the subject.

Might he be allowed to see the young lady?

"I fear that it would be of no service, Captain Batsby."

"Of no service?"

"On receiving Lady Albury's letter I was of course obliged to tell my

niece the honour you proposed to do her."

"I am quite in earnest, you know," said the Captain.

"So I suppose, as Lady Albury would not have written, nor would you

have come on such a mission. But so is my niece in earnest."

"She will, at any rate, hear what I have got to say."

"She would rather not," said Mrs. Dosett. "She thinks that it would

only be painful to both of you. As she has quite made up her mind

that she cannot accept the honour you propose to do her, what good

would it serve?"

"Is Miss Dormer at home?" asked the Captain, suddenly. Mrs. Dosett

hesitated for a while, anxious to tell a lie on the matter, but

fearing to do so. "I suppose she is at home," continued the urgent

lover.

"Miss Dormer is at present in her own chamber."

"Then I think I ought to see her," continued the Captain. "She can't

know at present what is my income."

"Lady Albury has told us that it is sufficient."

"But that means nothing. Your niece cannot be aware that I have a

very pretty little place of my own down in Berkshire."

"I don't think it would make a difference," said Mrs. Dosett.

"Or that I shall be willing to settle upon her a third of my income.

It is not many gentlemen who will do as much as that for a young

lady, when the young lady has nothing of her own."

"I am sure you are very generous."

"Yes, I am. I always was generous. And I have no impediments to get

rid of; not a trouble of that kind in all the world. And I don't owe

a shilling. Very few young men, who have lived as much in the world

as I have, can say that."

"I am sure your position is all that is desirable."

"That's just it. No position could be more desirable. I should

give up the service immediately as soon as I was married." At that

Mrs. Dosett bowed, not knowing what words to find for further

conversation. "After that," continued the Captain, "do you mean to

say that I am not to be allowed to see the young lady?"

"I cannot force her to come down, Captain Batsby."

"I would if I were you."

"Force a young lady?"

"Something ought to be done," said he, beginning almost to whine.

"I have come here on purpose to see her, and I am quite prepared to

do what is handsome. My half-sister, Lady Albury, had her down at

Stalham, and is quite anxious to have her there again. I suppose you

have no objection to make to me, Mrs. Dosett?"

"Oh, dear no."

"Or Mr. Dosett?"

"I do not say that he has, Captain Batsby; but this is a matter in

which a young lady's word must be paramount. We cannot force her to

marry you, or even to speak to you." The Captain still went on with

entreaties, till Mrs. Dosett found herself so far compelled to accede

to him as to go up to Ayala's room and beg her to come down and

answer this third suitor with her own voice. But Ayala was immovable.

When her aunt came near her she took hold of the bed as though

fearing an attempt would be made to drag her out of the room. She

again declared that if she were forced into the room below nothing

could oblige her to speak even a word.

"As for thanking him," she said, "you can do that yourself, Aunt

Margaret, if you like. I am not a bit obliged to him; but, if you

choose to say so, you may; only pray do tell him to go away,--and

tell him never, never to come back any more." Then Mrs. Dosett

returned to the drawing-room, and declared that her embassy had been

quite in vain.

"In all my life," said Captain Batsby, as he took his leave, "I never

heard of such conduct before." Nevertheless, as he went away he made

up his mind that Lady Albury should get Ayala again down to Stalham.

He was very angry, but his love remained as hot as ever.

"As I did not succeed in seeing her," he said, in a letter to his

half-sister, "of course I do not know what she might have said to

me herself. I might probably have induced her to give me another

hearing. I put it all down to that abominable aunt, who probably has

some scheme of her own, and would not let Miss Dormer come down to

me. If you will have her again at Stalham, everything may be made to

go right."

\* \* \* \* \* \*

At home, in Kingsbury Crescent, when Ayala had gone to bed, both

Mr. and Mrs. Dosett expressed themselves as much troubled by the

peculiarity of Ayala's nature. Mrs. Dosett declared her conviction

that that promised legacy from Uncle Tom would never be forthcoming,

because he had been so much offended by the rejection of his own son.

And even should the legacy remain written in Sir Thomas's will, where

would Ayala find a home if Mr. Dosett were to die before the baronet?

This rejection of suitors,--of fit, well-to-do, unobjectionable

suitors,--was held by Mrs. Dosett to be very wicked, and a direct

flying in the face of Providence. "Does she think," said Mrs. Dosett,

urging the matter with all her eloquence to her husband, "that young

men with incomes are to be coming after her always like this?" Mr.

Dosett shook his head and scratched it at the same time, which was

always a sign with him that he was not at all convinced by the

arguments used, but that he did not wish to incur further hostility

by answering them. "Why shouldn't she see an eligible man when he

comes recommended like this?"

"I suppose, my dear, she didn't think him nice enough."

"Nice! pshaw! I call it a direct flying in the face of Providence. If

he were ever so nasty and twice as old she ought to think twice about

it in her position. There is poor Tom, they say, absolutely ill. The

housekeeper was over here from Queen's Gate the other day, and she

declares that that affair about the policeman all came from his being

in love. And now he has left the business and has gone to Merle Park,

because he is so knocked in a heap that he cannot hold up his head."

"I don't see why love should make a man punch a policeman's breath

out of him," said Mr. Dosett.

"Of course Tom was foolish; but he would do very well if she would

have him. Of course your sister, and Sir Thomas, and all of them,

will be very furious. What right will she have to expect money after

that?"

"Tom is an ass," said Mr. Dosett.

"I suppose Colonel Stubbs is an ass too. What I want to know is what

it is she looks for. Like any other girl, she expects to get married

some day, I suppose; but she has been reading poetry, and novels, and

trash, till she has got her head so full of nonsense that she doesn't

know what it is she does want. I should like to shake her till I

shook all the romance out of her. If there is anything I do hate it

is romance, while bread and meat, and coals, and washing, are so

dear." With this Mrs. Dosett took herself and her troubles up to her

bedroom.

Mr. Dosett sat for a while gazing with speculative eyes at the embers

of the fire. He was conscious in his heart that some part of that

attack upon romance in general was intended for himself. Though he

did not look to be romantic, especially when seated at his desk in

Somerset House, with his big index-book before him, still there was

left about him some touch of poetry, and an appreciation of the finer

feelings of our nature. Though he could have wished that Ayala should

have been able to take one of these three well-to-do suitors, who

were so anxious to obtain her hand, still he could not bring himself

not to respect her, still he was unable not to love her, because she

was steadfastly averse to accept as a husband a man for whom she had

no affection. As he looked at the embers he asked himself how it

ought to be. Here was a girl whose only gift in life was her own

personal charm. That that charm must be powerful was evident from the

fact that she could so attract such men as these. Of the good things

of the world, of a pleasant home, of ample means, and of all that

absence of care which comes from money, poor Mr. Dosett had by no

means a poor appreciation. That men are justified in seeking these

good things by their energy, industry, and talents, he was quite

confident. How was it with a girl who had nothing else but her

beauty,--or, perhaps, her wit,--in lieu of energy and industry? Was

she justified in carrying her wares also into the market, and making

the most of them? The embers had burned so low, and he had become so

cold before he had settled the question in his own mind, that he was

obliged to go up to bed, leaving it unsettled.

CHAPTER XL.

AUNT EMMELINE'S NEW PROPOSITION.

A few days after this, just as the bread and cheese had been put on

the table for the modest mid-day meal at Kingsbury Crescent, there

came a most unwonted honour on Mrs. Dosett. It was a call from no

less a person than Lady Tringle herself, who had come all the way up

from Merle Park on purpose. It was a Saturday. She had travelled by

herself and intended to go back on the same day with her husband.

This was an amount of trouble which she very seldom gave herself,

not often making a journey to London during the periods of her rural

sojourn; and, when she began by assuring her sister-in-law that she

made the journey with no object but that of coming to Kingsbury

Crescent, Mrs. Dosett was aware that something very important was

to be communicated. Mrs. Dosett and Ayala were together in the

dining-room when Lady Tringle appeared, and the embracings were very

affectionate. They were particularly affectionate towards Ayala, who

was kissed as though nothing had ever happened to interfere with

the perfect love existing between the aunt and the niece. They were

more than friendly, almost sisterly, towards Mrs. Dosett, whom in

truth Lady Tringle met hardly more than once in a year. It was very

manifest that Aunt Emmeline wanted to have something done. "Now, my

darling," she said, turning to Ayala, "if you would not mind going

away for ten minutes, I could say a few words on very particular

business to your aunt." Then she gave her niece a tender little

squeeze and assumed her sweetest smile.

It will be as well to go back a little and tell the cause which had

produced this unexpected visit. There had been very much of real

trouble at Merle Park. Everything was troublesome. Gertrude had

received her final letter from her lover, had declared herself to be

broken-hearted, and was evincing her sorrow by lying in bed half the

day, abstaining from her meals, and relieving herself from famine by

sly visits to the larder. It was supposed that her object was to bend

the stony heart of her father, but the process added an additional

trouble to her mother. Then the Trafficks were a sore vexation. It

was now nearly the end of January and they were still at Merle Park.

There had been a scene in which Sir Thomas had been very harsh. "My

dear," he had said to his wife, "I find that something must be done

to the chimney of the north room. The workmen must be in it by the

first of February. See and have all the furniture taken out before

they come." Now the north room was the chamber in which the Trafficks

slept, and the Trafficks were present when the order was given.

No one believed the story of the chimney. This was the mode of

expulsion which Sir Thomas had chosen on the spur of the moment. Mr.

Traffick said not a word, but in the course of the morning Augusta

expostulated with her mother. This was also disagreeable. Then the

condition of Tom was truly pitiable. All his trust in champagne, all

his bellicose humour, had deserted him. He moped about the place the

most miserable of human beings, spending hour after hour in imploring

his mother's assistance. But Lucy with her quiet determination, and

mute persistency in waiting, was a source of almost greater annoyance

to her aunt than even her own children. That Lucy should in any

degree have had her way with Mr. Hamel, had gone against the grain

with her. Mr. Hamel, to her thinking, was a person to be connected

with whom would be a disgrace. She was always speaking of his birth,

of his father's life, and of those Roman iniquities. She had given

way for a time when she had understood that her husband intended to

give the young people money enough to enable them to marry. In that

case Lucy would at once be taken away from the house. But now all

that had come to an end. Sir Thomas had given no money, and had even

refused to give any money. Nevertheless he was peacefully indulgent

to Lucy, and was always scolding his wife because she was hostile to

Lucy's lover.

In this emergency she induced him to accede to a proposition, by

which one of her miseries would be brought to an end and another

might perhaps be remedied. A second exchange should be made. Lucy

should be sent back to Kingsbury Crescent, and Ayala should once more

be brought into favour at Merle Park, Queen's Gate, and Glenbogie.

"Your brother will never put up with it," said Sir Thomas. Lady

Tringle was not afraid of her brother, and thought that by soft words

she might even talk over her sister-in-law. Ayala, she knew, had been

troublesome in Kingsbury Crescent. She was sure, she said, Ayala's

whims would of their nature be more troublesome to such a woman as

Mrs. Dosett than Lucy's obstinacy. Ayala had no doubt been pert and

disobedient at Glenbogie and at Rome, but there had been an unbending

obduracy about Lucy which had been more distasteful to Aunt Emmeline

than even Ayala's pert disobedience. "It will be the only way," she

had said to Sir Thomas, "to put Tom on his legs again. If the girl

comes back here she will be sure to have him at last." There was

much in this which to Sir Thomas was weak and absurd. That prolonged

journey round by San Francisco, Japan, and Pekin, was the remedy

which recommended itself to him. But he was less able to despatch

Tom at once to Japan than the elder Faddle had been to send off the

younger Faddle to the stern realities of life in Aberdeen. He was

quite willing that Tom should marry Ayala if it could be arranged,

and therefore he gave his consent.

So armed, Lady Tringle had come up to Kingsbury Crescent, and was

now about to undertake a task, which she acknowledged to herself to

be difficult. She, in the first place, had had her choice and had

selected a niece. Then she had quarrelled with her own selection, and

had changed nieces. This had been done to accommodate her own fancy;

and now she wanted to change the nieces back again! She felt aware

that her request was unreasonable, and came, therefore, determined to

wrap it up in her blandest smiles.

When Ayala had left the room Mrs. Dosett sat mute in attention. She

was quite aware that something very much out of the ordinary way was

to be asked of her. In her ordinary way Lady Tringle never did smile

when she came to Kingsbury Crescent. She would be profuse in finery,

and would seem to throw off sparks of wealth at every word she spoke.

Now even her dress had been toned down to her humbler manner, and

there was no touch of her husband's purse in her gait. "Margaret,"

she said, "I have a proposition of great importance to make to you."

Mrs. Dosett opened her eyes wider and sat still mute. "That poor girl

is not,--is not,--is not doing perhaps the very best for herself here

at Kingsbury Crescent."

"Why is she not doing the best for herself?" asked Mrs. Dosett,

angrily.

"Do not for a moment suppose that I am finding fault either with you

or my brother."

"You'd be very wrong if you did."

"No doubt;--but I am not finding fault. I know how very generous you

have both been. Of course Sir Thomas is a rich man, and what he gives

to one of the girls comes to nothing. Of course it is different with

you. It is hard upon my brother to have any such burden put upon him;

and it is very good both in him and you to bear it."

"What is it you want us to do now, Emmeline?"

"Well;--I was going to explain. I do think it a great pity that Tom

and Ayala should not become man and wife. If ever any young man ever

did love a girl I believe that he loves her."

"I think he does."

"It is dreadful. I never saw anything like it. He is just for all the

world like those young men we read of who do all manner of horrible

things for love,--smothering themselves and their young women with

charcoal, or throwing them into the Regent's Canal. I am constantly

afraid of something happening. It was all because of Ayala that he

got into that terrible row at the police court,--and then we were

afraid he was going to take to drink. He has given all that up now."

"I am very glad he has given drink up. That wouldn't do him any

good."

"He is quite different now. The poor fellow hardly takes anything. He

will sit all the afternoon smoking cigarettes and sipping tea. It is

quite sad to see him. Then he comes and talks to me, and is always

asking me to make Ayala have him."

"I don't think that anybody can ever make Ayala do anything."

"Not quite by talking to her. I dare say not. I did not mean to say a

word to her about it just now."

"We can do nothing, I fear," said Mrs. Dosett.

"I was going to suggest something. But I wanted first to say a word

or two about poor Lucy." They were just at present all "poor" to

Lady Tringle,--Ayala, Lucy, Tom, and Gertrude. Even Augusta was poor

because she was to be turned out of her bedroom.

"Is she in trouble?"

"Oh, dear, yes. But," she added, thinking well to correct herself,

so that Mrs. Dosett might not imagine that she would have to look

forward to troubles with Lucy, "she could arrange her affairs, no

doubt, if she were not with us. She is engaged to that Mr. Isadore

Hamel, the sculptor."

"So I have heard."

"He does not earn very much just at present, I fear. Sir Thomas did

offer to help him, but he was perhaps a little hoity-toity, giving

himself airs. That, however, did not come off, and there they are,

waiting. I don't mean to say a word against poor Lucy. I think it a

pity, you know; but perhaps it was natural enough. He isn't what I

should have liked for a niece who was living with me just as though

she was my daughter; but I couldn't help that."

"But what are we to do, Emmeline?"

"Let them just change places again."

"Change again! Ayala go to you and Lucy come back here!"

"Just that. If Ayala were with us she would be sure to get used to

Tom at last. And then Lucy could manage her affairs with Mr. Hamel so

much better if she were with you."

"Why should she manage her affairs better if she were with us?"

Lady Tringle was aware that this was the weak part of her case. On

the poor Ayala and poor Tom side of the question there was a good

deal which might be said. Then, though she might not convince, she

might be eloquent. But, touching Lucy, she could say nothing which

did not simply signify that she wanted to get rid of the girl. Now,

Mrs. Dosett had also wanted to get rid of Lucy when the former

exchange had been made. "What I mean is, that, if she were away, Sir

Thomas would be more likely to do something for her." This was an

invention at the spur of the moment.

"Do you not feel that the girls should not be chucked about like

balls from a battledore?" asked Mrs. Dosett.

"For their own good, Margaret. I only propose it for their own good.

You can't but think it would be a good thing for Ayala to be married

to our Tom."

"If she liked him."

"Why shouldn't she like him? You know what that means. Poor Ayala is

young, and a little romantic. She would be a great deal happier if

all that could be knocked out of her. She has to marry somebody, and

the sooner she settles down the better. Sir Thomas will do anything

for them;--a horse and carriage, and anything she could set her heart

upon! There is nothing Sir Thomas would not do for Tom so as to get

him put upon his legs again."

"I don't think Ayala would go."

"She must, you know," whispered Lady Tringle, "if we both tell her."

"And Lucy?"

"She must too," again whispered Lady Tringle. "If they are told they

are to go, what else can they do? Why shouldn't Ayala wish to come?"

"There were quarrels before."

"Yes;--because of Augusta. Augusta is married now." Lady Tringle

could not quite say that Augusta was gone.

"Will you speak to Ayala?"

"Perhaps it would come better from you, Margaret, if you agree with

me."

"I am not sure that I do. I am quite sure that your brother would not

force her to go, whether she wished it or not. No doubt we should be

glad if the marriage could be arranged. But we cannot force a girl to

marry, and her aversion in this case is so strong--"

"Aversion!"

"Aversion to being married, I mean. It is so strong that I do not

think she will go of her own accord to any house where she is likely

to meet her cousin. I dare say she may be a fool. I say nothing about

that. Of course, she shall be asked; and, if she wishes to go, then

Lucy can be asked too. But of course it must all depend upon what

your brother says."

Then Lady Tringle took her leave without again seeing Ayala herself,

and as she went declared her intention of calling at Somerset

House. She would not think it right, she said, in a matter of such

importance, to leave London without consulting her brother. It might

be possible, she thought, that she would be able to talk her brother

over; whereas his wife, if she had the first word, might turn him the

other way.

"Is Aunt Emmeline gone?" asked Ayala, when she came down. "I am glad

she has gone, because I never know how to look when she calls me

dear. I know she hates me."

"I hope not, Ayala."

"I am sure she does, because I hated Augusta. I do hate Augusta, and

my aunt hates me. The only one of the lot I like is Uncle Tom."

Then the proposition was made, Ayala sitting with her mouth wide open

as the details, one after another, were opened out to her. Her aunt

did it with exquisite fairness, abstaining from opening out some

of the details which might be clear enough to Ayala without any

explanation. Her Aunt Emmeline was very anxious to have her back

again,--the only reason for her former expulsion having been the

enmity of Augusta. Her Uncle Tom and her aunt, and, no doubt,

Gertrude, would be very glad to receive her. Not a word was said

about Tom. Then something was urged as to the material comforts of

the Tringle establishments, and of the necessary poverty of Kingsbury

Crescent.

"And Lucy is to have the poverty?" said Ayala, indignantly.

"I think it probable, my dear, that before long Lucy will become the

wife of Mr. Hamel."

"And you want to get rid of me?" demanded Ayala.

"No, my dear; not so. You must not think that for a moment. The

proposition has not originated with me at all. I am endeavouring to

do my duty by explaining to you the advantages which you would enjoy

by going to your Aunt Emmeline, and which you certainly cannot have

if you remain here. And I must tell you, that, if you return to Sir

Thomas, he will probably provide for you. You know what I mean by

providing for you?"

"No, I don't," said Ayala, who had in her mind some dim idea that her

cousin Tom was supposed to be a provision. She was quite aware that

her Aunt Margaret, in her explanation as hitherto given, had not

mentioned Tom's name, and was sure that it had not been omitted

without reason.

"By providing, I mean that if you are living in his house he will

leave you something in his will;--as would be natural that he should

do for a child belonging to him. Your Uncle Reginald"--this she said

in a low and very serious tone--"will, I fear, have nothing to leave

to you." Then there was silence for some minutes, after which Mrs.

Dosett asked the important question, "Well, Ayala, what do you think

about it?"

"Must I go?" said Ayala. "May I stay?"

"Yes, my dear; you may certainly stay if you wish it."

"Then I will stay," said Ayala, jumping up on to her feet. "You do

not want to turn me out, Aunt Margaret?" Then she went down on her

knees, and, leaning on her aunt's lap, looked up into her face. "If

you will keep me I will try to be good."

"My dear, you are good. I have nothing to complain of. Of course we

will keep you. Nobody has thought for a moment of bidding you go. But

you should understand that when your aunt made the proposition I was

bound to tell it you." Then there was great embracing and kissing,

and Ayala felt that she was relieved from a terrible danger. She had

often declared that no one could make her marry her cousin Tom; but

it had seemed to her for a moment that if she were given up bodily to

the Tringles no mode of escape would be open to her short of suicide.

There had been a moment almost of regret that she had never brought

herself to regard Jonathan Stubbs as an Angel of Light.

At Somerset House Lady Tringle made her suggestion to her brother

with even more flowery assurance of general happiness than she had

used in endeavouring to persuade his wife. Ayala would, of course,

be married to Tom in the course of the next six months, and during

the same period Lucy, no doubt, would be married to that very

enterprising but somewhat obstinate young man, Mr. Hamel. Thus there

would be an end to all the Dormer troubles; "and you, Reginald," she

said, "will be relieved from a burden which never ought to have been

laid upon your shoulder."

"We will think of it," he said very gravely, over and over again.

Beyond that "we will think of it" he could not be induced to utter a

word.

CHAPTER XLI.

"A COLD PROSPECT!"

Three days were allowed to Frank Houston to consider within his own

mind what he would say for himself and what he would propose finally

to do when he should see Miss Docimer on the appointed Sunday. He was

called upon to decide whether, after so many resolutions made to the

contrary, he would now at last bring himself to encounter poverty

and a family,--genteel poverty with about seven hundred and fifty

pounds a-year between himself and his wife. He had hitherto been very

staunch on the subject, and had unfortunately thought that Imogene

Docimer had been as firmly fixed in her determination. His theory had

in itself been good. If two people marry they are likely, according

to the laws of nature, to have very soon more than two. In the

process of a dozen years they may not improbably become ever so many

more than two. Funds which were barely enough, if enough, for two,

would certainly fail to be enough for half-a-dozen. His means were

certainly not enough for himself, as he had hitherto found them.

Imogene's means were less even than his own. Therefore, it was clear

that he and Imogene ought not to marry and encounter the danger of

all those embryo mouths. There was a logic about it which had seemed

to him to be unanswerable. It was a logic which applied to his case

above all others. The man who had a hope of earning money need not

be absolutely bound by it. To him the money might come as quickly

as the mouths. With the cradles would arrive the means of buying

the cradles. And to the man who had much more than enough for

himself,--to such a man as he had expected to be while he was looking

forward to the coffin of that iniquitous uncle,--the logic did

not apply at all. In defending himself, both to himself and to

Imogene, he was very strong upon that point. A man who had plenty

and would not divide his plenty with another might with truth be

called selfish. Rich old bachelors might with propriety be called

curmudgeons. But was it right that a man should be abused,--even by

a young lady to whom, under more propitious circumstances, he had

offered his heart,--when he declared himself unwilling to multiply

suffering by assisting to bring into the world human beings whom he

would be unable to support? He had felt himself to be very strong in

his logic, and had unfortunately made the mistake of supposing that

it was as clear to Imogene as to himself.

Then he had determined to rectify the inconvenience of his position.

It had become manifest to him whilst he was waiting for his uncle's

money that not only were his own means insufficient for married life

but even for single comfort. It would always come to pass that when

he had resolved on two mutton chops and half-a-pint of sherry the

humble little meal would spread itself into woodcock and champagne.

He regarded it as an unkindness in Providence that he should not have

been gifted with economy. Therefore, he had to look about him for a

remedy; and, as Imogene was out of the question, he found a remedy in

Gertrude Tringle. He had then believed that everything was settled

for him,--not, indeed, in a manner very pleasant, but after a fashion

that would make life possible to him. Sir Thomas had given one of

his daughters, with a large sum of money, to such a man as Septimus

Traffick,--a man more impecunious than himself, one whom Frank did

not hesitate to pronounce to be much less of a gentleman. That seat

in the House of Commons was to him nothing. There were many men in

the House of Commons to whom he would hardly condescend to speak.

To be the younger son of a latter-day peer was to him nothing. He

considered himself in all respects to be a more eligible husband than

Septimus Traffick. Therefore he had entertained but little doubt when

he found himself accepted by Gertrude herself and her mother. Then

by degrees he had learnt to know something of the young lady to whom

he intended to devote himself; and it had come to pass that the

better he had known the less he had liked her. Nevertheless he had

persevered, groaning in spirit as he thought of the burden with which

he was about to inflict himself. Then had come the release. Sir

Thomas had explained to him that no money would be forthcoming; and

the young lady had made to him a foolish proposition, which, as he

thought, fully justified him in regarding the match as at an end.

And then he had three days in which to make up his mind. It may be a

question whether three days are ever much better than three minutes

for such a purpose. A man's mind will very generally refuse to make

itself up until it be driven and compelled by emergency. The three

days are passed not in forming but in postponing judgment. In nothing

is procrastination so tempting as in thought. So it came to pass,

that through the Thursday, the Friday, and the Saturday, Frank

Houston came to no conclusion, though he believed that every hour

of the time was devoted to forming one. Then, as he ate his dinner

on Saturday night at his club, a letter was brought to him, the

handwriting of which was familiar to him. This letter assisted him

little in thinking.

The letter was from Gertrude Tringle, and need not be given in its

entirety. There was a good deal of reproach, in that he had been so

fickle as to propose to abandon her at the first touch of adversity.

Then she had gone on to say, that, knowing her father a great deal

better than he could do, she was quite satisfied that the money would

be all right. But the last paragraph of the letter shall be given.

"Papa has almost yielded already. I have been very ill;"--here the

extent of her malady was shown by the strength of the underscoring

with which the words were made significant;--"very ill indeed," she

went on to say, "as you will understand if you have ever really loved

me. I have kept my bed almost ever since I got your cruel letter."

Bed and cruel were again strenuously underscored. "It has made papa

very unhappy, and, though he has said nothing to myself, he has told

mamma that if I am really in earnest he will do something for us."

The letter was long, but this is all the reader need see of it. But

it must be explained that the young lady had greatly exaggerated her

mother's words, and that her mother had exaggerated those which Sir

Thomas had spoken. "She is a stupid idiot," Sir Thomas had said to

his wife. "If she is obedient, and does her duty, of course I shall

do something for her some day." This had been stretched to that

promise of concession which Gertrude communicated to her lover.

This was the assistance which Frank Houston received in making up

his mind on Saturday night. If what the girl said was true, there

was still open to him the manner of life which he had prepared for

himself; and he did believe the announcement to be true. Though Sir

Thomas had been so persistent in his refusals, his experience in life

had taught him to believe that a parent's sternness is never a match

for a daughter's obstinacy. Had there been a touch of tenderness in

his heart to the young lady herself he would not have abandoned her

so easily. But he had found his consolation when giving up his hope

of Sir Thomas's money. Now, should he again take to the girl, and

find his consolation in accepting the money? Should he resolve upon

doing so, this would materially affect any communication which he

might make to Imogene on the following day.

While thus in doubt he went into the smoking-room and there he found

any thinking to be out of the question. A great question was being

debated as to club law. One man had made an assertion. He had

declared that another man had been seen playing cards in a third

man's company. A fourth man had, thereupon, put his hat on his head,

and had declared contumaciously that the "assertion was not true."

Having so declared he had contumaciously stalked out of the room,

and had banged the door after him,--very contumaciously indeed.

The question was whether the contumacious gentleman had misbehaved

himself in accordance with the rules of the club, and, if so, what

should be done to him. Not true is as bad as "false." "False,"

applied to a gentleman in a club, must be matter either of an apology

or expulsion. The objectionable word had, no doubt, been said in

defence of an absent man, and need not, perhaps, have been taken up

had the speaker not at once put on his hat and stalked out of the

room, and banged the door. It was asserted that a lie may be given

by the way in which a door is banged. And yet no club punishes the

putting on of hats, or stalking off, or the banging of doors. It was

a difficult question, and occupied Frank Houston till two o'clock

in the morning, to the exclusion of Gertrude Tringle and Imogene

Docimer.

On the Sunday morning he was not up early, nor did he go to church.

The contumacious gentleman was a friend of his, whom he knew that no

arguments would induce to apologise. He believed also that gentleman

No. 3 might have been seen playing cards with gentleman No. 2,--so

that there was no valid excuse for the banging of the door. He was

much exercised by the points to be decided, so that when he got into

a cab to be taken to Mrs. Docimer's house he had hardly come to

any other conclusion than that one which had arisen to him from a

comparison between the two young ladies. Imogene was nearly perfect,

and Gertrude was as nearly the reverse as a young lady could be with

the proper number of eyes in her head and a nose between them. The

style of her letter was abominable to him. "Very ill indeed;--as you

will understand, if you ever really loved me!" There was a mawkish

clap-trap about it which thoroughly disgusted him. Everything from

Imogene was straightforward and downright whether it were love or

whether it were anger. But then to be settled with an income of

Â£3,000 a year would relieve him from such a load of care!

"And so Tringle pÃ¨re does not see the advantage of such a

son-in-law," said Imogene, after the first greetings were over

between them. The greetings had been very simple,--just a touch of

the hand, just a civil word,--civil, but not in the least tender,

just an inclination of the head, and then two seats occupied with all

the rug between them.

"Yes, indeed!" said Frank. "The man is a fool, because he will

probably get somebody who will behave less well to his daughter, and

make a worse use of his money."

"Just so. One can only be astonished at his folly. Is there no hope

left?"

"A glimmer there is."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I got a letter last night from my lady-love, in which she tells

me that she is very ill, and that her sickness is working upon her

father's bowels."

"Frank!"

"It is the proper language;--working upon her father's bowels of

compassion. Fathers always have bowels of compassion at last."

"You will return then, of course?"

"What do you say?"

"As for myself,--or as for you?"

"As a discreet and trusty counsellor. To me you have always been a

trusty counsellor."

"Then I should put a few things into a bag, go down to Merle Park,

and declare that, in spite of all the edicts that ever came from a

father's mouth, you cannot absent yourself while you know that your

Gertrude is ill."

"And so prepare a new cousin for you to press to your bosom."

"If you can endure her for always, why should not I for an hour or

two, now and again?"

"Why not, indeed? In fact, Imogene, this enduring, and not

enduring,--even this living, and not living,--is, after all, but an

affair of the imagination. Who can tell but, that as years roll on,

she may be better-looking even than you."

"Certainly."

"And have as much to say for herself?"

"A great deal more that is worth hearing."

"And behave herself as a mother of a family with quite as much

propriety?"

"In all that I do not doubt that she would be my superior."

"More obedient I am sure she would be."

"Or she would be very disobedient."

"And then she can provide me and my children with ample comforts."

"Which I take it is the real purpose for which a wife should be

married."

"Therefore," said he,--and then he stopped.

"And therefore there should be no doubt."

"Though I hate her," he said, clenching his fist with violence as he

spoke, "with every fibre of my heart,--still you think there should

be no doubt?"

"That, Frank, is violent language,--and foolish."

"And though I love you so intensely that whenever I see her the

memory of you becomes an agony to me."

"Such language is only more violent and more foolish."

"Surely not, if I have made up my mind at last, that I never will

willingly see Miss Tringle again." Here he got up, and walking across

the rug, stood over her, and waited as though expecting some word

from her. But she, putting her two hands up to her head, and brushing

her hair away from her forehead, looked up to him for what further

words might come to him. "Surely not," he continued, "if I have made

up my mind at last, that nothing shall ever again serve to rob me of

your love,--if I may still hope to possess it."

"Oh, Frank!" she said, "how mean I am to be a creature obedient to

the whistle of such a master as you!"

"But are you obedient?"

"You know that well enough. I have had no Gertrude with whom I have

vacillated, whether for the sake of love or lucre. Whatever you may

be,--whether mean or noble,--you are the only man with whom I can

endure to live, for whom I would endure to die. Of course I had

not expected that your love should be like mine. How should it be

so, seeing that you are a man and that I am but a woman." Here he

attempted to seat himself by her on the sofa, which she occupied, but

she gently repulsed him, motioning him towards the chair which he had

occupied, "Sit there, Frank," she said, "so that we may look into

each other's faces and talk seriously. Is it to come to this then,

that I am to ruin you at last?"

"There will be no ruin."

"But there will, if we are married now. Shall I tell you the kind of

life which would satisfy me?"

"Some little place abroad?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no! No place to which you would be confined at all. If

I may remain as I am, knowing that you intend to marry no one else,

feeling confident that there is a bond binding us together even

though we should never become man and wife, I should be, if not

happy, at least contented."

"That is a cold prospect."

"Cold;--but not ice-cold, as would have been the other. Cold, but not

wretchedly cold, as would be the idea always present to me that I had

reduced you to poverty. Frank, I am so far selfish that I cannot bear

to abandon the idea of your love. But I am not so far selfish as to

wish to possess it at the expense of your comfort. Shall it be so?"

"Be how?" said he, speaking almost in anger.

"Let us remain just as we are. Only you will promise me, that as I

cannot be your wife there shall be no other. I need hardly promise

you that there will be no other husband." Now he sat frowning at

her, while she, still pressing back her hair with her hands, looked

eagerly into his face. "If this will be enough for you," she said,

"it shall be enough for me."

"No, by G----d!"

"Frank!"

"It will certainly not be enough for me. I will have nothing to do

with so damnable a compact."

"Damnable!"

"Yes; that is what I call it. That is what any man would call

it,--and any woman, too, who would speak her mind."

"Then, Sir, perhaps you will be kind enough to make your proposition.

I have made mine, such as it is, and am sorry that it should not have

been received at any rate with courtesy." But as she said this there

was a gleam of a bright spirit in her eyes, such as he had not seen

since first the name of Gertrude had been mentioned to her.

"Yes," said he. "You have made your proposition, and now it is only

fair that I should make mine. Indeed, I made it already when I

suggested that little place abroad. Let it be abroad or at home, or

of what nature it may,--so that you shall be there, and I with you,

it shall be enough for me. That is my proposition; and, if it be not

accepted, then I shall return to Miss Tringle and all the glories of

Lombard Street."

"Frank--" she said. Then, before she could speak another word, he had

risen from his seat, and she was in his arms. "Frank," she continued,

pushing back his kisses, "how impossible it is that I should not be

obedient to you in all things! I know,--I know that I am agreeing to

that which will cause you some day to repent."

"By heavens, no!" said he. "I am changed in all that."

"A man cannot change at once. Your heart is soft, but your nature

remains the same. Frank, I could be so happy at this moment if I

could forget the picture which my imagination points to me of your

future life. Your love, and your generous words, and the look out of

your dear eyes, are sweet to me now, as when I was a child, whom you

first made so proud by telling her that she owned your heart. If I

could only revel in the return of your affections--"

"It is no return," said he. "There has never been a moment in which

my affections have not been the same."

"Well, then,--in these permitted signs of your affection,--if it were

not that I cannot shut out the future! Do not press me to name any

early day, because no period of my future life will be so happy to me

as this."

"Is there any reason why I should not intrude?" said Mrs. Docimer,

opening the door when the above conversation had been extended for

perhaps another hour.

"Not in the least, as far as I'm concerned," said Frank. "A few words

have been spoken between us, all of which may be repeated to you if

Imogene can remember them."

"Every one of them," said Imogene; "but I hardly think that I shall

repeat them."

"I suppose they have been very much a matter of course," said Mrs.

Docimer;--"the old story repeated between you two for the fourth

or fifth time. Considering all things, do you think that I should

congratulate you?"

"I ask for no congratulation," said Imogene.

"You may certainly congratulate me," said Frank. After that the

conversation became tame, and the happy lover soon escaped from the

house into the street. When there he found very much to occupy his

mind. He had certainly made his resolution at last, and had done so

in a manner which would now leave him no power of retrogression. The

whole theory of his life had,--with a vengeance,--been thrown to the

winds. "The little place abroad,"--or elsewhere,--was now a settled

certainty. He had nearly got the better of her. He had all but

succeeded in putting down his own love and hers by a little gentle

ridicule, and by a few half-wise phrases which she at the moment had

been unable to answer; but she now had in truth vanquished him by the

absolute sincerity of her love.

CHAPTER XLII.

ANOTHER DUEL.

Frank Houston on that Sunday afternoon became an altered man. The

reader is not to suppose by this that he is declared to have suddenly

thrown off all his weaknesses, and to have succeeded in clothing

himself in an armour of bright steel, proof for the rest of his life

against all temptations. Such suits of armour are not to be had at

a moment's notice; nor, as I fear, can a man ever acquire one quite

perfect at all points who has not begun to make it for himself before

Houston's age. But he did on that day dine off the two mutton chops,

and comforted himself with no more than the half-pint of sherry. It

was a great beginning. Throughout the whole evening he could not be

got for a moment to join any of the club juntas which were discussing

the great difficulty of the contumacious gentleman. "I think he

must really be going to be married at last!" one club pundit said

when a question was asked as to Houston's singular behaviour on the

occasion.

He was indeed very sober,--so sober that he left the smoking-room

as soon as his one silent cigar was finished, and went out alone in

order that he might roam the streets in thoughtful solitude. It was

a clear frosty night, and as he buttoned his great coat around him

he felt that the dry cold air would do him good, and assist his

meditations. At last then everything was arranged for him, and he was

to encounter exactly that mode of life which he had so often told

himself to be most unfit for him. There were to be the cradles always

full, and his little coffer so nearly empty! And he had done it

all for himself. She, Imogene, had proposed a mode of life to him

which would at any rate have saved him from this; but it had been

impossible that he should accept a plan so cruel to her when the

proposition came from herself. It must all soon be done now. She had

asked that a distant day might be fixed for their marriage. Even

that request, coming from her, made it almost imperative upon him

to insist upon an early day. It would be well for him to look upon

to-morrow, or a few morrows whose short distance would be immaterial

as the time fixed.

No;--there should be no going back now! So he declared to himself,

endeavouring to prepare the suit of armour for his own wearing. Pau

might be the best place,--or perhaps one of those little towns in

Brittany. Dresden would not do, because there would be society at

Dresden, and he must of course give up all ideas of society. He

would have liked Rome; but Rome would be far too expensive, and then

residents in Rome require to be absent three or four months every

year. He and his wife and large family,--he had no doubt in life

as to the large family,--would not be able to allow themselves any

recreation such as that. He thought he had heard that the ordinary

comforts of life were cheap in the west of Ireland,--or, if not

cheap, unobtainable, which would be the same thing. Perhaps Castlebar

might be a good locality for his nursery. There would be nothing to

do at Castlebar,--no amusement whatever for such a one as himself,

no fitting companion for Imogene. But then amusement for himself

and companions for Imogene must of course be out of the question.

He thought that perhaps he might turn his hand to a little useful

gardening,--parsnips instead of roses,--while Imogene would be at

work in the nursery. He would begin at once and buy two or three

dozen pipes, because tobacco would be so much cheaper than cigars. He

knew a shop at which were to be had some very pretty new-fashioned

meerschaums, which, he had been told, smokers of pipes found to

be excellent. But, whether it should be Pau or whether it should

be Castlebar, whether it should be pipes or whether, in regard to

economy, no tobacco at all, the question now was at any rate settled

for him. He felt rather proud of his gallantry, as he took himself

home to bed, declaring to himself that he would answer that last

letter from Gertrude in a very few words and in a very decided tone.

There would be many little troubles. On the Monday morning he got

up early thinking that as a family man such a practice would be

necessary for him. When he had disturbed the house and nearly

driven his own servant mad by demanding breakfast at an altogether

unaccustomed hour, he found that he had nothing to do. There was that

head of Imogene for which she had only once sat, and at which he had

occasionally worked from memory because of her refusal to sit again;

and he thought for a moment that this might be good employment

for him now. But his art was only an expense to him. He could not

now afford for himself paint and brushes and canvas, so he turned

the half-finished head round upon his easel. Then he took out his

banker's book, a bundle of bills and some blotted scraps of ruled

paper, with which he set himself to work to arrange his accounts.

When he did this he must certainly have been in earnest. But he had

not as yet succeeded in seeing light through his figures when he was

interrupted by the arrival of a letter which altogether arrested his

attention. It was from Mudbury Docimer, and this was the letter;--

DEAR HOUSTON,

Of course I think that you and Imogene are two fools.

She has told me what took place here yesterday, and I

have told her the same as I tell you. I have no power to

prevent it; but you know as well as I do that you and she

cannot live together on the interest of sixteen thousand

pounds. When you've paid everything that you owe I don't

suppose there will be so much as that. It had been

arranged between you that everything should be over; and

if I had thought that anything of the kind would have

occurred again I would have told them not to let you into

the house. What is the good of two such people as you

making yourselves wretched for ever, just to satisfy the

romance of a moment? I call it wicked. So I told Imogene,

and so I tell you.

You have changed your mind so often that of course you may

change it again. I am sure that Imogene expects that you

will. Indeed I can hardly believe that you intend to be

such a Quixote. But at any rate I have done my duty. She

is old enough to look after herself, but as long as she

lives with me as my sister I shall tell her what I think;

and until she becomes your wife,--which I hope she never

will be,--I shall tell you the same.

Yours truly,

MUDBURY DOCIMER.

"He always was a hard, unfeeling fellow," said Frank to himself. Then

he put the letter by with a crowd of others, assuring himself that it

was one which required no answer.

On the afternoon he called at the house, as he did again on the

Tuesday; but on neither day did he succeed in seeing Imogene. This he

thought to be hard, as the pleasure of her society was as sweet to

him as ever, though he was doubtful as to his wisdom in marrying her.

On the Wednesday morning he received a note from her asking him not

to come at once, because Mudbury had chosen to put himself into a

bad humour. Then a few words of honey were added; "Of course you

know that nothing that he can say will make a change. I am too

well satisfied to allow of any change that shall not come from you

yourself." He was quite alive to the sweetness of the honey, and

declared to himself that Mudbury Docimer's ill-humour was a matter to

him of no concern whatever.

But on the Wednesday there came also another letter,--in regard to

which it will be well that we should travel down again to Merle Park.

An answer altogether averse to the proposed changes as to the nieces

had been received from Mrs. Dosett. "As Ayala does not wish it, of

course nothing can be done." Such was the decision as conveyed by

Mrs. Dosett. It seemed to Lady Tringle that this was absurd. It was

all very well extending charity to the children of her deceased

sister, Mrs. Dormer; but all the world was agreed that beggars should

not be choosers. "As Ayala does not wish it." Why should not Ayala

wish it? What a fool must Ayala be not to wish it? Why should not

Ayala be made to do as she was told, whether she wished it or not?

Such were the indignant questions which Lady Tringle asked of her

husband. He was becoming sick of the young ladies altogether,--of her

own girls as well as the Dormer girls. "They are a pack of idiots

together," he said, "and Tom is the worst of the lot." With this he

rushed off to London, and consoled himself with his millions.

Mrs. Dosett's letter had reached Merle Park on the Tuesday morning,

Sir Thomas having remained down in the country over the Monday.

Gertrude, having calculated the course of the post with exactness,

had hoped to get a reply from Frank to that last letter of

hers,--dated from her sick bed, but written in truth after a little

surreptitious visit to the larder after the servants' dinner,--on

the Sunday morning. This had been possible, and would have evinced a

charming alacrity on the part of her lover. But this she had hardly

ventured to expect. Then she had looked with anxiety to the arrival

of letters on the Monday afternoon, but had looked in vain. On the

Tuesday morning she had felt so certain that she had contrived to

open the post-bag herself in spite of illness;--but there had been

nothing for her. Then she sent the dispatch which reached Frank on

the Wednesday morning, and immediately afterwards took to her bed

again with such a complication of disorders that the mare with the

broken knees was sent at once into Hastings for the doctor.

"A little rice will be the best thing for her," said the doctor.

"But the poor child takes nothing,--literally nothing," said Lady

Tringle, who was frightened for her child. Then the doctor went on

to say that arrowroot would be good, and sago, but offered no other

prescription. Lady Tringle was disgusted by his ignorance, and

thought that it might be well to send up to London for some great

man. The doctor bowed, and made up his mind that Lady Tringle was an

ass. But, being an honest man, and also tender-hearted, he contrived

to get hold of Tom before he left the house.

"Your sister's health is generally good?" he said. Tom assented. As

far as he knew, Gertrude had always been as strong as a horse. "Eats

well?" asked the doctor. Tom, who occasionally saw the family at

lunch, gave a description of his sister's general performance.

"She is a fine healthy young lady," said the doctor. Tom gave a

brother's ready adhesion to the word healthy, but passed over the

other epithet as being superfluous. "Now, I'll tell you what it is,"

said the doctor. "Of course I don't want to inquire into any family

secrets."

"My father, you know," said Tom, "won't agree about the man she's

engaged to."

"That is it? I knew there was some little trouble, but I did not want

to ask any questions. Your mother is unnecessarily frightened, and

I have not wished to disturb her. Your sister is taking plenty of

nourishment?"

"She does not come to table, nor yet have it in her own room."

"She gets it somehow. I can say that it is so. Her veins are full,

and her arms are strong. Perhaps she goes into the kitchen. Have a

little tray made ready for her, with something nice. She will be sure

to find it, and when she has found it two or three times she will

know that she has been discovered. If Lady Tringle does send for

a physician from London you could perhaps find an opportunity of

telling him what I have suggested. Her mamma need know nothing about

it." This took place on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday morning

Gertrude knew that she had been discovered,--at any rate by Tom and

the doctor. "I took care to keep a wing for you," said Tom; "I carved

them myself at dinner." As he so addressed her he came out from his

hiding-place in the kitchen about midnight, and surprised her in the

larder. She gave a fearful scream, which, however, luckily was not

heard through the house. "You won't tell mamma, Tom, will you?" Tom

promised that he would not, on condition that she would come down

to breakfast on the following morning. This she did, and the London

physician was saved a journey.

But, in the meantime, Gertrude's second letter had gone up to Frank,

and also a very heartrending epistle from Lady Tringle to her

husband. "Poor Gertrude is in a very bad state. If ever there was

a girl really broken-hearted on account of love, she is one. I did

not think she would ever set her heart upon a man with such violent

affection. I do think you might give way when it becomes a question

of life and death. There isn't anything really against Mr. Houston."

Sir Thomas, as he read this, was a little shaken. He had hitherto

been inclined to agree with Rosalind, "That men have died from time

to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." But now he did

not know what to think about it. There was Tom undoubtedly in a bad

way, and here was Gertrude brought to such a condition, simply by her

love, that she refused to take her meals regularly! Was the world

come to such a pass that a father was compelled to give his daughter

with a large fortune to an idle adventurer, or else to be responsible

for his daughter's life? Would Augusta have pined away and died had

she not been allowed to marry her Traffick? Would Lucy pine and die

unless money were given to her sculptor? Upon the whole, Sir Thomas

thought that the cares of his family were harder to bear than those

of his millions. In regard to Gertrude, he almost thought that he

would give way, if only that he might be rid of that trouble.

It must be acknowledged that Frank Houston, when he received the

young lady's letter, was less soft-hearted than her father. The

letter was, or should have been, heartrending;--

YOU CRUEL MAN,

You must have received my former letter, and though I told

you that I was ill and almost dying you have not heeded

it! Three posts have come, and I have not had a line from

you. In your last you were weak enough to say that you

were going to give it all up because you could not make

papa do just what you wanted all at once. Do you know what

it is to have taken possession of a young lady's heart;

or is it true, as Augusta says of you, that you care for

nothing but the money? If it is so, say it at once and

let me die. As it is I am so very ill that I cannot eat a

mouthful of anything, and have hardly strength left to me

to write this letter.

But I cannot really believe what Augusta says, though I

daresay it may have been so with Mr. Traffick. Perhaps you

have not been to your club, and so you have not got my

former letter. Or, it may be that you are ill yourself.

If so, I do wish that I could come and nurse you, though

indeed I am so ill that I am quite unable to leave my bed.

At any rate, pray write immediately;--and do come! Mamma

seems to think that papa will give way because I am so

ill. If so, I shall think my illness the luckiest thing

in the world.--You must believe, dearest Frank, that I am

now, as ever, yours most affectionately,

GERTRUDE.

Frank Houston was less credulous than Sir Thomas, and did not believe

much in the young lady's sickness. It was evident that the young lady

was quite up to the work of deceiving her father and mother, and

would no doubt be willing to deceive himself if anything could be got

by it. But, whether she were ill or whether she were well, he could

offer her no comfort. Nevertheless, he was bound to send her some

answer, and with a troubled spirit he wrote as follows;--

MY DEAR MISS TRINGLE,

It is to me a matter of inexpressible grief that I should

have to explain again that I am unable to persist in

seeking the honour of your hand in opposition to the

absolute and repeated refusals which I have received from

your father. It is so evident that we could not marry

without his consent that I need not now go into that

matter. But I think myself bound to say that, considering

the matter in all its bearing, I must regard our

engagement as finally at an end. Were I to hesitate in

saying this very plainly I think I should be doing you an

injury.

I am sorry to hear that you are unwell, and trust that you

may soon recover your health.

Your sincere friend,

FRANK HOUSTON.

On the next morning Gertrude was still in her bed, having there

received her letter, when she sent a message to her brother. Would

Tom come and see her? Tom attended to her behest, and then sat down

by her bedside on being told in a mysterious voice that she had to

demand from him a great service. "Tom," she said, "that man has

treated me most shamefully and most falsely."

"What man?"

"What man? Why, Frank Houston. There has never been any other man.

After all that has been said and done he is going to throw me over."

"The governor threw him over," said Tom.

"That amounts to nothing. The governor would have given way, of

course, and if he hadn't that was no matter of his. After he had had

my promise he was bound to go on with it. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps he was," said Tom, dubiously.

"Of course he was. What else is the meaning of a promise? Now I'll

tell you what you must do. You must go up to London and find him out.

You had better take a stick with you, and then ask him what he means

to do."

"And if he says he'll do nothing?"

"Then, Tom, you should call him out. It is just the position in which

a brother is bound to do that kind of thing for his sister. When he

has been called out, then probably he'll come round, and all will be

well."

The prospect was one which Tom did not at all like. He had had one

duel on his hands on his own account, and had not as yet come through

it with flying colours. There were still moments in which he felt

that he would be compelled at last to take to violence in reference

to Colonel Stubbs. He was all but convinced that were he to do so

he would fall into some great trouble, but still it was more than

probable that his outraged feelings would not allow him to resist.

But this second quarrel was certainly unnecessary. "That's all

nonsense, Gertrude," he said, "I can do nothing of the kind."

"You will not?"

"Certainly not. It would be absurd. You ask Septimus and he will tell

you that it is so."

"Septimus, indeed!"

"At any rate, I won't. Men don't call each other out now-a-days.

I know what ought to be done in these kind of things, and such

interference as that would be altogether improper."

"Then, Tom," said she, raising herself in bed, and looking round upon

him, "I will never call you my brother again!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONCE MORE!

"Probably you are not aware, Sir, that I am not at present the young

lady's guardian." This was said at the office in Lombard Street by

Sir Thomas, in answer to an offer made to him by Captain Batsby for

Ayala's hand. Captain Batsby had made his way boldly into the great

man's inner room, and had there declared his purpose in a short and

business-like manner. He had an ample income of his own, he said,

and was prepared to make a proper settlement on the young lady. If

necessary, he would take her without any fortune;--but it would, of

course, be for the lady's comfort and for his own if something in the

way of money were forthcoming. So much he added, having heard of this

uncle's enormous wealth, and having also learned the fact that if Sir

Thomas were not at this moment Ayala's guardian he had been not long

ago. Sir Thomas listened to him with patience, and then replied to

him as above.

"Just so, Sir Thomas. I did hear that. But I think you were once; and

you are still her uncle."

"Yes; I am her uncle."

"And when I was so ill-treated in Kingsbury Crescent I thought

I would come to you. It could not be right that a gentleman

making an honourable proposition,--and very liberal, as you must

acknowledge,--should not be allowed to see the young lady. It was not

as though I did not know her. I had been ten days in the same house

with her. Don't you think, Sir Thomas, I ought to have been allowed

to see her?"

"I have nothing to do with her," said Sir Thomas;--"that is, in the

way of authority." Nevertheless, before Captain Batsby left him, he

became courteous to that gentleman, and though he could not offer any

direct assurance he acknowledged that the application was reasonable.

He was, in truth, becoming tired of Ayala, and would have been glad

to find a husband whom she would accept, so that she might be out

of Tom's way. He had been quite willing that Tom should marry the

girl if it were possible, but he began to be convinced that it was

impossible. He had offered again to open his house to her, with all

its wealth, but she had refused to come into it. His wife had told

him that, if Ayala could be brought back in place of Lucy, she would

surely yield. But Ayala would not allow herself to be brought back.

And there was Tom as bad as ever. If Ayala were once married then Tom

could go upon his travels, and come back, no doubt, a sane man. Sir

Thomas thought it might be well to make inquiry about this Captain,

and then see if a marriage might be arranged. Mrs. Dosett, he told

himself, was a hard, stiff woman, and would never get the girl

married unless she allowed such a suitor as this Captain Batsby to

have access to the house. He did make inquiry, and before the week

was over had determined that if Ayala would become Mrs. Batsby there

might probably be an end to one of his troubles.

As he went down to Merle Park he arranged his plan. He would, in the

first place, tell Tom that Ayala had as many suitors as Penelope,

and that one had come up now who would probably succeed. But when he

reached home he found that his son was gone. Tom had taken a sudden

freak, and had run up to London. "He seemed quite to have got a

change," said Lady Tringle.

"I hope it was a change for the better as to that stupid girl." Lady

Tringle could not say that there had been any change for the better,

but she thought that there had been a change about the girl. Tom

had, as she said, quite "brisked up," had declared that he was not

going to stand this thing any longer, had packed up three or four

portmanteaus, and had had himself carried off to the nearest railway

station in time for an afternoon train up to London. "What is he

going to do when he gets there?" asked Sir Thomas. Lady Tringle had

no idea what her son intended to do, but thought that something

special was intended in regard to Ayala.

"He is an ass," said the father.

"You always say he is an ass," said the mother, complaining.

"No doubt I do. What else am I to call him?" Then he went on and

developed his scheme. "Let Ayala be asked to Merle Park for a

week,--just for a week,--and assured that during that time Tom

would not be there. Then let Captain Batsby also be invited." Upon

this there followed an explanation as to Captain Batsby and his

aspirations. Tom must be relieved after some fashion, and Sir Thomas

declared that no better fashion seemed to present itself. Lady

Tringle received her orders with sundry murmurings, still grieving

for her son's grief;--but she assented, as she always did assent, to

her husband's propositions.

Now we will accompany Tom up to London. The patient reader will

perhaps have understood the condition of his mind when in those

days of his sharpest agony he had given himself up to Faddle and

champagne. By these means he had brought himself into trouble and

disgrace, of which he was fully conscious. He had fallen into the

hands of the police and had been harassed during the whole period by

headache and nausea. Then had come the absurdity of his challenge

to Colonel Stubbs, the folly of which had been made plain to him by

the very letter which his rival had written to him. There was good

sense enough about the poor fellow to enable him to understand

that the police court, and the prison, that Faddle and the orgies

at Bolivia's, that his challenge and the reply to it, were alike

dishonourable to him. Then had come a reaction, and he spent a

miserable fortnight down at Merle Park, doing nothing, resolving on

nothing, merely moping about and pouring the oft-repeated tale of his

woes into his mother's bosom. These days at Merle Park gave him back

at any rate his health, and rescued him from the intense wretchedness

of his condition on the day after the comparison of Bolivia's wines.

In this improved state he told himself that it behoved him even yet

to do something as a man, and he came suddenly to the bold resolution

of having,--as he called it to himself,--another "dash at Ayala."

How the "dash" was to be made he had not determined when he left

home. But to this he devoted the whole of the following Sunday. He

had received a lachrymose letter from his friend Faddle, at Aberdeen,

in which the unfortunate youth had told him that he was destined to

remain in that wretched northern city for the rest of his natural

life. He had not as yet been to the Mountaineers since his mishap

with the police, and did not care to show himself there at present.

He was therefore altogether alone, and, walking all alone the entire

round of the parks, he at last formed his resolution.

On the following morning when Mr. Dosett entered his room at Somerset

House, a little after half-past ten o'clock, he found his nephew

Tom there before him, and waiting for him. Mr. Dosett was somewhat

astonished, for he too had heard of Tom's misfortunes. Some

ill-natured chronicle of Tom's latter doings had spread itself among

the Tringle and Dosett sets, and Uncle Reginald was aware that his

nephew had been forced to relinquish his stool in Lombard Street. The

vices of the young are perhaps too often exaggerated, so that Mr.

Dosett had heard of an amount of champagne consumed and a number

of policemen wounded, of which his nephew had not been altogether

guilty. There was an idea at Kingsbury Crescent that Tom had gone

nearly mad, and was now kept under paternal care at Merle Park. When,

therefore, he saw Tom blooming in health, and brighter than usual in

general appearance, he was no doubt rejoiced, but also surprised, at

the change. "What, Tom!" he said; "I'm glad to see you looking so

well. Are you up in London again?"

"I'm in town for a day or two," said Tom.

"And what can I do for you?"

"Well, Uncle Reginald, you can do a great deal for me if you will. Of

course you've heard of all those rows of mine?"

"I have heard something."

"Everybody has heard," said Tom, mournfully. "I don't suppose anybody

was ever knocked so much about as I've been for the last six months."

"I'm sorry for that, Tom."

"I'm sure you are, because you're always good-natured. Now I wonder

if you will do a great thing to oblige me."

"Let us hear what it is," said Uncle Reginald.

"I suppose you know that there is only one thing in the world that I

want." Mr. Dosett thought that it would be discreet to make no reply

to this, but, turning his chair partly round, he prepared to listen

very attentively to what his nephew might have to say to him. "All

this about the policeman and the rest of it has simply come from my

being so unhappy about Ayala."

"It wouldn't be taken as a promise of your being a good husband, Tom,

when you get into such a mess as that."

"That's because people don't understand," said Tom. "It is because I

am so earnest about it, and because I can't bear the disappointment!

There isn't one at Travers and Treason who doesn't know that if I'd

married Ayala I should have settled down as quiet a young man as

there is in all London. You ask the governor else himself. As long as

I thought there was any hope I used to be there steady as a rock at

half-past nine. Everybody knew it. So I should again, if she'd only

come round."

"You can't make a lady come round, as you call it."

"Not make her; no. Of course you can't make a girl. But persuading

goes a long way. Why shouldn't she have me? As to all these rows, she

ought to feel at any rate that they're her doing. And what she's done

it stands to reason she could undo if she would. It only wants a word

from her to put me all right with the governor,--and to put me all

right with Travers and Treason too. Nobody can love her as I do."

"I do believe that nobody could love her better," said Mr. Dosett,

who was beginning to be melted by his nephew's earnestness.

"Oughtn't that to go for something? And then she would have

everything that she wishes. She might live anywhere she pleased,--so

that I might go to the office every day. She would have her own

carriage, you know."

"I don't think that would matter much with Ayala."

"It shows that I'm in a position to ask her," said Tom. "If she could

only bring herself not to hate me--"

"There is a difference, Tom, between hating and not loving."

"If she would only begin to make a little way, then I could hope

again. Uncle Reginald, could you not tell her that at any rate I

would be good to her?"

"I think you would be good to her," he said.

"Indeed, I would. There is nothing I would not do for her. Now will

you let me see her just once again, and have one other chance?"

This was the great thing which Tom desired from his uncle, and Mr.

Dosett was so much softened by his nephew's earnestness that he did

promise to do as much as this;--to do as much as this, at least, if

it were in his power. Of course, Ayala must be told. No good could

be done by surprising her by a visit. But he would endeavour so

to arrange it that, if Tom were to come to him on the following

afternoon, they two should go to the Crescent together, and then Tom

should remain and dine there,--or go away before dinner, as he might

please, after the interview. This was settled, and Tom left Somerset

House, rejoicing greatly at his success. It seemed to him that now at

last a way was open to him.

Uncle Reginald, on his return home, took his niece aside and talked

to her very gently and very kindly. "Whether you like him or whether

you do not, my dear, he is so true to you that you are bound to see

him again when he asks it." At first she was very stout, declaring

that she would not see him. Of what good could it be, seeing that she

would rather throw herself into the Thames than marry him? Had she

not told him so over and over again, as often as he had spoken to

her? Why would he not just leave her alone? But against all this her

uncle pleaded gently but persistently. He had considered himself

bound to promise so much on her behalf, and for his sake she must do

as he asked. To this, of course, she yielded. And then he said many

good things of poor Tom. His constancy was a great virtue. A man so

thoroughly in love would no doubt make a good husband. And then there

would be the assent of all the family, and an end, as far as Ayala

was concerned, of all pecuniary trouble. In answer to this she only

shook her head, promising, however, that she would be ready to give

Tom an audience when he should be brought to the Crescent on the

following day.

Punctually at four Tom made his appearance at Somerset House, and

started with his uncle as soon as the index-books had been put in

their places. Tom was very anxious to take his uncle home in a

cab, but Mr. Dosett would not consent to lose his walk. Along the

Embankment they went, and across Charing Cross into St. James's Park,

and then by Green Park, Hyde Park, and Kensington Gardens, all the

way to Notting Hill. Mr. Dosett did not walk very fast, and Tom

thought they would never reach Kingsbury Crescent. His uncle would

fain have talked about the weather, or politics, or the hardships of

the Civil Service generally; but Tom would not be diverted from his

one subject. Would Ayala be gracious to him? Mr. Dosett had made up

his mind to say nothing on the subject. Tom must plead his own cause.

Uncle Reginald thought that he knew such pleading would be useless,

but still would not say a word to daunt the lover. Neither could he

say a word expressive of hope. As they were fully an hour-and-a-half

on their walk, this reticence was difficult.

Immediately on his arrival, Tom was taken up into the drawing-room.

This was empty, for it had been arranged that Mrs. Dosett should be

absent till the meeting was over. "Now I'll look for this child,"

said Uncle Reginald, in his cheeriest voice as he left Tom alone

in the room. Tom, as he looked round at the chairs and tables,

remembered that he had never received as much as a kind word or look

in the room, and then great drops of perspiration broke out all over

his brow. All that he had to hope for in the world must depend upon

the next five minutes;--might depend perhaps upon the very selection

of the words which he might use.

Then Ayala entered the room and stood before him.

"Ayala," he said, giving her his hand.

"Uncle Reg says that you would like to see me once again."

"Of course I want to see you once, and twice,--and always. Ayala, if

you could know it! If you could only know it!" Then he clasped his

two hands high upon his breast, not as though appealing to her heart,

but striking his bosom in very agony. "Ayala, I feel that, if I do

not have you as my own, I can only die for the want of you. Ayala, do

you believe me?"

"I suppose I believe you, but how can I help it?"

"Try to help it! Try to try and help it! Say a word that you will

perhaps help it by-and-bye." Then there came a dark frown upon her

brow,--not, indeed, from anger, but from a feeling that so terrible a

task should be thrown upon her. "I know you think that I am common."

"I have never said a word, Tom, but that I could not love you."

"But I am true,--true as the sun. Would I come again after all if

it were not that I cannot help coming? You have heard that I have

been,--been misbehaving myself?"

"I have not thought about that."

"It has been so because I have been so wretched. Ayala, you have made

me so unhappy. Ayala, you can make me the happiest man there is in

London this day. I seem to want nothing else. As for drink, or clubs,

or billiards, and all that, they are nothing to me,--unless when I

try to forget that you are so--so unkind to me!"

"It is not unkind, not to do as you ask me."

"To do as I ask you,--that would be kind. Oh, Ayala, cannot you be

kind to me?" She shook her head, still standing in the place which

she had occupied from the beginning. "May I come again? Will you give

me three months, and then think of it? If you would only say that, I

would go back to my work and never leave it." But she still shook her

head. "Must I never hope?"

"Not for that, Tom. How can I help it?"

"Not help it."

"No. How can I help it? One does not fall in love by trying,--nor by

trying prevent it."

"By degrees you might love me,--a little." She had said all that

she knew how to say, and again shook her head. "It is that accursed

Colonel," he exclaimed, forgetting himself as he thought of his

rival.

"He is not accursed," said Ayala, angrily.

"Then you love him?"

"No! But you should not ask. You have no right to ask. It is not

proper."

"You are not engaged to him?"

"No; I am not engaged to him. I do not love him. As you will ask,

I tell you. But you should not ask; and he is not accursed. He is

better than you,--though I do not love him. You should not have

driven me to say this. I do not ask you questions."

"There is none that I would not answer. Stay, Ayala," for now she was

going to leave the room. "Stay yet a moment. Do you know that you

are tearing my heart in pieces? Why is it that you should make me so

wretched? Dear Ayala;--dearest Ayala;--stay yet a moment."

"Tom, there is nothing more that I can say. I am very, very sorry if

you are unhappy. I do think that you are good and true; and if you

will shake hands with me, there is my hand. But I cannot say what

you want me to say." Tom took her by the hand and tried to hold her,

without, however, speaking to her again. But she slid away from him

and left the room, not having for a moment sat down in his presence.

When the door was closed he stood awhile looking round him, trying

to resolve what he might do or what he might say next. He was now

at any rate in the house with her, and did not know whether such

an opportunity as that might ever occur to him again. He felt that

there were words within his bosom which, if he could only bring them

up to his mouth, would melt the heart of a stone. There was his

ineffable love, his whole happiness at stake, his purpose,--his holy

purpose,--to devote himself, and all that he had, to her well-being.

Of all this he had a full conception within his own heart, if only he

could express it so that others should believe him! But of what use

was it now? He had had this further liberty of speech accorded to

him, and in it he had done nothing, made no inch of progress. She had

hardly spoken a dozen words to him, but of those she had spoken two

remained clear upon his memory. He must never hope, she had said; and

she had said also that that other man was better than he. Had she

said that he was dearer, the word would hardly have been more bitter.

All the old feeling came upon him of rage against his rival, and of

a desire that something desperate should be done by which he might

wreak his vengeance.

But there he was standing alone in Mrs. Dosett's drawing-room, and it

was necessary that he should carry himself off. As for dining in that

house, sitting down to eat and drink in Ayala's presence after such a

conversation as that which was past, that he felt to be quite out of

the question. He crammed his hat upon his head, left the room, and

hurried down the stairs towards the door.

In the passage he was met by his uncle, coming out of the

dining-room. "Tom," he said, "you'll stay and eat your dinner?"

"No, indeed," said Tom, angrily.

"You shouldn't let yourself be disturbed by little trifles such as

these," said his uncle, trying to put a good face upon the matter.

"Trifles!" said Tom Tringle. "Trifles!" And he banged the door after

him as he left the house.

END OF VOL. II.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

AYALA'S ANGEL

by

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

Author of "Doctor Thorne," "The Prime Minister," "Orley Farm,"

&c., &c.

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AYALA'S ANGEL.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN THE HAYMARKET.

It was now the beginning of February. As Tom and his uncle had walked

from Somerset House the streets were dry and the weather fine; but,

as Mr. Dosett had remarked, the wind was changing a little out of

the east and threatened rain. When Tom left the house it was already

falling. It was then past six, and the night was very dark. He had

walked there with a top coat and umbrella, but he had forgotten

both as he banged the door after him in his passion; and, though

he remembered them as he hurried down the steps, he would not turn

and knock at the door and ask for them. He was in that humour which

converts outward bodily sufferings almost into a relief. When a

man has been thoroughly illused in greater matters it is almost a

consolation to him to feel that he has been turned out into the

street to get wet through without his dinner,--even though he may

have turned himself out.

He walked on foot, and as he walked became damp and dirty, till he

was soon wet through. As soon as he reached Lancaster Gate he went

into the park, and under the doubtful glimmer of the lamps trudged on

through the mud and slush, not regarding his path, hardly thinking

of the present moment in the full appreciation of his real misery.

What should he do with himself? What else was there now left to

him? He had tried everything and had failed. As he endeavoured to

count himself up, as it were, and tell himself whether he were

worthy of a happier fate than had been awarded to him, he was very

humble,--humble, though so indignant! He knew himself to be a poor

creature in comparison with Jonathan Stubbs. Though he could not have

been Stubbs had he given his heart for it, though it was absolutely

beyond him to assume one of those tricks of bearing, one of those

manly, winning ways, which in his eyes was so excellent in the other

man, still he saw them and acknowledged them, and told himself that

they would be all powerful with such a girl as Ayala. Though he

trusted to his charms and his rings, he knew that his charms and his

rings were abominable, as compared with that outside look and natural

garniture which belonged to Stubbs, as though of right,--as though it

had been born with him. Not exactly in those words, but with a full

inward sense of the words, he told himself that Colonel Stubbs was a

gentleman,--whereas he acknowledged himself to be a cad. How could

he have hoped that Ayala should accept such a one, merely because he

would have a good house of his own and a carriage? As he thought of

all this, he hardly knew which he hated most,--himself or Jonathan

Stubbs.

He went down to the family house in Queen's Gate, which was closed

and dark,--having come there with no special purpose, but having

found himself there, as though by accident, in the neighbourhood.

Then he knocked at the door, which, after a great undoing of chains,

was opened by an old woman, who with her son had the custody of the

house when the family were out of town. Sir Thomas in these days had

rooms of his own in Lombard Street in which he loved to dwell, and

would dine at a city club, never leaving the precincts of the city

throughout the week. The old woman was an old servant, and her son

was a porter at the office. "Mr. Tom! Be that you? Why you are as wet

as a mop!" He was wet as any mop, and much dirtier than a mop should

be. There was no fire except in the kitchen, and there he was taken.

He asked for a great coat, but there was no such thing in the house,

as the young man had not yet come home. Nor was there any food that

could be offered him, or anything to drink; as the cellar was locked

up, and the old woman was on board wages. But he sat crouching over

the fire, watching the steam as it came up from his damp boots and

trousers. "And ain't you had no dinner, Mr. Tom?" said the old woman.

Tom only shook his head. "And ain't you going to have none?" The poor

wretch again shook his head. "That's bad, Mr. Tom." Then she looked

up into his face. "There is something wrong I know, Mr. Tom. I hears

that from Jem. Of course he hears what they do be saying in Lombard

Street."

"What is it they say, Mrs. Tapp?"

"Well;--that you ain't there as you used to be. Things is awk'ard,

and Sir Thomas, they say, isn't best pleased. But of course it isn't

no affair of mine, Mr. Tom."

"Do they know why?" he asked.

"They do say it's some'at about a young lady."

"Yes; by heavens!" said Tom, jumping up out of his chair. "Oh, Mrs.

Tapp, you can't tell the condition I'm in. A young lady indeed! D----

the fellow!"

"Don't 'ee now, Mr. Tom."

"D---- the fellow! But there's no good in my standing here cursing.

I'll go off again. You needn't say that I've been here, Mrs. Tapp?"

"But you won't go out into the rain, Mr. Tom?"

"Rain,--what matters the rain?" Then he started again, disregarding

all her prayers, and went off eastward on foot, disdaining the use

of a cab because he had settled in his mind on no place to which he

would go.

Yes; they knew all about it, down to the very porters at the office.

Everyone had heard of his love for Ayala; and everyone had heard also

that Ayala had scorned him. Not a man or woman connected by ever so

slight a tie to the establishment was unaware that he had been sent

away from his seat because of Ayala! All this might have been borne

easily had there been any hope; but now he was forced to tell himself

that there was none. He saw no end to his misery,--no possibility of

escape. Where was he to go in this moment of his misery for any shred

of comfort? The solitude of his lodgings was dreadful to him; nor had

he heart enough left to him to seek companionship at his club.

At about ten o'clock he found himself, as it were, by accident, close

to Mr. Bolivia's establishment. He was thoroughly wet through, jaded,

wretched, and in want of sustenance. He turned in, and found the

place deserted. The diners had gone away, and the hour had not come

at which men in quest of later refreshment were wont to make their

appearance. But there were still one or two gas-lights burning; and

he threw himself wearily into a little box or partition nearest

to the fire. Here Signor Bolivia himself came to him, asking in

commiserating accents what had brought him thither in so wretched a

plight. "I have left my coat and umbrella behind," said Tom, trying

to pluck up a little spirit,--"and my dinner too."

"No dinner, Mr. Tringle; and you wet through like that! What shall I

get you, Mr. Tringle?" But Tom declared that he would have no dinner.

He was off his appetite altogether, he said. He would have a bottle

of champagne and a devilled biscuit. Mr. Walker, who, as we are

aware, put himself forward to the world generally as Signor Bolivia,

felt for the moment a throb of pity, which overcame in his heart the

innkeeper's natural desire to make the most he could of his customer.

"Better have a mutton chop and a little drop of brandy-and-water

hot."

"I ain't up to it, Bolivia," said the young man. "I couldn't swallow

it if I had it. Give us the bottle of champagne and the devilled

biscuit." Then Mr. Walker,--for Bolivia was in truth Walker,--fetched

the wine and ordered the biscuit; and poor Tom was again brought back

to the miserable remedy to which he had before applied himself in his

misfortune. There he remained for about an hour, during a part of

which he slept; but before he left the house he finished the wine.

As he got up to take his departure Mr. Walker scanned his gait and

bearing, having a friendly feeling for the young man, and not wishing

him to fall again into the hands of the police. But Tom walked forth

apparently as sober as a judge, and as melancholy as a hangman. As

far as Mr. Walker could see the liquor had made no impression on him.

"If I were you, Mr. Tringle," said the keeper of the eating-house,

"I'd go home at once, because you are so mortal wet."

"All right," said Tom, going out into the pouring rain.

It was then something after eleven, and Tom instead of taking the

friendly advice which had been offered to him, walked, as fast as he

could, round Leicester Square; and as he walked the fumes of the wine

mounted into his head. But he was not drunk,--not as yet so drunk as

to misbehave himself openly. He did not make his way round the square

without being addressed, but he simply shook off from him those who

spoke to him. His mind was still intent upon Ayala. But now he was

revengeful rather than despondent. The liquor had filled him once

again with a desire to do something. If he could destroy himself and

the Colonel by one and the same blow, how fitting a punishment would

that be for Ayala! But how was he to do it? He would throw himself

down from the top of the Duke of York's column, but that would be

nothing unless he could force the Colonel to take the jump with him!

He had called the man out and he wouldn't come! Now, with the alcohol

in his brain, he again thought that the man was a coward for not

coming. Had not such a meeting been from time immemorial the resource

of gentlemen injured as he now was injured? The Colonel would not

come when called,--but could he not get at him so as to strike him?

If he could do the man a real injury he would not care what amount of

punishment he might be called upon to bear.

He hurried at last out of the square into Coventry Street and down

the Haymarket. His lodgings were in Duke Street, turning out of

Piccadilly,--but he could not bring himself to go home to his bed.

He was unutterably wretched, but yet he kept himself going with some

idea of doing something, or of fixing some purpose. He certainly

was tipsy now, but not so drunk as to be unable to keep himself on

his legs. He gloried in the wet, shouting inwardly to himself that

he in his misery was superior to all accidents of the weather. Then

he stood for awhile watching the people as they came out of the

Haymarket Theatre. He was at this time a sorry sight to be seen. His

hat was jammed on to his head and had been almost smashed in the

jamming. His coat reeking wet through was fastened by one button

across his chest. His two hands were thrust into his pockets, and the

bottle of champagne was visible in his face. He was such a one,--to

look at,--that no woman would have liked to touch or any man to

address. In this guise he stood there amidst the crowd, foremost

among those who were watching the ladies as they got into their

vehicles. "And she might be as good as the best of them, and I might

be here to hand her into her own carriage,"--said he to himself,--"if

it were not for that intruder!"

At that moment the intruder was there before him, and on his arm was

a lady whom he was taking across to a carriage, at the door of which

a servant in livery was standing. They were followed closely by a

pretty young girl who was picking her steps after them alone. These

were Lady Albury and Nina, whom Colonel Stubbs had escorted to the

play.

"You will be down by the twentieth?" said the elder lady.

"Punctual as the day comes," said the Colonel.

"And mind you have Ayala with you," said the younger.

"If Lady Albury can manage it with her aunt of course I will wait

upon her," said the Colonel. Then the door of the carriage was shut,

and the Colonel was left to look for a cab. He had on an overcoat and

an opera hat, but otherwise was dressed as for dinner. On one side

a link-boy was offering him assistance, and on another a policeman

tendering him some service. He was one of those who by their outward

appearance always extort respect from those around them.

As long as the ladies had been there,--during the two minutes which

had been occupied while they got into the carriage,--Tom had been

restrained by their presence. He had been restrained by their

presence even though he had heard Ayala's name and had understood the

commission given to the man whom he hated. Had Colonel Stubbs luckily

followed the ladies into the carriage Tom, in his fury, would have

taken himself off to his bed. But now,--there was his enemy within

a yard of him! Here was the opportunity the lack of which seemed, a

few moments since, to be so grievous to him! He took two steps out

from the row in which he stood and struck his rival high on his

breast with his fist. He had aimed at the Colonel's face but in his

eagerness had missed his mark. "There," said he, "there! You would

not fight me, and now you have got it." Stubbs staggered, and would

have fallen but for the policeman. Tom, though no hero, was a strong

young man, and had contrived to give his blow with all his force. The

Colonel did not at first see from whom the outrage had come, but at

once claimed the policeman's help.

"We've got him, Sir;--we've got him," said the policeman.

"You've got me," said Tom, "but I've had my revenge." Then, though

two policemen and one waterman were now holding him, he stretched

himself up to his full height and glared at his enemy in the face.

"It's the chap who gave that hawful blow to Thompson in the bow'ls!"

said one of the policemen, who by this time had both Tom's arms

locked behind his own.

Then the Colonel knew who had struck him. "I know him," said the

Colonel to the policeman. "It is a matter of no consequence."

"So do we, Sir. He's Thomas Tringle, junior."

"He's a friend of mine," said the Colonel. "You must let him come

with me."

"A friend, is he?" said an amateur attendant. The policeman, who

had remembered the cruel onslaught made on his comrade, looked very

grave, and still held Tom tight by the arms. "A very hugly sort of

friend," said the amateur. Tom only stretched himself still higher,

but remained speechless.

"Tringle," said the Colonel, "this was very foolish, you know,--a

most absurd thing to do! Come with me, and we will talk it all over."

"He must come along with us to the watch-house just at present," said

the policeman. "And you, Sir, if you can, had better please to come

with us. It ain't far across to Vine Street, but of course you can

have a cab if you like it." This was ended by two policemen walking

off with Tom between them, and by the Colonel following in a cab,

after having administered divers shillings to the amateur attendants.

Though the journey in the cab did not occupy above five minutes, it

sufficed to enable him to determine what step he should take when he

found himself before the night officers of the watch.

When he found himself in the presence of the night officer he had

considerable difficulty in carrying out his purpose. That Tom

should be locked up for the night, and be brought before the police

magistrate next morning to answer for the outrage he had committed,

seemed to the officers to be a matter of course. It was long before

the Colonel could persuade the officer that this little matter

between him and Mr. Tringle was a private affair, of which he at

least wished to take no further notice. "No doubt," he said, "he had

received a blow on his chest, but it had not hurt him in the least."

"'E 'it the gen'leman with all his might and main," said the

policeman.

"It is quite a private affair," said the Colonel. "My name is Colonel

Stubbs; here is my card. Sir ---- is a particular friend of mine."

Here he named a pundit of the peace, very high in the estimation of

all policemen. "If you will let the gentleman come away with me I

will be responsible for him to-morrow, if it should be necessary

to take any further step in the matter." This he said very eagerly,

and with all the authority which he knew how to use. Tom, in the

meantime, stood perfectly motionless, with his arms folded akimbo on

his breast, wet through, muddy, still tipsy, a sight miserable to

behold.

The card and the Colonel's own name, and the name of the pundit of

the peace together, had their effect, and after a while Tom was

dismissed in the Colonel's care. The conclusion of the evening's

affair was, for the moment, one which Tom found very hard to bear. It

would have been better for him to have been dragged off to a cell,

and there to have been left to his miserable solitude. But as he went

down through the narrow ways leading from the police-office out into

the main street he felt that he was altogether debarred from making

any further attack upon his protector. He could not strike him again,

as he might have done had he escaped from the police by his own

resources. His own enemy had saved him from durance, and he could

not, therefore, turn again upon his enemy.

"In heaven's name, my dear fellow," said the Colonel, "what good do

you expect to get by that? You have hit me a blow when you knew that

I was unprepared, and, therefore, unarmed. Was that manly?" To this

Tom made no reply. "I suppose you have been drinking?" And Stubbs, as

he asked this question, looked into his companion's face. "I see you

have been drinking. What a fool you are making of yourself!"

"It is that girl," said Tom.

"Does that seem to you to be right? Can you do yourself any good by

that? Will she be more likely to listen to you when she hears that

you have got drunk, and have assaulted me in the street? Have I done

you any harm?"

"She says that you are better than me," replied Tom.

"If she does, is that my doing? Come, old fellow, try to be a man.

Try to think of this thing rightly. If you can win the girl you love,

win her; but, if you cannot, do not be such an ass as to suppose that

she is to love no one because she will not love you. It is a thing

which a man must bear if it comes in his way. As far as Miss Dormer

is concerned, I am in the same condition as you. But do you think

that I should attack you in the street if she began to favour you

to-morrow?"

"I wish she would; and then I shouldn't care what you did."

"I should think you a happy fellow, certainly; and for a time I

might avoid you, because your happiness would remind me of my own

disappointment; but I should not come behind your back and strike

you! Now, tell me where you live, and I will see you home." Then Tom

told him where he lived, and in a few minutes the Colonel had left

him within his own hall door.

CHAPTER XLV.

THERE IS SOMETHING OF THE ANGEL ABOUT HIM.

The little accident which was recorded at the close of the last

chapter occurred on a Tuesday night. On the following afternoon Tom

Tringle, again very much out of spirits, returned to Merle Park.

There was now nothing further for him to do in London. He had had

his last chance with Ayala, and the last chance had certainly done

him no good. Fortune, whether kindly or unkindly, had given him an

opportunity of revenging himself upon the Colonel; he had taken

advantage of the opportunity, but did not find himself much relieved

by what he had done. His rival's conduct had caused him to be

thoroughly ashamed of himself. It had at any rate taken from him all

further hope of revenge. So that now there was nothing for him but to

take himself back to Merle Park. On the Wednesday he heard nothing

further of the matter; but on the Thursday Sir Thomas came down from

London, and, showing to poor Tom a paragraph in one of the morning

papers, asked whether he knew anything of the circumstance to which

reference was made. The paragraph was as follows:--

That very bellicose young City knight who at Christmas

time got into trouble by thrashing a policeman within

an inch of his life in the streets, and who was then

incarcerated on account of his performance, again

exhibited his prowess on Tuesday night by attacking

Colonel ----, an officer than whom none in the army is

more popular,--under the portico of the Haymarket theatre.

We abstain from mentioning the officer's name,--which is,

however, known to us. The City knight again fell into the

hands of the police and was taken to the watch-house.

But Colonel ----, who knew something of his family,

accompanied him, and begged his assailant off. The officer

on duty was most unwilling to let the culprit go; but the

Colonel used all his influence and was successful. This

may be all very well between the generous Colonel and the

valiant knight. But if the young man has any friends they

had better look to him. A gentleman with such a desire

for the glories of battle must be restrained if he cannot

control his propensities when wandering about the streets

of the metropolis.

"Yes," said Tom,--who scorned to tell a lie in any matter concerning

Ayala. "It was me. I struck Colonel Stubbs, and he got me off at the

police office."

"And you're proud of what you've done?"

"No, Sir, I'm not. I'm not proud of anything. Whatever I do or

whatever I say seems to go against me."

"He didn't go against you as you call it."

"I wish he had with all my heart. I didn't ask him to get me off. I

struck him because I hated him; and whatever might have happened I

would sooner have borne it than be like this."

"You would sooner have been locked up again in prison?"

"I would sooner anything than be as I am."

"I tell you what it is, Tom," said the father. "If you remain here

any longer with this bee in your bonnet you will be locked up in a

lunatic asylum, and I shall not be able to get you out again. You

must go abroad." To this Tom made no immediate answer. Lamentable as

was his position, he still was unwilling to leave London while Ayala

was living there. Were he to consent to go away for any lengthened

period, by doing so he would seem to abandon his own claim. Hope he

knew there was none; but yet, even yet, he regarded himself as one of

Ayala's suitors. "Do you think it well," continued the father, "that

you should remain in London while such paragraphs as these are being

written about you?"

"I am not in London now," said Tom.

"No, you are not in London while you are at Merle Park,--of course.

And you will not go up to London without my leave. Do you understand

that?" Here Tom again was silent. "If you do," continued his father,

"you shall not be received down here again, nor at Queen's Gate, nor

will the cheques for your allowance be honoured any longer at the

bank. In fact if you do not obey me I will throw you off altogether.

This absurdity about your love has been carried on long enough." And

so it came to be understood in the family that Tom was to be kept in

mild durance at Merle Park till everything should have been arranged

for his extended tour about the world. To this Tom himself gave no

positive assent, but it was understood that when the time came he

would yield to his father's commands.

It had thus come to pass that the affray at the door of the Haymarket

became known to so much of the world at large as interested itself

in the affairs either of Colonel Stubbs or of the Tringles. Other

paragraphs were written in which the two heroes of the evening were

designated as Colonel J---- S---- and as T---- T----, junior, of the

firm of T---- and T----, in the City. All who pleased could read

these initials, and thus the world was aware that our Colonel had

received a blow, and had resented the affront only by rescuing his

assailant from the hands of the police. A word was said at first

which seemed to imply that the Colonel had not exhibited all the

spirit which might have been expected from him. Having been struck

should he not have thrashed the man who struck him;--or at any rate

have left the ruffian in the hands of the policemen for proper

punishment? But many days had not passed over before the Colonel's

conduct had been viewed in a different light, and men and women

were declaring that he had done a manly and a gallant thing. The

affair had in this way become sufficiently well known to justify

the allusion made to it in the following letter from Lady Albury to

Ayala;--

Stalham, Tuesday, 11th February, 18--.

MY DEAR AYALA,

It is quite indispensable for the happiness of everybody,

particularly that of myself and Sir Harry, that you should

come down here on the twentieth. Nina will be here on

her farewell visit before her return to her mother. Of

course you have heard that it is all arranged between

her and Lord George Bideford, and this will be the last

opportunity which any of us will have of seeing her once

again before her martyrdom. The world is to be told

that he is to follow her to Rome, where they are to be

married,--no doubt by the Pope himself under the dome of

St. Peter's. But my belief is that Lord George is going

to travel with her all the way. If he is the man I take

him to be he will do so, but of course it would be very

improper.

You, however, must of course come and say pretty things

to your friend; and, as you cannot go to Rome to see her

married, you must throw your old shoe after her when she

takes her departure from Stalham. I have written a line

to your aunt to press my request for this visit. This she

will no doubt show to you, and you, if you please, can

show her mine in return.

And now, my dear, I must explain to you one or two other

arrangements. A certain gentleman will \_certainly\_ not be

here. It was not my fault that a certain gentleman went to

Kingsbury Crescent. The certain gentleman is, as you are

aware, a great friend of ours, and was entitled to explain

himself if it so seemed good to him; but the certain

gentleman was not favoured in that enterprise by the

Stalham interest. At any rate, the certain gentleman

will not be at Stalham on this occasion. So much for the

certain gentleman.

Colonel Stubbs will be here, and, as he will be coming

down on the twentieth, would be glad to travel by the same

train, so that he may look after your ticket and your

luggage, and be your slave for the occasion. He will leave

the Paddington Station by the 4 P.M. train if that will

suit you.

We all think that he behaved beautifully in that little

affair at the Haymarket theatre. I should not mention it

only that everybody has heard of it. Almost any other man

would have struck the poor fellow again; but he is one

of the very few who always know what to do at the moment

without taking time to think of it.

Mind you come like a good girl.--Your affectionate friend,

ROSALINE ALBURY.

It was in this way that Ayala heard what had taken place between her

cousin Tom and Colonel Stubbs. Some hint of a fracas between the two

men had reached her ears; but now she asked various questions of her

aunt, and at last elicited the truth. Tom had attacked her other

lover in the street,--had attacked Colonel Stubbs because of his

injured love, and had grossly misbehaved himself. As a consequence he

would have been locked up by the police had not the Colonel himself

interfered on his behalf. This to Ayala seemed to be conduct worthy

almost of an Angel of Light.

Then the question of the proposed visit was discussed,--first with

her aunt, and then with herself. Mrs. Dosett was quite willing that

her niece should go to Stalham. To Mrs. Dosett's thinking, a further

journey to Stalham would mean an engagement with Colonel Stubbs. When

she had read Lady Albury's letter she was quite sure that that had

been Lady Albury's meaning. Captain Batsby was not to receive the

Stalham interest;--but that interest was to be used on the part of

Colonel Stubbs. She had not the slightest objection. It was clear to

her that Ayala would have to be married before long. It was out of

the question that one man after another should fall in love with her

violently, and that nothing should come of it. Mrs. Dosett had become

quite despondent about Tom. There was an amount of dislike which it

would be impossible to overcome. And as for Captain Batsby there

could be no chance for a man whom the young lady could not be induced

even to see. But the other lover, whom the lady would not admit that

she loved,--as to whom she had declared that she could never love

him,--was held in very high favour. "I do think it was so noble not

to hit Tom again," she had said. Therefore, as Colonel Stubbs had a

sufficient income, there could be no reason why Ayala should not go

again to Stalham. So it was that Mrs. Dosett argued with herself, and

such was the judgment which she expressed to Ayala.

But there were difficulties. Ayala's little stock of cash was all

gone. She could not go to Stalham without money, and that money must

come out of her Uncle Reginald's pocket. She could not go to Stalham

without some expenditure, which, as she well knew, it would be hard

for him to bear. And then there was that terrible question of her

clothes! When that suggestion had been made of a further transfer of

the nieces a cheque had come from Sir Thomas. "If Ayala comes to us

she will want a few things," Sir Thomas had said in a note to Mrs.

Dosett. But Mr. Dosett had chosen that the cheque should be sent back

when it was decided that the further transfer should not take place.

The cheque had been sent back, and there had been an end of it. There

must be a morning dress, and there must be another hat, and there

must be boots. So much Mrs. Dosett acknowledged. Let them do what

they might with the old things, Mrs. Dosett acknowledged that so much

as that would at least be necessary. "We will both go to work," Mrs.

Dosett said, "and we will ask your uncle what he can do for us." I

think she felt that she had received some recompense when Ayala

kissed her.

It was after this that Ayala discussed the matter with herself. She

had longed to go once again to Stalham,--"dear Stalham," as she

called it to herself. And as she thought of the place she told

herself that she loved it because Lady Albury had been so kind to

her, and because of Nina, and because of the hunting, and because

of the general pleasantness and luxury of the big comfortable house.

And yes; there was something to be said, too, of the pleasantness of

Colonel Stubbs. Till he had made love to her he had been, perhaps,

of all these fine new friends the pleasantest. How joyous his voice

had sounded to her! How fraught with gratification to her had been

his bright ugly face! How well he had known how to talk to her, and

to make her talk, so that everything had been easy with her! How

thoroughly she remembered all his drollery on that first night at

the party in London,--and all his keen sayings at the theatre;--and

the way he had insisted that she should hunt! She thought of little

confidences she had had with him, almost as though he had been her

brother! And then he had destroyed it all by becoming her lover!

Was he to be her lover still; and if so would it be right that she

should go again to Stalham, knowing that she would meet him there?

Would it be right that she should consent to travel with him,--under

his special escort? Were she to do so would she not be forced to do

more,--if he should again ask her? It was so probable that he would

not ask her again! It was so strange that such a one should have

asked her!

But if he did ask her? Certainly he was not like that Angel of Light

whom she had never seen, but of whom the picture in her imagination

was as clearly drawn as though she were in his presence daily.

No;--there was a wave of hair and a shape of brow, and a peculiarity

of the eye, with a nose and mouth cut as sharp as chisel could cut

them out of marble, all of which graced the Angel but none of which

belonged to the Colonel. Nor were these the chief of the graces which

made the Angel so glorious to her. There was a depth of poetry about

him, deep and clear, pellucid as a lake among grassy banks, which

make all things of the world mean when compared to it. The Angel of

Light lived on the essence of all that was beautiful, altogether

unalloyed by the grossness of the earth. That such a one should come

in her way! Oh, no; she did not look for it! But, having formed such

an image of an angel for herself, would it be possible that she

should have anything less divine, less beautiful, less angelic?

Yes; there was something of the Angel about him; even about him,

Colonel Jonathan Stubbs. But he was so clearly an Angel of the earth,

whereas the other one, though living upon the earth, would be of the

air, and of the sky, of the clouds, and of the heaven, celestial.

Such a one she knew she had never seen. She partly dreamed that

she was dreaming. But if so had not her dream spoilt her for all

else? Oh, yes; indeed he was good, this red-haired ugly Stubbs. How

well had he behaved to Tom! How kind he had been to herself! How

thoughtful of her he was! If it were not a question of downright

love,--of giving herself up to him, body and soul, as it were,--how

pleasant would it be to dwell with him! For herself she would confess

that she loved earthly things,--such as jumping over the brook with

Larry Twentyman before her to show her the way. But for her love, it

was necessary that there should be an Angel of Light. Had she not

read that angels had come from heaven and taken in marriage the

daughters of men?

But was it right that she should go to Stalham, seeing that there

were two such strong reasons against it? She could not go without

costing her uncle money, which he could ill afford; and if she did go

would she--would she not confess that she had abandoned her objection

to the Colonel's suit. She, too, understood something of that which

had made itself so plain to her aunt. "Your uncle thinks it is right

that you should go," her aunt said to her in the drawing-room that

evening; "and we will set to work to-morrow and do the best that we

can to make you smart."

Her uncle was sitting in the room at the time, and Ayala felt herself

compelled to go to him and kiss him, and thank him for all his

kindness. "I am so sorry to cost you so much money, Uncle Reginald,"

she said.

"It will not be very much, my dear," he answered. "It is hard that

young people should not have some amusement. I only hope they will

make you happy at Stalham."

"They always make people happy at Stalham," said Ayala,

energetically.

"And now, Ayala," said her aunt, "you can write your letter to Lady

Albury before we go out to-morrow. Give her my compliments, and tell

her that as you are writing I need not trouble her."

Ayala, when she was alone in her bedroom, felt almost horrified as

she reflected that in this manner the question had been settled for

her. It had been impossible for her to reject her uncle's liberal

offer when it had been made. She could not find the courage at that

moment to say that she had thought better of it all, and would

decline the visit. Before she was well aware of what she was doing

she had assented, and had thus, as it were, thrown over all the

creations of her dream. And yet, as she declared herself, not even

Lady Albury could make her marry this man, merely because she was

at her house. She thought that, if she could only avoid that first

journey with Colonel Stubbs in the railway, still she might hold her

own. But, were she to travel with him of her own accord, would it not

be felt that she would be wilfully throwing herself in his way? Then

she made a little plan for herself, which she attempted to carry out

when writing her letter to Lady Albury on the following morning. What

was the nature of her plan, and how she effected it, will be seen in

the letter which she wrote;--

Kingsbury Crescent, Thursday.

DEAR LADY ALBURY,

It is so very good of you to ask me again, and I shall

be so happy to visit Stalham once more! I should have

been very sorry not to see dear Nina before her return to

Italy. I have written to congratulate her of course, and

have told her what a happy girl I think she is. Though

I have not seen Lord George I take all that from her

description. As she is going to be his wife immediately,

I don't at all see why he should not go back with her to

Rome. As for being married by the Pope, I don't think he

ever does anything so useful as that. I believe he sits

all day and has his toe kissed. That is what they told me

at Rome.

I am very glad of what you tell me about the certain

gentleman, because I don't think I could have been happy

at Stalham if he had been there. It surprised me so much

that I could not think that he meant it in earnest. We

never hardly spoke to each other when we were in the house

together.

Perhaps, if you don't mind, and I shan't be in the way,

--here she began to display the little plan which she had made for

her own protection,--

I will come down by an earlier train than you mention.

There is one at 2.15, and then I need not be in the dark

all the way. You need not say anything about this to

Colonel Stubbs, because I do not at all mind travelling by

myself.--Yours affectionately,

AYALA.

This was her little plan. But she was very innocent when she thought

that Lady Albury would be blind to such a scheme as that. She got

three words from Lady Albury, saying that the 2.15 train would do

very well, and that the carriage would be at the station to meet her.

Lady Albury did not also say in her note that she had communicated

with Colonel Stubbs on the subject, and informed him that he must

come up from Aldershot earlier than he intended in order that he

might adapt himself to Ayala's whims. "Foolish little child," said

Lady Albury to herself! "As if that would make any difference!" It

was clear to Lady Albury that Ayala must surrender now that she was

coming to Stalham a second time, knowing that the Colonel would be

there.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AYALA GOES AGAIN TO STALHAM.

The correspondence between Lady Albury and Colonel Stubbs was close

and frequent, the friendship between them being very close. Ayala had

sometimes asked herself why Lady Albury should have been so kind and

affectionate to her, and had failed to find any sufficient answer.

She had been asked to Stalham at first,--so far as she knew,--because

she had been intimate at Rome with the Marchesa Baldoni. Hence had

apparently risen Lady Albury's great friendship, which had seemed

even to herself to be strange. But in truth the Marchesa had had very

little to do with it,--nor had Lady Albury become attached to Ayala

for Ayala's own sake. To Lady Albury Colonel Stubbs was,--as she

declared to herself very often,--"her own real brother." She had

married a man very rich, well known in the world, whom she loved very

well; and she was not a woman who in such a position would allow

herself to love another man. That there might certainly be no danger

of this kind she was continually impressing on her friend the

expediency of marriage,--if only he could find some one good enough

to marry. Then the Colonel had found Ayala. Lady Albury at the

beginning of all this was not inclined to think that Ayala was good

enough. Judging at first from what she heard and then from what she

saw, she had not been very favourable to Ayala. But when her friend

had insisted,--had declared that his happiness depended on it,--had

shown by various signs that he certainly would carry out his

intentions, if not at Stalham then elsewhere, Lady Albury had yielded

herself to him, and had become Ayala's great friend. If it was

written in the book that Ayala was to become Mrs. Stubbs then it

would certainly be necessary that she and Ayala should be friends.

And she herself had such confidence in Jonathan Stubbs as a man of

power, that she did not doubt of his success in any matter to which

he might choose to devote himself. The wonder had been that Ayala

should have rejected the chance when it had come in her way. The girl

had been foolish, allowing herself to be influenced by the man's red

hair and ill-sounding name,--not knowing a real pearl when she saw

it. So Lady Albury had thought,--having only been partially right

in so thinking,--not having gone to the depth of Ayala's power of

dreaming. She was very confident, however, that the girl, when once

again at Stalham, would yield herself easily; and therefore she went

to work, doing all that she could to smoothen love's road for her

friend Jonathan. Her woman's mind had seen all those difficulties

about clothes, and would have sent what was needful herself had

she not feared to offend both the Dosetts and Ayala. Therefore she

prepared a present which she could give to the girl at Stalham

without offence. If it was to be the girl's high fate to become Mrs.

Jonathan Stubbs, it would be proper that she should be adorned and

decked, and made beautiful among others of her class,--as would

become the wife of such a hero.

Of all that passed between her and Ayala word was sent down to

Aldershot. "The stupid little wretch will throw you out, I know,"

wrote Lady Albury, "by making you start two hours before you have

done your work. But you must let your work do itself for this

occasion. There is nothing like a little journey together to make

people understand each other."

The Colonel was clearly determined to have the little journey

together. Whatever might be the present military duties at Aldershot,

the duties of love were for the nonce in the Colonel's mind more

imperative. Though his Royal Highness had been coming that afternoon

to inspect all the troops, still he would have resolved so to have

arranged matters as to travel down with Ayala to Stalham. But not

only was he determined to do this, but he found it necessary also to

arrange a previous meeting with Lady Albury before that important

twentieth of the month. This he did by making his friend believe that

her presence in London for a few hours would be necessary for various

reasons. She came up as he desired, and there he met her at her

hotel in Jermyn Street. On his arrival here he felt that he was

almost making a fool of himself by the extent of his anxiety. In his

nervousness about this little girl he was almost as insane as poor

Tom Tringle, who, when she despised his love, was altogether unable

to control himself. "If I cannot persuade her at last, I shall be

knocking somebody over the head, as he did." It was thus he was

talking to himself as he got out of the cab at the door of the hotel.

"And now, Jonathan," said Lady Albury, "what can there possibly be to

justify you in giving me all this trouble?"

"You know you had to come up about that cook's character."

"I know that I have given that as a reason to Sir Harry; but I know

also that I should have gone without a cook for a twelvemonth had you

not summoned me."

"The truth is I could not get down to Stalham and back without losing

an additional day, which I cannot possibly spare. With you it does

not very much matter how many days you spare."

"Nor how much money I spend, nor how much labour I take, so that I

obey all the commands of Colonel Jonathan Stubbs! What on earth is

there that I can say or do for you more?"

"There are one or two things," said he, "that I want you to

understand. In the first place, I am quite in earnest about this."

"Don't I know that you're in earnest?"

"But perhaps you do not understand the full extent of my earnestness.

If she were to refuse me ultimately I should go away."

"Go away! Go where?"

"Oh; that I have not at all thought of;--probably to India, as I

might manage to get a regiment there. But in truth it would matter

very little."

"You are talking like a goose."

"That is very likely, because in this matter I think and feel like

a goose. It is not a great thing in a man to be turned out of his

course by some undefined feeling which he has as to a young woman.

But the thing has occurred before now, and will occur again, in my

case, if I am thrown over."

"What on earth is there about the girl?" asked Lady Albury. "There

is that precious brother-in-law of ours going to hang himself

incontinently because she will not look at him. And that unfortunate

friend of yours, Tom Tringle, is, if possible, worse than Ben Batsby

or yourself."

"If two other gentlemen are in the same condition it only makes it

the less singular that I should be the third. At any rate, I am the

third."

"You do not mean to liken yourself to them?"

"Indeed I do. As to our connection with Miss Dormer, I can see no

difference. We are all in love with her, and she has refused us

all. It matters little whether a man's ugliness or his rings or his

natural stupidity may have brought about this result."

"You are very modest, Jonathan."

"I always was, only you never could see it. I am modest in this

matter; but not for that reason the less persistent in doing the

best I can for myself. My object now in seeing you is to let you

understand that it is--well, not life and death, because she will

not suffice either to kill me or to keep me alive,--but one of those

matters which, in a man's career, are almost as important to him as

life and death. She was very decided in her refusal."

"So is every girl when a first offer is made to her. How is any girl

so to arrange her thoughts at a moment's notice as to accept a man

off-hand?"

"Girls do do so."

"Very rarely, I think; and when they do they are hardly worth

having," said Lady Albury, laying down the law on the matter with

great precision. "If a girl accept a man all at once when she has

had, as it were, no preparation for such a proposal, she must always

surely be in a state of great readiness for matrimonial projects.

When there has been a prolonged period of spooning then of course it

is quite a different thing. The whole thing has in fact been arranged

before the important word has been spoken."

"What a professor in the art you are!" said he.

"The odd thing is, that such a one as you should be so ignorant.

Can't you understand that she would not come to Stalham if her mind

were made up against you? I said nothing of you as a lover, but I

took care to let her know that you were coming. You are very ready

to put yourself in the same boat with poor Ben Batsby or that other

unfortunate wretch. Would she, do you think, have consented to come

had she known that Ben would have been there, or your friend Tom

Tringle?"

There was much more of it, but the upshot was,--as the Colonel had

intended that it should be,--that Lady Albury was made to understand

that Ayala's good-will was essential to his happiness. "Of course

I will do my best," she said, as he parted from her. "Though I am

not quite as much in love with her myself as you are, yet I will

do my best." Then when she was left alone, and was prosecuting her

inquiries about the new cook, and travelling back in the afternoon

to Stalham, she again considered how wonderful a thing it was such a

girl as Ayala, so small, apparently so unimportant, so childish in

her manner, with so little to say for herself, should become a person

of such terrible importance.

The twentieth came, and at ten minutes before two Ayala was at the

Paddington Railway Station. The train, which was to start at 2.15,

had been chosen by herself so that she might avoid the Colonel, and

there she was, with her aunt, waiting for it. Mrs. Dosett had thought

it to be her duty to see her off, and had come with her in the cab.

There were the two boxes laden with her wardrobe, such as it was.

Both she and her aunt had worked hard; for though,--as she had

declared to herself,--there was no special reason for it, still she

had wished to look her best. As she saw the boxes put into the van,

and had told herself how much shabbier they were than the boxes of

other young ladies who went visiting to such houses as Stalham,

she rejoiced that Colonel Stubbs was not there to see them. And

she considered whether it was possible that Colonel Stubbs should

recognise a dress which she had worn at Stalham before, which was

now to appear in a quite altered shape. She wondered also whether it

would be possible that Colonel Stubbs should know how poor she was.

As she was thinking of all this there was Colonel Stubbs on the

platform.

She had never doubted but that little plan would be efficacious. Nor

had her aunt doubted,--who had seen through the plan, though not a

word had been spoken between them on the subject. Mrs. Dosett had

considered it to be impossible that a Colonel engaged on duties of

importance at Aldershot should run away from them to wait upon a

child like Ayala,--even though he had professed himself to be in love

with the child. She had never seen the Colonel, and on this occasion

did not expect to see him. But there he was, all suddenly, shaking

hands with Ayala.

"My aunt, Mrs. Dosett," whispered Ayala. Then the Colonel began to

talk to the elder lady as though the younger lady were a person of

very much less importance. Yes; he had run up from Aldershot a little

earlier than he had intended. There had been nothing particular to

keep him down at Aldershot. It had always been his intention to go to

Stalham on this day, and was glad of the accident which was bringing

Miss Dormer there just at the same time. He spent a good deal of his

time at Stalham because Sir Harry and he, who were in truth cousins,

were as intimate as brothers. He always lived at Stalham when he

could get away from duty and was not in London. Stalham was a very

nice place certainly; one of the most comfortable houses he knew in

England. So he went on till he almost made Mrs. Dosett believe, and

did make Ayala believe, that his visit to Stalham had nothing to

do with herself. And yet Mrs. Dosett knew that the offer had been

made. Ayala bethought herself that she did not care so much for the

re-manufactured frock after all, nor yet for the shabby appearance

of the boxes. The real Angel of Light would not care for her frock

nor for her boxes; and certainly would not be indifferent after the

fashion of,--of,--! Then she began to reflect that she was making a

fool of herself.

She was put into the carriage, Mr. Dosett having luckily decided

against the use of the second class. Going to such a house as Stalham

Ayala ought, said Mr. Dosett, to go as any other lady would. Had it

been himself or his wife it would have been very different; but for

Ayala, on such an occasion as this, he would be extravagant. Ayala

was therefore put into her seat while the Colonel stood at the door

outside, still talking to Mrs. Dosett. "I don't think she will be

let to come away at the end of a week," said the Colonel. "Sir

Harry doesn't like people to come away very soon." Ayala heard this,

and thought that she remembered that Sir Harry himself was very

indifferent as to the coming and going of the visitors. "They go up

to London about the end of March," said the Colonel, "and if Miss

Dormer were to return about a week before it would do very well."

"Oh, no," said Ayala, putting her head out of the window; "I couldn't

think of staying so long as that." Then the last final bustle was

made by the guard; the Colonel got in, the door was shut, and Mrs.

Dosett, standing on the platform, nodded her head for the last time.

There were only four persons in the carriage. In the opposite corner

there were two old persons, probably a husband and wife, who had been

very careful as to a foot-warming apparatus, and were muffled up very

closely in woollen and furs. "If you don't mind shutting the door,

Sir," said the old gentleman, rather testily, "because my wife has a

pain in her face." The door absolutely was shut when the words were

spoken, but the Colonel made some sign of closing all the apertures.

But there was a ventilator above, which the old lady spied. "If you

don't mind shutting that hole up there, Sir, because my husband is

very bad with neuralgia." The Colonel at once got up and found that

the ventilator was fast closed, so as not to admit a breath of air.

"There are draughts come in everywhere," said the old gentleman. "The

Company ought to be prosecuted." "I believe the more people they kill

the better they like it," said the old lady. Then the Colonel looked

at Ayala with a very grave face, with no hint at a smile, with a face

which must have gratified even the old lady and gentleman. But Ayala

understood the face, and could not refrain from a little laugh. She

laughed only with her eyes,--but the Colonel saw it.

"The weather has been very severe all day," said the Colonel, in a

severe voice.

Ayala protested that she had not found it cold at all. "Then, Miss, I

think you must be made of granite," said the old lady. "I hope you'll

remember that other people are not so fortunate." Ayala again smiled,

and the Colonel made another effort as though to prevent any possible

breath of air from making its way into the interior of the vehicle.

There was silence among them for some minutes, and then Ayala was

quite surprised by the tone in which her friend addressed her. "What

an ill-natured girl you must be," said he, "to have put me to such a

terrible amount of trouble all on purpose."

"I didn't," said Ayala.

"Yes, you did. Why wouldn't you come down by the four o'clock train

as I told you? Now I've left everything undone, and I shouldn't

wonder if I get into such a row at the Horse Guards that I shall

never hear the end of it. And now you are not a bit grateful."

"Yes, I am grateful; but I didn't want you to come at all," she said.

"Of course I should come. I didn't think you were so perverse."

"I'm not perverse, Colonel Stubbs."

"When young persons are perverse, it is my opinion they oughtn't to

be encouraged," said the old lady from her corner.

"My dear, you know nothing about it," said the old gentleman.

"Yes, I do," said the old lady. "I know all about it. Whatever she

does a young lady ought not to be perverse. I do hate perversity. I

am sure that hole up there must be open, Sir, for the wind does come

in so powerful." Colonel Stubbs again jumped up and poked at the

ventilator.

In the meantime Ayala was laughing so violently that she could with

difficulty prevent herself from making a noise, which, she feared,

would bring down increased wrath upon her from the old lady. That

feigned scolding from the Colonel at once brought back upon her the

feeling of sudden and pleasant intimacy which she had felt when he

had first come and ordered her to dance with him at the ball in

London. It was once again with her as though she knew this man almost

more intimately, and certainly more pleasantly, than any of her other

acquaintances. Whatever he said she could answer him now, and pretend

to scold him, and have her joke with him as though no offer had ever

been made. She could have told him now all the story of that turned

dress, if that subject had come naturally to her, or have laughed

with him at her own old boxes, and confided to him any other of the

troubles of her poverty, as if they were jokes which she could share

at any rate with him. Then he spoke again. "I do abominate a perverse

young woman," he said. Upon this Ayala could no longer constrain

herself, but burst into loud laughter.

After a while the two old people became quite familiar, and there

arose a contest, in which the lady took part with the Colonel, and

the old man protected Ayala. The Colonel spoke as though he were

quite in earnest, and went on to declare that the young ladies of

the present time were allowed far too much licence. "They never have

their own bread to earn," he said, "and they ought to make themselves

agreeable to other people who have more to do."

"I quite agree with you, Sir," said the old lady. "They should run

about and be handy. I like to see a girl that can jump about the

house and make herself useful."

"Young ladies ought to be young ladies," said the old man, putting

his mouth for a moment up out of his comforter.

"And can't a young lady be useful and yet be a young lady?" said the

Colonel.

"It is her special province to be ornamental," said the old

gentleman. "I like to see young ladies ornamental. I don't think

young ladies ought to be scolded, even if they are a little

fractious."

"I quite agree with you, Sir," said Ayala. And so the fight went on

with sundry breaks and changes in the matter under discussion till

the station for Stalham had been reached. The old gentleman, indeed,

seemed to lose his voice before the journey was half over, but

the lady persevered, so that she and the Colonel became such fast

friends that she insisted on shaking hands with him when he left the

carriage.

"How could you be so wicked as to go on hoaxing her like that?" said

Ayala, as soon as they were on the platform.

"There was no hoax at all. I was quite in earnest. Was not every word

true that I said? Now come and get into the carriage quickly, or you

will be as bad as the old gentleman himself."

Ayala did get into the carriage quickly, where she found Nina.

The two girls were full of conversation as they went to Stalham; but

through it all Ayala could not refrain from thinking how the Jonathan

Stubbs of to-day had been exactly like that Jonathan Stubbs she had

first known,--and how very unlike a lover.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CAPTAIN BATSBY AT MERLE PARK.

When Ayala went to Stalham Captain Batsby went to Merle Park. They

had both been invited by Lady Tringle, and when the letter was

written to Ayala she was assured that Tom should not be there. At

that time Tom's last encounter with the police had not as yet become

known to the Tringles, and the necessity of keeping Tom at the house

in the country was not manifest. The idea had been that Captain

Batsby should have an opportunity of explaining himself to Ayala. The

Captain came; but, as to Ayala, Mrs. Dosett sent word to say that she

had been invited to stay some days just at that time with her friend

Lady Albury at Stalham.

What to do with Captain Batsby had been felt to be a difficulty by

Lady Albury. It was his habit to come to Stalham some time in March

and there finish the hunting season. It might be hoped that Ayala's

little affair might be arranged early in March, and then, whether he

came or whether he did not, it would be the same to Ayala. But the

Captain himself would be grievously irate when he should hear the

trick which would have been played upon him. Lady Albury had already

desired him not to come till after the first week in March, having

fabricated an excuse. She had been bound to keep the coast clear both

for Ayala's sake and the Colonel's; but she knew that when her trick

should be discovered there would be unmeasured wrath. "Why the deuce

don't you let the two men come, and then the best man may win!"

said Sir Harry, who did not doubt but that, in such a case, the

Colonel would prove to be the best man. Here too there was another

difficulty. When Lady Albury attempted to explain that Ayala would

not come unless she were told that she would not meet the Captain,

Sir Harry declared that there should be no such favour. "Who the

deuce is this little girl," he asked, "that everybody should be

knocked about in this way for her?" Lady Albury was able to pacify

the husband, but she feared that any pacifying of the Captain would

be impossible. There would be a family quarrel;--but even that must

be endured for the Colonel's sake.

In the meantime the Captain was kept in absolute ignorance of Ayala's

movements, and went down to Merle Park hoping to meet her there.

He must have been very much in love, for Merle Park was by no

means a spot well adapted for hunting. Hounds there were in the

neighbourhood, but he turned up his nose at the offer when Sir Thomas

suggested that he might bring down a hunter. Captain Batsby, when he

went on hunting exhibitions, never stirred without five horses, and

always confined his operations to six or seven favoured counties. But

Ayala just at present was more to him than hunting, and therefore,

though it was now the end of February, he went to Merle Park.

"It was all Sir Thomas's doing." It was thus that Lady Tringle

endeavoured to console herself when discussing the matter with her

daughters. The Honourable Septimus Traffick had now gone up to

London, and was inhabiting a single room in the neighbourhood of the

House. Augusta was still at Merle Park, much to the disgust of her

father. He did not like to tell her to be gone; and would indeed have

been glad enough of her presence had it not been embittered by the

feeling that he was being "done." But there she remained, and in

discussing the affairs of the Captain with her mother and Gertrude

was altogether averse to the suggested marriage for Ayala. To her

thinking Ayala was not entitled to a husband at all. Augusta had

never given way in the affair of Tom;--had declared her conviction

that Stubbs had never been in earnest; and was of opinion that

Captain Batsby would be much better off at Merle Park without Ayala

than he would have been in that young lady's presence. When he

arrived nothing was said to him at once about Ayala. Gertrude,

who recovered from the great sickness occasioned by Mr. Houston's

misconduct, though the recovery was intended only to be temporary,

made herself as pleasant as possible. Captain Batsby was made

welcome, and remained three days before he sought an opportunity of

asking a question about Ayala.

During this time he found Gertrude to be a very agreeable companion,

but he made Mrs. Traffick his first confidant. "Well, you know,

Captain Batsby, to tell you the truth, we are not very fond of our

cousin."

"Sir Thomas told me she was to be here."

"So we know. My father is perhaps a little mistaken about Ayala."

"Was she not asked?" demanded Captain Batsby, beginning to think that

he had been betrayed.

"Oh, yes; she was asked. She has been asked very often, because she

is mamma's niece, and did live with us once for a short time. But she

did not come. In fact she won't go anywhere, unless--"

"Unless what?"

"You know Colonel Stubbs?"

"Jonathan Stubbs. Oh dear, yes; very intimately. He is a sort of

connection of mine. He is my half-brother's second cousin by the

father's side."

"Oh indeed! Does that make him very near?"

"Not at all. I don't like him, if you mean that. He always takes

everything upon himself down at Stalham."

"What we hear is that Ayala is always running after him."

"Ayala running after Jonathan?"

"Haven't you heard of that?" asked Mrs. Traffick. "Why;--she is at

Stalham with the Alburys this moment, and I do not doubt that Colonel

Stubbs is there also. She would not have gone had she not been sure

of meeting him."

This disturbed the Captain so violently that for two or three hours

he kept himself apart, not knowing what to do with himself or where

to betake himself. Could this be true about Jonathan Stubbs? There

had been moments of deep jealousy down at Stalham; but then he had

recovered from that, having assured himself that he was wrong. It

had been Larry Twentyman and not Jonathan Stubbs who had led the two

girls over the brook,--into which Stubbs had simply fallen, making

himself an object of pity. But now again the Captain believed it all.

It was on this account, then, that his half-sister-in-law, Rosaline,

had desired him to stay away from Stalham for the present! He knew

well how high in favour with Lady Albury was that traitor Stubbs;

how it was by her favour that Stubbs, who was no more than a second

cousin, was allowed to do just what he pleased in the stables, while

Sir Harry himself, the master of the hounds, confined himself to

the kennel! He was determined at first to leave Merle Park and

start instantly for Stalham, and had sent for his servant to begin

the packing of his things; but as he thought of it more maturely

he considered that his arrival at Stalham would be very painful

to himself as well as to others. For the others he did not much

care, but he saw clearly that the pain to himself would be very

disagreeable. No one at Stalham would be glad to see him. Sir Harry

would be disturbed, and the other three persons with whom he was

concerned,--Lady Albury, Stubbs, and Ayala,--would be banded together

in hostility against him. What chance would he have under such

circumstances? Therefore he determined that he would stay at Merle

Park yet a little longer.

And, after all, was Ayala worth the trouble which he had proposed to

take for her? How much had he offered her, how scornfully had his

offer been received, and how little had she to give him in return!

And now he had been told that she was always running after Jonathan

Stubbs! Could it be worth his while to run after a girl who was

always running after Jonathan Stubbs? Was he not much higher in the

world than Jonathan Stubbs, seeing that he had, at any rate, double

Stubbs's income? Stubbs was a red-haired, ugly, impudent fellow, who

made his way wherever he went simply by "cheek"! Upon reflection, he

found that it would be quite beneath him to run after any girl who

could so demean herself as to run after Jonathan Stubbs. Therefore he

came down to dinner on that evening with all his smiles, and said not

a word about Ayala to Sir Thomas, who had just returned from London.

"Is he very much provoked?" Sir Thomas asked his wife that evening.

"Provoked about what?"

"He was expressly told that he would meet Ayala here."

"He seems to be making himself very comfortable, and hasn't said a

word to me about Ayala. I am sick of Ayala. Poor Tom is going to be

really ill." Then Sir Thomas frowned, and said nothing more on that

occasion.

Tom was certainly in an uncomfortable position, and never left his

bed till after noon. Then he would mope about the place, moping even

worse than he did before, and would spend the evening all alone in

the housekeeper's room, with a pipe in his mouth, which he seemed

hardly able to take the trouble to keep alight. There were three

or four other guests in the house, including two Honourable Miss

Trafficks, and a couple of young men out of the City, whom Lady

Tringle hoped might act as antidotes to Houston and Hamel. But with

none of them would Tom associate. With Captain Batsby he did form

some little intimacy; driven to it, no doubt, by a community of

interest. "I believe you were acquainted with my cousin, Miss Dormer,

at Stalham?" asked Tom. At the moment the two were sitting over the

fire in the housekeeper's room, and Captain Batsby was smoking a

cigar, while Tom was sucking an empty pipe.

"Oh, yes," said Captain Batsby, pricking up his ears, "I saw a good

deal of her."

"A wonderful creature!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes, indeed!"

"For a real romantic style of beauty, I don't suppose that the world

ever saw her like before. Did you?"

"Are you one among your cousin's admirers?" demanded the Captain.

"Am I?" asked Tom, surprised that there should be anybody who had

not as yet heard his tragic story. "Am I one of her admirers?

Why,--rather! Haven't you heard about me and Stubbs?"

"No, indeed."

"I thought that everybody had heard that. I challenged him, you

know."

"To fight a duel?"

"Yes; to fight a duel. I sent my friend Faddle down with a letter to

Stalham, but it was of no use. Why should a man fight a duel when he

has got such a girl as Ayala to love him?"

"That is quite true, then?"

"I fear so! I fear so! Oh, yes; it is too true. Then you know;"--and

as he came to this portion of his story he jumped up from his chair

and frowned fiercely;--"then, you know, I met him under the portico

of the Haymarket, and struck him."

"Oh,--was that you?"

"Indeed it was."

"And he did not do anything to you?"

"He behaved like a hero," said Tom. "I do think that he behaved like

a hero,--though of course I hate him." The bitterness of expression

was here very great. "He wouldn't let them lock me up. Though, in

the matter of that, I should have been best pleased if they would

have locked me up for ever, and kept me from the sight of the world.

Admire that girl, Captain Batsby! I don't think that I ever heard of

a man who loved a girl as I love her. I do not hesitate to say that I

continue to walk the world,--in the way of not committing suicide, I

mean,--simply because there is still a possibility while she has not

as yet stood at the hymeneal altar with another man. I would have

shot Stubbs willingly, though I knew I was to be tried for it at the

Old Bailey,--and hung! I would have done it willingly,--willingly; or

any other man." After that Captain Batsby thought it might be prudent

not to say anything especial as to his own love.

And how foolish would it be for a man like himself, with a good

fortune of his own, to marry any girl who had not a sixpence!

The Captain was led into this vain thought by the great civility

displayed to him by the ladies of the house. With Lucy, whom he knew

to be Ayala's sister, he had not prospered very well. It came to

his ears that she was out of favour with her aunt, and he therefore

meddled with her but little. The Tringle ladies, however, were very

kind to him,--so kind that he was tempted to think less than ever of

one who had been so little courteous to him as Ayala. Mrs. Traffick

was of course a married woman, and it amounted to nothing. But

Gertrude--! All the world knew that Septimus Traffick without a

shilling of his own had become the happy possessor of a very large

sum of money. He, Batsby, had more to recommend him than Traffick!

Why should not he also become a happy possessor? He went away for a

week's hunting into Northamptonshire, and then, at Lady Tringle's

request, came back to Merle Park.

At this time Miss Tringle had quite recovered her health. She had

dropped all immediate speech as to Mr. Houston. Had she not been

provoked, she would have allowed all that to drop into oblivion. But

a married sister may take liberties. "You are well rid of him, I

think," said Augusta. Gertrude heaved a deep sigh. She did not wish

to acknowledge herself to be rid of him until another string were

well fitted to her bow. "After all, a man with nothing to do in the

world, with no profession, no occupation, with no money--"

"Mr. Traffick had not got very much money of his own."

"He has a seat in Parliament, which is very much more than fortune,

and will undoubtedly be in power when his party comes in. And he is a

man of birth. But Frank Houston had nothing to recommend him."

"Birth!" said Gertrude, turning up her nose.

"The Queen, who is the fountain of honour, made his father a

nobleman, and that constitutes birth." This the married sister

said with stern severity of manner, and perfect reliance on the

constitutional privileges of her Sovereign.

"I don't know that we need talk about it," said Gertrude.

"Not at all. Mr. Houston has behaved very badly, and I suppose there

is an end of him as far as this house is concerned. Captain Batsby

seems to me to be a very nice young man, and I suppose he has got

money. A man should certainly have got money,--or an occupation."

"He has got both," said Gertrude, which, however, was not true, as

Captain Batsby had left the service.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

"Have you forgotten my cousin so soon?" Gertrude asked one day, as

she was walking with the happy Captain in the park. The Captain, no

doubt, had been saying soft things to her.

"Do you throw that in my teeth as an offence?"

"Inconstancy in men is generally considered as an offence," said

Gertrude. What it might be in women she did not just then declare.

"After all I have heard of your cousin since I have been here, I

should hardly have thought that it would be reckoned so in this

case."

"You have heard nothing against her from me."

"I am told that she has treated your brother very badly."

"Poor Tom!"

"And that she is flirting with a man I particularly dislike."

"I suppose she does make herself rather peculiar with that Colonel

Stubbs."

"And, after all, only think how little I saw of her! She is pretty."

"So some people think. I never saw it myself," said Gertrude. "We

always thought her a mass of affectation. We had to turn her out of

the house once you know. She was living here, and then it was that

her sister had to come in her place. It is not their fault that they

have got nothing;--poor girls! They are mamma's nieces, and so papa

always has one of them." After that forgiveness was accorded to the

Captain on account of his fickle conduct, and Gertrude consented to

accept of his services in the guise of a lover. That this was so Mrs.

Traffick was well aware. Nor was Lady Tringle very much in the dark.

Frank Houston was to be considered as good as gone, and if so it

would be well that her daughter should have another string. She

was tired of the troubles of the girls around her, and thought

that as Captain Batsby was supposed to have an income he would do

as a son-in-law. But she had not hitherto been consulted by the

young people, who felt among themselves that there still might be

a difficulty. The difficulty lay with Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas had

brought Captain Batsby there to Merle Park as Ayala's lover, and as

he had been very little at home was unaware of the changes which

had taken place. And then Gertrude was still supposed to be engaged

to Mr. Houston, although this lover had been so violently rejected

by himself. The ladies felt that, as he was made of sterner stuff

than they, so would it be more difficult to reconcile him to the

alterations which were now proposed in the family arrangements. Who

was to bell the cat? "Let him go to papa in the usual way, and ask

his leave," said Mrs. Traffick.

"I did suggest that," said Gertrude, "but he seems not to like to do

it quite yet."

"Is he such a coward as that?"

"I do not know that he is more a coward than anybody else. I remember

when Septimus was quite afraid to go near papa. But then Benjamin has

got money of his own, which does make a difference."

"It's quite untrue saying that Septimus was ever afraid of papa. Of

course he knows his position as a Member of Parliament too well for

that. I suppose the truth is, it's about Ayala."

"It is a little odd about Ayala," said Gertrude, resuming her

confidential tone. "It is so hard to make papa understand about these

kind of things. I declare I believe he thinks that I never ought to

speak to another man because of that scoundrel Frank Houston."

All this was in truth so strange to Sir Thomas that he could not

understand any of the existing perplexities. Why did Captain Batsby

remain as a guest at Merle Park? He had no special dislike to the

man, and when Lady Tringle had told him that she had asked the

Captain to prolong his visit he had made no objection. But why should

the man remain there, knowing as he did now that there was no chance

of Ayala's coming to Merle Park? At last, on a certain Saturday

evening, he did make inquiry on the subject. "What on earth is that

man staying here for?" he said to his wife.

"I think he likes the place."

"Perhaps he likes the place as well as Septimus Traffick, and means

to live here always!" Such allusions as these were constant with Sir

Thomas, and were always received by Lady Tringle with dismay and

grief. "When does he mean to go away?" asked Sir Thomas, gruffly.

Lady Tringle had felt that the time had come in which some word

should be said as to the Captain's intentions; but she feared to

say it. She dreaded to make the clear explanation to her husband.

"Perhaps," said she, "he is becoming fond of some of the young

ladies."

"Young ladies! What young ladies? Do you mean Lucy?"

"Oh dear no!" said Lady Tringle.

"Then what the deuce do you mean? He came here after Ayala, because

I wanted to have all that nonsense settled about Tom. Ayala is not

here, nor likely to be here; and I don't know why he should stay here

philandering away his time. I hate men in a country-house who are

thorough idlers. You had better take an opportunity of letting him

know that he has been here long enough."

All this was repeated by Lady Tringle to Mrs. Traffick, and by Mrs.

Traffick to Gertrude. Then they felt that this was no time for

Captain Batsby to produce himself to Sir Thomas as a suitor for his

youngest daughter.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE JOURNEY TO OSTEND.

"No doubt it will be very hard to make papa understand." This was

said by Gertrude to her new lover a few days after that order had

been given that the lover should be sent away from Merle Park. The

purport of the order in all its severity had not been conveyed

to Captain Batsby. The ladies had felt,--Gertrude had felt very

strongly,--that were he informed that the master of the house

demanded his absence he would take himself off at once. But still

something had to be said,--and something done. Captain Batsby was,

just at present, in a matrimonial frame of mind. He had come to Merle

Park to look for a wife, and, as he had missed one, was, in his

present mood, inclined to take another. But there was no knowing

how long this might last. Augusta had hinted that "something must

be done, either with papa's consent or without it." Then there had

come the conversation in which Gertrude acknowledged the existing

difficulty. "Papa, too probably, would not consent quite at once."

"He must think it very odd that I am staying here," said the Captain.

"Of course it is odd. If you could go to him and tell him

everything!" But the Captain, looking at the matter all round,

thought that he could not go to Sir Thomas and tell him anything.

Then she began gently to introduce the respectable clergyman at

Ostend. It was not necessary that she should refer at length to the

circumstances under which she had studied the subject, but she gave

Captain Batsby to understand that it was one as to which she had

picked up a good deal of information.

But the money! "If Sir Thomas were made really angry, the

consequences would be disastrous," said the Captain. But Gertrude was

of a different way of thinking. Her father was, no doubt, a man who

could be very imperious, and would insist upon having his own way

as long as his own way was profitable to him. But he was a man who

always forgave.

"If you mean about the money," said Gertrude, "I am quite sure

that it would all come right." He did mean about the money, and

was evidently uneasy in his mind when the suggested step was made

manifest to him. Gertrude was astonished to see how long and

melancholy his face could become. "Papa was never unkind about money

in his life," said Gertrude. "He could not endure to have any of us

poor."

On the next Saturday Sir Thomas again came down, and still found his

guest at Merle Park. We are now a little in advance of our special

story, which is, or ought to be, devoted to Ayala. But, with the

affairs of so many lovers and their loves, it is almost impossible to

make the chronicle run at equal periods throughout. It was now more

than three weeks since Ayala went to Stalham, and Lady Albury had

written to the Captain confessing something of her sin, and begging

to be forgiven. This she had done in her anxiety to keep the Captain

away. He had not answered his sister-in-law's letter, but, in his

present frame of mind, was not at all anxious to finish up the

hunting-season at Stalham. Sir Thomas, on his arrival, was very full

of Tom's projected tour. He had arranged everything,--except in

regard to Tom's own assent. He had written to New York, and had

received back a reply from his correspondent assuring him that Tom

should be made most heartily welcome. It might be that Tom's fighting

propensities had not been made known to the people of New York. Sir

Thomas had taken a berth on board of one of the Cunard boats, and had

even gone so far as to ask the Captain to come down for a day or two

to Merle Park. He was so much employed with Tom that he could hardly

afford time and consideration to Captain Batsby and his affairs.

Nevertheless he did ask a question, and received an answer with which

he seemed to be satisfied. "What on earth is that man staying here

for?" he said to his wife.

"He is going on Friday," replied Lady Tringle, doubtingly;--almost

as though she thought that she would be subjected to further anger

because of this delay. But Sir Thomas dropped the subject, and passed

on to some matter affecting Tom's outfit. Lady Tringle was very

glad to change the subject, and promised that everything should be

supplied befitting the hottest and coldest climates on the earth's

surface.

"She sails on the nineteenth of April," said Sir Thomas to his son.

"I don't think I could go as soon as that, Sir," replied Tom,

whining.

"Why not? There are more than three weeks yet, and your mother will

have everything ready for you. What on earth is there to hinder you?"

"I don't think I could go--not on the nineteenth of April."

"Well then, you must. I have taken your place, and Firkin expects you

at New York. They'll do everything for you there, and you'll find

quite a new life. I should have thought you'd have been delighted to

get away from your wretched condition here."

"It is wretched," said Tom; "but I'd rather not go quite so soon."

"Why not?"

"Well, then--"

"What is it, Tom? It makes me unhappy when I see you such a fool."

"I am a fool! I know I am a fool!"

"Then make a new start of it. Cut and run, and begin the world again.

You're young enough to forget all this."

"So I would, only--"

"Only what?"

"I suppose she is engaged to that man Stubbs! If I knew it for

certain then I would go. If I went before, I should only come back as

soon as I got to New York. If they were once married and it were all

done with I think I could make a new start."

In answer to this his father told him that he must go on the

nineteenth of April, whether Ayala were engaged or disengaged,

married or unmarried;--that his outfit would be bought, his cabin

would be ready, circular notes for his use would be prepared,

and everything would be arranged to make his prolonged tour as

comfortable as possible; but that if he did not start on that day

all the Tringle houses would be closed against him, and he would be

turned penniless out into the world. "You'll have to learn that I'm

in earnest," said Sir Thomas, as he turned his back and walked away.

Tom took himself off to reflect whether it would not be a grand thing

to be turned penniless out into the world,--and all for love!

By the early train on Monday Sir Thomas returned to London, having

taken little or no heed of Captain Batsby during his late visit to

the country. Even at Merle Park Captain Batsby's presence was less

important than it would otherwise have been to Lady Tringle and Mrs.

Traffick, because of the serious nature of Sir Thomas's decision as

to his son. Lady Tringle perhaps suspected something. Mrs. Traffick,

no doubt, had her own ideas as to her sister's position; but nothing

was said and nothing was done. Both on the Wednesday and on the

Thursday Lady Tringle went up to town to give the required orders on

Tom's behalf. On the Thursday her elder daughter accompanied her, and

returned with her in the evening. On their arrival they learnt that

neither Captain Batsby nor Miss Gertrude had been seen since ten

o'clock; that almost immediately after Lady Tringle's departure in

the morning Captain Batsby had caused all his luggage to be sent into

Hastings; and that it had since appeared that a considerable number

of Miss Gertrude's things were missing. There could be no doubt that

she had caused them to be packed up with the Captain's luggage. "They

have gone to Ostend, mamma," said Augusta. "I was sure of it, because

I've heard Gertrude say that people can always get themselves married

at Ostend. There is a clergyman there on purpose to do it."

It was at this time past seven o'clock, and Lady Tringle when she

heard the news was so astounded that she did not at first know how

to act. It was not possible for her to reach Dover that night before

the night-boat for Ostend should have started,--even could she have

done any good by going there. Tom was in such a condition that she

hardly dared to trust him; but it was settled at last that she should

telegraph at once to Sir Thomas, in Lombard Street, and that Tom

should travel up to London by the night train.

On the following morning Lady Tringle received a letter from

Gertrude, posted by that young lady at Dover as she passed through on

her road to Ostend. It was as follows;--

DEAR MAMMA,

You will be surprised on your return from London to

find that we have gone. After much thinking about it we

determined it would be best, because we had quite made

up our mind \_not to be kept separated\_. Ben was so eager

about it that I was obliged to yield. We were afraid that

if we asked papa at once he would not have given his

consent. Pray give him my most dutiful love, and tell him

that I am sure he will never have occasion to be ashamed

of his son-in-law. I don't suppose he knows, but it is

the fact that Captain Batsby has about three thousand a

year of his own. It is very different from having nothing,

like that wretch Frank Houston, or, for that matter, Mr.

Traffick. Ben was quite in a position to ask papa, but

things had happened which made us both feel that papa

would not like it just at present. We mean to be married

at Ostend, and then will come back as soon as you and papa

say that you will receive us. In the meantime I wish you

would send some of my clothes after me. Of course I had to

come away with very little luggage, because I was obliged

to have my things mixed up with Ben's. I did not dare to

have my boxes brought down by the servants. Could you send

me the green silk in which I went to church the last two

Sundays, and my pink gauze, and the grey poplin? Please

send two or three flannel petticoats, as I could not put

them among his things, and as many cuffs and collars as

you can cram in. I suppose I can get boots at Ostend,

but I should like to have the hat with the little brown

feather. There is my silk jacket with the fur trimming;

I should like to have that. I suppose I shall have to be

married without any regular dress, but I am sure papa will

make up my trousseau to me afterwards. I lent a little

lace fichu to Augusta; tell her that I shall so like to

have it.

Give papa my best love, and Augusta, and poor Tom, and

accept the same from your affectionate daughter,

GERTRUDE.

I suppose I must not add the other name yet.

Sir Thomas did not receive the telegram till eleven o'clock, when he

returned from dinner, and could do nothing that night. On the next

morning he was disturbed soon after five o'clock by Tom, who had come

on the same errand. "Idiots!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, "What on earth

can they have gone to Ostend for? And what can you do by coming up?"

"My mother thought that I might follow them to Ostend."

"They wouldn't care for you. No one will care for you until you have

got rid of all this folly. I must go. Idiots! Who is to marry them at

Ostend? If they are fools enough to want to be married, why shouldn't

they get married in England?"

"I suppose they thought you wouldn't consent."

"Of course I shan't consent. But why should I consent a bit more

because they have gone to Ostend? I don't suppose anybody ever had

such a set of fools about him as I have." This would have been hard

upon Tom had it not been that he had got beyond the feeling of any

hardness from contempt or contumely. As he once said of himself,

all sense of other injury had been washed out of him by Ayala's

unkindness.

On that very day Sir Thomas started for Ostend, and reached the place

about two o'clock. Captain Batsby and Gertrude had arrived only

during the previous night, and Gertrude, as she had been very sick,

was still in bed. Captain Batsby was not in bed. Captain Batsby had

been engaged since an early hour in the morning looking for that

respectable clergyman of the Church of England of whose immediate

services he stood in need. By the time that Sir Thomas had reached

Ostend he had found that no such clergyman was known in the place.

There was a regular English clergyman who would be very happy to

marry him,--and to accept the usual fees,--after the due performance

of certain preliminaries as ordained by the law, and as usual at

Ostend. The lady, no doubt, could be married at Ostend, after such

preliminaries,--as she might have been married also in England. All

this was communicated by the Captain to Gertrude,--who was still very

unwell,--at her bedroom door. Her conduct during this trying time was

quite beyond reproach,--and also his,--as Captain Batsby afterwards

took an opportunity of assuring her father.

"What on earth, Sir, is the meaning of all this?" said Sir Thomas,

encountering the man who was not his son-in-law in the sitting-room

of the hotel.

"I have just run away with your daughter, Sir Thomas. That is the

simple truth."

"And I have got the trouble of taking her back again."

"I have behaved like a gentleman through it all, Sir Thomas," said

the Captain, thus defending his own character and the lady's.

"You have behaved like a fool. What on earth am I to think of

it, Sir? You were asked down to my house because you gave me to

understand that you proposed to ask my niece, Miss Dormer, to be your

wife; and now you have run away with my daughter. Is that behaviour

like a gentleman?"

"I must explain myself?"

"Well, Sir?" Captain Batsby found the explanation very difficult; and

hummed and hawed a great deal. "Do you mean to say that it was a lie

from beginning to end about Miss Dormer?" Great liberties of speech

are allowed to gentlemen whose daughters have been run away with, and

whose hospitality has been outraged.

"Oh dear no. What I said then was quite true. It was my intention.

But--but--." The perspiration broke out upon the unhappy man's brow

as the great immediate trouble of his situation became clear to him.

"There was no lie,--no lie at all. I beg to assure you, Sir Thomas,

that I am not a man to tell a lie."

"How has it all been, then?"

"When I found how very superior a person your daughter was!"

"It isn't a month since she was engaged to somebody else," said the

angry father, forgetting all propriety in his indignation.

"Gertrude?" demanded Captain Batsby.

"You are two fools. So you gave up my niece?"

"Oh dear yes, altogether. She didn't come to Merle Park, you know.

How was I to say anything to her when you didn't have her there?"

"Why didn't you go away then, instead of remaining under a false

pretence? Or why, at any rate, didn't you tell me the truth?"

"And what would you have me to do now?" asked Captain Batsby.

"Go to the d----," said Sir Thomas, as he left the room, and went to

his daughter's chamber.

Gertrude had heard that her father was in the house, and endeavoured

to hurry herself into her clothes while the interview was going on

between him and her father. But she was not yet perfectly arrayed

when her father burst into her room. "Oh, papa," she said, going down

on her knees, "you do mean to forgive us?"

"I mean to do nothing of the kind. I mean to carry you home and have

you locked up."

"But we may be married!"

"Not with my leave. Why didn't you come and ask if you wanted to get

yourselves married? Why didn't you tell me?"

"We were ashamed."

"What has become of Mr. Houston, whom you loved so dearly?"

"Oh, papa!"

"And the Captain was so much attached to Ayala!"

"Oh, papa!"

"Get up, you stupid girl. Why is it that my children are so much more

foolish than other people's? I don't suppose you care for the man in

the least."

"I do, I do. I love him with all my heart."

"And as for him,--how can he care for you when it is but the other

day he was in love with your cousin?"

"Oh, papa!"

"What he wants is my money, of course."

"He has got plenty of money, papa."

"I can understand him, fool as he is. There is something for him to

get. He won't get it, but he might think it possible. As for you,

I cannot understand you at all. What do you expect? It can't be for

love of a hatchet-faced fellow like that, whom you had never seen a

fortnight ago."

"It is more than a month ago, papa."

"Frank Houston was, at any rate, a manly-looking fellow."

"He was a scoundrel," said Gertrude, now standing up for the first

time.

"A good-looking fellow was Frank Houston; that at least may be said

for him," continued the father, determined to exasperate his daughter

to the utmost. "I had half a mind to give way about him, because he

was a manly, outspoken fellow, though he was such an idle dog. If

you'd gone off with him, I could have understood it;--and perhaps

forgiven it," he added.

"He was a scoundrel!" screamed Gertrude, remembering her ineffectual

attempts to make her former lover perform this same journey.

"But this fellow! I cannot bring myself to believe that you really

care for him."

"He has a good income of his own, while Houston was little better

than a beggar."

"I'm glad of that," said Sir Thomas, "because there will be something

for you to live upon. I can assure you that Captain Batsby will never

get a shilling of my money. Now, you had better finish dressing

yourself, and come down and eat your dinner with me if you've got any

appetite. You will have to go back to Dover by the boat to-night."

"May Ben dine with us?" asked Gertrude, timidly.

"Ben may go to the d----. At any rate he had better not show himself

to me again," said Sir Thomas.

The lovers, however, did get an opportunity of exchanging a few

words, during which it was settled between them that as the young

lady must undoubtedly obey her father's behests, and return to Dover

that night, it would be well for Captain Batsby to remain behind at

Ostend. Indeed, he spoke of making a little tour as far as Brussels,

in order that he might throw off the melancholy feelings which had

been engendered. "You will come to me again, Ben," she said. Upon

this he looked very grave. "You do not mean to say that after all

this you will desert me?"

"He has insulted me so horribly!"

"What does that signify? Of course he is angry. If you could only

hear how he has insulted me."

"He says that you were in love with somebody else not a month since."

"So were you, Ben, for the matter of that." He did, however, before

they parted, make her a solemn promise that their engagement should

remain an established fact, in spite both of father and mother.

Gertrude, who had now recovered the effects of her

sea-sickness,--which, however, she would have to encounter again

so very quickly,--contrived to eat a hearty dinner with her father.

There, however, arose a little trouble. How should she contrive to

pack up the clothes which she had brought with her, and which had

till lately been mixed with the Captain's garments. She did, however,

at last succeed in persuading the chamber-maid to furnish her with

a carpet-bag, with which in her custody she arrived safely on the

following day at Merle Park.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE NEW FROCK.

Ayala's arrival at Stalham was full of delight to her. There was

Nina with all her new-fledged hopes and her perfect assurance in the

absolute superiority of Lord George Bideford to any other man either

alive or dead. Ayala was quite willing to allow this assurance to

pass current, as her Angel of Light was as yet neither alive nor

dead. But she was quite certain,--wholly certain,--that when the

Angel should come forth he would be superior to Lord George. The

first outpouring of all this took place in the carriage as Nina and

Ayala were driven from the station to the house, while the Colonel

went home alone in a dog-cart. It had been arranged that nothing

should be said to Ayala about the Colonel, and in the carriage the

Colonel's name was not mentioned. But when they were all in the

hall at Stalham, taking off their cloaks and depositing their wraps,

standing in front of the large fire, Colonel Stubbs was there. Lady

Albury was present also, welcoming her guests, and Sir Harry, who

had already come home from hunting, with one or two other men in red

coats and top breeches, and a small bevy of ladies who were staying

in the house. Lady Albury was anxious to know how her friend had

sped with Ayala, but at such a moment no question could be asked.

But Ayala's spirits were so high that Lady Albury was at a loss to

understand whether the whole thing had been settled by Jonathan with

success,--or whether, on the other hand, Ayala was so happy because

she had not been troubled by a word of love.

"He has behaved so badly, Lady Albury," said Ayala.

"What;--Stubbs?" asked Sir Harry, not quite understanding all the ins

and outs of the matter.

"Yes, Sir Harry. There was an old lady and an old gentleman. They

were very funny and he would laugh at them."

"I deny it," said the Colonel.

"Why shouldn't he laugh at them if they were funny?" asked Lady

Albury.

"He knew it would make me laugh out loud. I couldn't help myself, but

he could be as grave as a judge all the time. So he went till the old

woman scolded me dreadfully."

"But the old man took your part," said the Colonel.

"Yes;--he did. He said that I was ornamental."

"A decent and truth-speaking old gentleman," said one of the

sportsmen in top-boots.

"Quite so;--but then the old lady said that I was perverse, and

Colonel Stubbs took her part. If you had been there, Lady Albury, you

would have thought that he had been in earnest."

"So I was," said the Colonel.

All this was very pleasant to Ayala. It was a return to the old

joyousness when she had first discovered the delight of having such a

friend as Colonel Stubbs. Had he flattered her, paid her compliments,

been soft and delicate to her,--as a lover might have been,--she

would have been troubled in spirit and heavy at heart. But now it

seemed as though all that love-making had been an episode which had

passed away, and that the old pleasant friendship still remained.

As yet, while they were standing there in the hall, there had come

no moment for her to feel whether there was anything to regret in

this. But certainly there had been comfort in it. She had been able

to appear before all her Stalham friends, in the presence even of

the man himself, without any of that consciousness which would have

oppressed her had he come there simply as her acknowledged lover, and

had she come there conscious before all the guests that it was so.

Then they sat for a while drinking tea and eating buttered toast in

the drawing-room. A supply of buttered toast fully to gratify the

wants of three or four men just home from hunting has never yet been

created by the resources of any establishment. But the greater marvel

is that the buttered toast has never the slightest effect on the

dinner which is to follow in an hour or two. During this period the

conversation turned chiefly upon hunting,--which is of all subjects

the most imperious. It never occurs to a hunting-man to suppose

that either a lady, or a bishop, or a political economist, can be

indifferent to hunting. There is something beyond millinery,--beyond

the interests of the church,--beyond the price of wheat,--in that

great question whether the hounds did or did not change their fox in

Gobblegoose Wood. On the present occasion Sir Harry was quite sure

that the hounds did carry their fox through Gobblegoose Wood, whereas

Captain Glomax, who had formerly been master of the pack which now

obeyed Sir Harry, was perfectly certain that they had got upon

another animal, who went away from Gobblegoose as fresh as paint. He

pretended even to ridicule Sir Harry for supposing that any fox could

have run at that pace up Buddlecombe Hill who had travelled all the

way from Stickborough Gorse. To this Sir Harry replied resentfully

that the Captain did not know what were the running powers of a

dog-fox in March. Then he told various stories of what had been done

in this way at this special period of the year. Glomax, however,

declared that he knew as much of a fox as any man in England, and

that he would eat both the foxes, and the wood, and Sir Harry, and,

finally, himself, if the animal which had run up Buddlecombe Hill was

the same which they brought with them from Stickborough Gorse into

Gobblegoose Wood. So the battle raged, and the ladies no doubt were

much interested;--as would have been the bishop had he been there, or

the political economist.

After this Ayala was taken up into her room, and left to sit there by

herself for a while till Lady Albury should send her maid. "My dear,"

said Lady Albury, "there is something on the bed which I expect you

to wear to-night. I shall be broken-hearted if it doesn't fit you.

The frock is a present from Sir Harry; the scarf comes from me. Don't

say a word about it. Sir Harry always likes to make presents to young

ladies." Then she hurried out of the room while Ayala was still

thanking her. Lady Albury had at first intended to say something

about the Colonel as they were sitting together over Ayala's fire,

but she had made up her mind against this as soon as she saw their

manner towards each other on entering the house. If Ayala had

accepted him at a word as they were travelling together, then there

would be need of no further interference in the matter. But if not,

it would be better that she should hold her peace for the present.

Ayala's first instinct was to look at the finery which had been

provided for her. It was a light grey silk, almost pearl colour, as

to which she thought she had never seen anything so lovely before.

She measured the waist with her eye, and knew at once that it

would fit her. She threw the gauzy scarf over her shoulders and

turned herself round before the large mirror which stood near the

fire-place. "Dear Lady Albury!" she exclaimed; "dear Lady Albury!"

It was impossible that she should have understood that Lady Albury's

affection had been shown to Jonathan Stubbs much rather than to her

when those presents were prepared.

She got rid of her travelling dress and her boots, and let down her

hair, and seated herself before the fire, that she might think of

it all in her solitude. Was she or was she not glad,--glad in sober

earnest, glad now the moment of her mirth had passed by, the mirth

which had made her return to Stalham so easy for her,--was she or was

she not glad that this change had come upon the Colonel, this return

to his old ways? She had got her friend again, but she had lost her

lover. She did not want the lover. She was sure of that. She was

still sure that if a lover would come to her who would be in truth

acceptable,--such a lover as would enable her to give herself up to

him altogether, and submit herself to him as her lord and master,--he

must be something different from Jonathan Stubbs. That had been the

theory of her life for many months past, a theory on which she had

resolved to rely with all her might from the moment in which this

man had spoken to her of his love. Would she give way and render

up herself and all her dreams simply because the man was one to be

liked? She had declared to herself again and again that it should not

be so. There should come the Angel of Light or there should come no

lover for her. On that very morning as she was packing up her boxes

at Kingsbury Crescent she had arranged the words in which, should

he speak to her on the subject in the railway train, she would make

him understand that it could never be. Surely he would understand

if she told him so simply, with a little prayer that his suit might

not be repeated. His suit had not been repeated. Nothing apparently

had been further from his intention. He had been droll, pleasant,

friendly,--just like his old dear self. For in truth the pleasantness

and the novelty of his friendship had made him dear to her. He had

gone back of his own accord to the old ways, without any little

prayer from her. Now was she contented? As the question would thrust

itself upon her in opposition to her own will, driving out the

thoughts which she would fain have welcomed, she gazed listlessly at

the fire. If it were so, then for what purpose, then for what reason,

had Lady Albury procured for her the pale grey pearl-coloured dress?

And why were all these grand people at Stalham so good to her,--to

her, a poor little girl, whose ordinary life was devoted to the

mending of linen and to the furtherance of economy in the use of

pounds of butter and legs of mutton? Why was she taken out of her own

sphere and petted in this new luxurious world? She had a knowledge

belonging to her,--if not quite what we may call common sense,--which

told her that there must be some cause. Of some intellectual

capacity, some appreciation of things and words which were divine in

their beauty, she was half conscious. It could not be, she felt, that

without some such capacity she should have imaged to herself that

Angel of Light. But not for such capacity as that had she been made

welcome at Stalham. As for her prettiness, her beauty of face and

form, she thought about them not at all,--almost not at all. In

appearing in that pale-pearl silk, with that gauzy scarf upon her

shoulders, she would take pride. Not to be shamed among other girls

by the poorness of her apparel was a pride to her. Perhaps to excel

some others by the prettiness of her apparel might be a pride to

her. But of feminine beauty, as a great gift bestowed upon her, she

thought not at all. She would look in the mirror for the effect of

the scarf, but not for the effect of the neck and shoulders beneath

it. Could she have looked in any mirror for the effect of the dreams

she had thus dreamed,--ah! that would have been the mirror in which

she would have loved yet feared to look!

Why was Lady Albury so kind to her? Perhaps Lady Albury did not know

that Colonel Stubbs had changed his mind. She would know it very

soon, and then, maybe, everything would be changed. As she thought of

this she longed to put the pearl silk dress aside, and not to wear

it as yet,--to put it aside so that it might never be worn by her if

circumstances should so require. It was to be hoped that the man had

changed his mind,--and to be hoped that Lady Albury would know that

he had done so. Then she would soon see whether there was a change.

Could she not give a reason why she should not wear the dress this

night? As she sat gazing at the fire a tear ran down her cheek. Was

it for the dress she would not wear, or for the lover whom she would

not love?

The question as to the dress was settled for her very soon. Lady

Albury's maid came into the room,--not a chit of a girl without a

thought of her own except as to her own grandness in being two steps

higher than the kitchen-maid,--but a well-grown, buxom, powerful

woman, who had no idea of letting such a young lady as Ayala do

anything in the matter of dress but what she told her. When Ayala

suggested something as to the next evening in reference to the

pale-pearl silk the buxom powerful woman pooh-poohed her down in

a moment. What;--after Sir Harry had taken so much trouble about

having it made; having actually inquired about it with his own mouth.

"To-night, Miss; you must wear it to-night! My lady would be quite

angry!" "My lady not know what you wear! My lady knows what all the

ladies wear,--morning, noon, and night." That little plan of letting

the dress lie by till she should know how she should be received

after Colonel Stubbs's change of mind had been declared, fell to the

ground altogether under the hands of the buxom powerful woman.

When she went into the drawing-room some of the guests were

assembled. Sir Harry and Lady Albury were there, and so was Colonel

Stubbs. As she walked in Sir Harry was standing well in front of the

fire, in advance of the rug, so as to be almost in the middle of the

room. Captain Glomax was there also, and the discussion about the

foxes was going on. It had occurred to Ayala that as the dress was a

present from Sir Harry she must thank him. So she walked up to him

and made a little curtsey just before him. "Am I nice, Sir Harry?"

she said.

"Upon my word," said Sir Harry, "that is the best spent

ten-pound-note I ever laid out in my life." Then he took her by the

hand and gently turned her round, so as to look at her and her dress.

"I don't know whether I am nice, but you are," she said, curtseying

again. Everybody felt that she had had quite a little triumph as she

subsided into a seat close by Lady Albury, who called her. As she

seated herself she caught the Colonel's eye, who was looking at her.

She fancied that there was a tear in it. Then he turned himself and

looked away into the fire.

"You have won his heart for ever," said Lady Albury.

"Whose heart?" asked Ayala, in her confusion.

"Sir Harry's heart. As for the other, cela va sans dire. You must go

on wearing it every night for a week or Sir Harry will want to know

why you have left it off. If the woman had made it on you it couldn't

have fitted better. Baker,--" Baker was the buxom female,--"said that

she knew it was right. You did that very prettily to Sir Harry. Now

go up and ask Colonel Stubbs what he thinks of it."

"Indeed, I won't," said Ayala. Lady Albury, a few minutes afterwards,

when she saw Ayala walking away towards the drawing-room leaning

on the Colonel's arm, acknowledged to herself that she did at last

understand it. The Colonel had been able to see it all, even without

the dress, and she confessed in her mind that the Colonel had eyes

with which to see, and ears with which to hear, and a judgment with

which to appreciate. "Don't you think that girl very lovely?" she

said to Lord Rufford, on whose arm she was leaning.

"Something almost more than lovely," said Lord Rufford, with unwonted

enthusiasm.

It was acknowledged now by everybody. "Is it true about Colonel

Stubbs and Miss Dormer?" whispered Lady Rufford to her hostess in the

drawing-room.

"Upon my word, I never inquire into those things," said Lady Albury.

"I suppose he does admire her. Everybody must admire her."

"Oh yes;" said Lady Rufford. "She is certainly very pretty. Who is

she, Lady Albury?" Lady Rufford had been a Miss Penge, and the Penges

were supposed to be direct descendants from Boadicea.

"She is Miss Ayala Dormer. Her father was an artist, and her mother

was a very handsome woman. When a girl is as beautiful as Miss

Dormer, and as clever, it doesn't much signify who she is." Then the

direct descendant from Boadicea withdrew, holding an opinion much at

variance with that expressed by her hostess.

"Who is that young lady who sat next to you?" asked Captain Glomax of

Colonel Stubbs, after the ladies had gone.

"She is a Miss Ayala Dormer."

"Did I not see her out hunting with you once or twice early in the

season?"

"You saw her out hunting, no doubt, and I was there. I did not

specially bring her. She was staying here, and rode one of Albury's

horses."

"Take her top and bottom, and all round," said Captain Glomax, "she

is the prettiest little thing I've seen for many a day. When she

curtsyed to Sir Harry in the drawing-room I almost thought that I

should like to be a marrying man myself." Stubbs did not carry on the

conversation, having felt displeased rather than otherwise by the

admiration expressed.

"I didn't quite understand before," said Sir Harry to his wife that

night, "what it was that made Jonathan so furious about that girl;

but I think I see it now."

"Fine feathers make fine birds," said his wife, laughing.

"Feathers ever so fine," said Sir Harry, "don't make well-bred

birds."

"To tell the truth," said Lady Albury, "I think we shall all have to

own that Jonathan has been right."

This took place upstairs, but before they left the drawing-room Lady

Albury whispered a few words to her young friend. "We have had a

terrible trouble about you, Ayala."

"A trouble about me, Lady Albury? I should be so sorry."

"It is not exactly your fault;--but we haven't at all known what to

do with that unfortunate man."

"What man?" asked Ayala, forgetful at the moment of all men except

Colonel Stubbs.

"You naughty girl! Don't you know that my brother-in-law is

broken-hearted about you?"

"Captain Batsby!" whispered Ayala, in her faintest voice.

"Yes; Captain Batsby. A Captain has as much right to be considered

as a Colonel in such a matter as this." Here Ayala frowned, but said

nothing. "Of course, I can't help it, who may break his heart, but

poor Ben is always supposed to be at Stalham just at this time of the

year, and now I have been obliged to tell him one fib upon another to

keep him away. When he comes to know it all, what on earth will he

say to me?"

"I am sure it has not been my fault," said Ayala.

"That's what young ladies always say when gentlemen break their

hearts."

When Ayala was again in her room, and had got rid of the buxom

female who came to assist her in taking off her new finery, she was

aware of having passed the evening triumphantly. She was conscious

of admiration. She knew that Sir Harry had been pleased by her

appearance. She was sure that Lady Albury was satisfied with her, and

she had seen something in the Colonel's glance that made her feel

that he had not been indifferent. But in their conversation at the

dinner table he had said nothing which any other man might not have

said, if any other man could have made himself as agreeable. Those

hunting days were all again described with their various incidents,

with the great triumph over the brook, and Twentyman's wife and baby,

and fat Lord Rufford, who was at the moment sitting there opposite to

them; and the ball in London, with the lady who was thrown out of the

window; and the old gentleman and the old lady of to-day who had been

so peculiar in their remarks. There had been nothing else in their

conversation, and it surely was not possible that a man who intended

to put himself forward as a lover should have talked in such fashion

as that! But then there were other things which occurred to her. Why

had there been that tear in his eye? And that "cela va sans dire"

which had come from Lady Albury in her railing mood;--what had that

meant? Lady Albury, when she said that, could not have known that the

Colonel had changed his purpose.

But, after all, what is a dress, let it be ever so pretty? The Angel

of Light would not care for her dress, let her wear what she might.

Were he to seek her because of her dress, he would not be the Angel

of Light of whom she had dreamed. It was not by any dress that

she could prevail over him. She did rejoice because of her little

triumph;--but she knew that she rejoiced because she was not an Angel

of Light herself. Her only chance lay in this, that the angels of

yore did come down from heaven to ask for love and worship from the

daughters of men.

As she went to bed, she determined that she would still be true to

her dream. Not because folk admired a new frock would she be ready to

give herself to a man who was only a man,--a man of the earth really;

who had about him no more than a few of the real attributes of an

Angel of Light.

CHAPTER L.

GOBBLEGOOSE WOOD ON SUNDAY.

The next two days were not quite so triumphant to Ayala as had been

the evening of her arrival. There was hunting on both of those days,

the gentlemen having gone on the Friday away out of Sir Harry's

country to the Brake hounds. Ayala and the Colonel had arrived on the

Thursday. Ayala had not expected to be asked to hunt again,--had not

even thought about it. It had been arranged before on Nina's account,

and Nina now was not to hunt any more. Lord George did not altogether

approve of it, and Nina was quite in accord with Lord George,--though

she had held up her whip and shaken it in triumph when she jumped

over the Cranbury Brook. And the horse which Alaya had ridden was no

longer in the stables. "My dear, I am so sorry; but I'm afraid we

can't mount you," Lady Albury said. In answer to this Ayala declared

that she had not thought of it for a moment. But yet the days seemed

to be dull with her. Lady Rufford was,--well,--perhaps a little

patronising to her, and patronage such as that was not at all to

Ayala's taste. "Lady Albury seems to be quite a kind friend to you,"

Lady Rufford said. Nothing could be more true. The idea implied was

true also,--the idea that such a one as Ayala was much in luck's

way to find such a friend as Lady Albury. It was true no doubt; but,

nevertheless, it was ungracious, and had to be resented. "A very kind

friend, indeed. Some people only make friends of those who are as

grand as themselves."

"I am sure we should be very glad to see you at Rufford if you remain

long in the country," said Lady Rufford, a little time afterwards.

But even in this there was not a touch of that cordiality which might

have won Ayala's heart. "I am not at all likely to stay," said Ayala.

"I live with my uncle and aunt at Notting Hill, and I very rarely go

away from home." Lady Rufford, however, did not quite understand it.

It had been whispered to her that morning that Ayala was certainly

going to marry Colonel Stubbs; and, if so, why should she not come to

Rufford?

On that day, the Friday, she was taken out to dinner by Captain

Glomax. "I remember quite as if it were yesterday," said the Captain.

"It was the day we rode the Cranbury Brook."

Ayala looked up into his face, also remembering everything as well

as it were yesterday. "Mr. Twentyman rode over it," she said, "and

Colonel Stubbs rode into it."

"Oh, yes; Stubbs got a ducking; so he did." The Captain had not got a

ducking, but then he had gone round by the road. "It was a good run

that."

"I thought so."

"We haven't been lucky since Sir Harry has had the hounds somehow.

There doesn't seem to be the dash about 'em there used to be when I

was here. I had them before Sir Harry, you know." All this was nearly

in a whisper.

"Were you Master?" asked Ayala, with a tone of surprise which was not

altogether pleasing to the Captain.

"Indeed I was, but the fag of it was too great, and the thanks too

small, so I gave it up. They used to get four days a week out of me."

During the two years that the Captain had had the hounds, there had

been, no doubt, two or three weeks in which he had hunted four days.

Ayala liked hunting, but she did not care much for Captain Glomax,

who, having seen her once or twice on horseback, would talk to her

about nothing else. A little away on the other side of the table Nina

was sitting next to Colonel Stubbs, and she could hear their voices

and almost their words. Nina and Jonathan were first cousins, and,

of course, could be happy together without giving her any cause for

jealousy;--but she almost envied Nina. Yet she had hoped that it

might not fall to her lot to be taken out again that evening by the

Colonel. Hitherto she had not even spoken to him during the day. They

had started to the meet very early, and the gentlemen had almost

finished their breakfast before she had come down. If there had been

any fault it was her fault, but yet she almost felt that there was

something of a disruption between them. It was so evident to her that

he was perfectly happy whilst he was talking to Nina.

After dinner it seemed to be very late before the men came into the

drawing-room, and then they were still engaged upon that weary talk

about hunting, till Lady Rufford, in order to put a stop to it,

offered to sing. "I always do," she said, "if Rufford ventures to

name a fox in the drawing-room after dinner." She did sing, and Ayala

thought that the singing was more weary than the talk about hunting.

While this was going on, the Colonel had got himself shut up in

a corner of the room. Lady Albury had first taken him there, and

afterwards he had been hemmed in when Lady Rufford sat down to the

piano. Ayala had hardly ventured even to glance at him, but yet she

knew all that he did, and heard almost every word that he spoke.

The words were not many, but still when he did speak his voice was

cheerful. Nina now and again had run up to him, and Lady Rufford had

asked him some questions about the music. But why didn't he come out

and speak to her? thought Ayala. Though all that nonsense about love

was over, still he ought not to have allowed a day to pass at Stalham

without speaking to her. He was the oldest friend there in that

house except Nina. It was indeed no more than nine months since she

had first seen him, but still it seemed to her that he was an old

friend. She did feel, as she endeavoured to answer the questions that

Lord Rufford was asking her, that Jonathan Stubbs was treating her

unkindly.

Then came the moment in which Lady Albury marshalled her guests out

of the room towards their chambers. "Have you found yourself dull

without the hunting?" the Colonel said to Ayala.

"Oh dear no; I must have a dull time if I do, seeing that I have

only hunted three days in my life." There was something in the tone

of her voice which, as she herself was aware, almost expressed

dissatisfaction. And yet not for worlds would she have shown herself

to be dissatisfied with him, could she have helped it.

"I thought that perhaps you might have regretted the little pony," he

said.

"Because a thing has been very pleasant, it should not be regretted

because it cannot be had always."

"To me a thing may become so pleasant, that unless I can have it

always my life must be one long regret."

"The pony is not quite like that," said Ayala, smiling, as she

followed the other ladies out of the room.

On the next morning the meet was nearer, and some of the ladies were

taken there in an open carriage. Lady Rufford went, and Mrs. Gosling,

and Nina and Ayala. "Of course there is a place for you," Lady Albury

had said to her. "Had I wanted to go I would have made Sir Harry send

the drag; but I've got to stop at home and see that the buttered

toast is ready by the time the gentlemen all come back." The morning

was almost warm, so that the sportsmen were saying evil things of

violets and primroses, as is the wont of sportsmen on such occasions,

and at the meet the ladies got out of the carriage and walked about

among the hounds, making civil speeches to old Tony. "No, my lady,"

said Tony, "I don't like these sunshiny mornings at all; there ain't

no kind of scent, and I goes riding about these big woods, up and

down, till my shirt is as wet on my back with the sweat as though I'd

been pulled through the river." Then Lady Rufford walked away and did

not ask Tony any more questions.

Ayala was patting one of the hounds when the Colonel, who had given

his horse to a groom, came and joined her. "If you don't regret that

pony," said he, "somebody else does."

"I do regret him in one way, of course. I did like it very much; but

I don't think it nice, when much has been done for me, to say that I

want to have more done."

"Of course I knew what you meant."

"Perhaps you would go and tell Sir Harry, and then he would think me

very ungrateful."

"Ayala," he said, "I will never say anything of you that will make

anybody think evil of you. But, between ourselves, as Sir Harry is

not here, I suppose I may confess that I regret the pony."

"I should like it, of course," whispered Ayala.

"And so should I,--so much! I suppose all these men here would

think me an ass if they knew how little I care about the day's

work,--whether we find, or whether we run, or whether we kill,--just

because the pony is not here. If the pony were here I should have

that feeling of expectation of joy, which is so common to girls when

some much-thought-of ball or promised pleasure is just before them."

Then Tony went off with his hounds, and Jonathan, mounting his horse,

followed with the ruck.

Ayala knew very well what the pony meant, as spoken of by the

Colonel. When he declared that he regretted the pony, it was because

the pony might have carried herself. He had meant her to understand

that the much-thought-of ball or promised pleasure would have been

the delight of again riding with herself. And then he had again

called her Ayala. She could remember well every occasion on which

he had addressed her by her Christian name. It had been but seldom.

Once, however, it had occurred in the full flow of their early

intimacy, before that love-making had been begun. It had struck her

as being almost wrong, but still as very pleasant. If it might be

made right by some feeling of brotherly friendship, how pleasant

would it be! And now she would like it again, if only it might be

taken as a sign of friendship rather than of love. It never occurred

to her to be angry as she would have been angry with any other

man. How she would have looked at Captain Batsby had he dared to

call her Ayala! Colonel Stubbs should call her Ayala as long as he

pleased,--if it were done only in friendship.

After that they were driven about for a while, seeing what Tony did

with the hounds, as tidings came to them now and again that one

fox had broken this way and another had gone the other. But Ayala,

through it all, could not interest herself about the foxes. She was

thinking only of Jonathan Stubbs. She knew that she was pleased

because he had spoken to her, and had said kind, pleasant words to

her. She knew that she had been displeased while he had sat apart

from her, talking to others. But yet she could not explain to herself

why she had been either pleased or displeased. She feared that there

was more than friendship,--than mere friendship, in that declaration

of his that he did in truth regret the pony. His voice had been, oh,

so sweet as he had said it! Something told her that men do not speak

in mere friendship after that fashion. Not even in the softness of

friendship between a man and a woman will the man's voice become

as musical as that! Young as she was, child as she was, there was

an instinct in her breast which declared to her that it was so. But

then, if it were so, was not everything again wrong with her? If it

were so, then must that condition of things be coming back which it

had been, and still was her firm resolve to avoid. And yet, as the

carriage was being driven about, and as the frequent exclamations

came that the fox had traversed this way or that, her pride was

gratified and she was happy.

"What was Colonel Stubbs saying to you?" asked Nina, when they were

at home at the house after lunch.

"He was talking about the dear pony which I used to ride."

"About nothing else?"

"No;--about nothing else." This Ayala said with a short, dry manner

of utterance which she would assume when she was determined not to

have a subject carried on.

"Ayala, why do you not tell me everything? I told you everything as

soon as it happened."

"Nothing has happened."

"I know he asked you," said Nina.

"And I answered him."

"Is that to be everything?"

"Yes;--that is to be everything," said Ayala, with a short, dry

manner of utterance. It was so plain, that even Nina could not pursue

the subject.

There was nothing done on that day in the way of sport. Glomax

thought that Tony had been idle, and had made a holiday of the day

from the first. But Sir Harry declared that there had not been a yard

of scent. The buttered toast, however, was eaten, and the regular

sporting conversation was carried on. Ayala, however, was not there

to hear it. Ayala was in her own room dreaming.

She was taken in to dinner by a curate in the neighbourhood,--to whom

she endeavoured to make herself very pleasant, while the Colonel

sat at her other side. The curate had a good deal to say as to lawn

tennis. If the weather remained as it was, it was thought that

they could all play lawn tennis on the Tuesday,--when there would

be no hunting. The curate was a pleasant young fellow, and Ayala

devoted herself to him and to their joint hopes for next Tuesday.

Colonel Stubbs never once attempted to interfere with the curate's

opportunity. There was Lady Rufford on the other side of him, and

to Lady Rufford he said all that he did say during dinner. At one

period of the repast she was more than generally lively, because she

felt herself called upon to warn her husband that an attack of the

gout was imminent, and would be certainly produced instantaneously

if he could not deny himself the delight of a certain diet which

was going the round of the table. His lordship smiled and denied

himself,--thinking, as he did so, whether another wife, plus

the gout, would or would not have been better for him. All this

either amused Colonel Stubbs so sufficiently, or else made him so

thoughtful, that he made no attempt to interfere with the curate. In

the evening there was again music,--which resulted in a declaration

made upstairs by Sir Harry to his wife that that wife of Rufford's

was a confounded bore. "We all knew that, my dear, as soon as he

married her," said Lady Albury.

"Why did he marry a bore?"

"Because he wanted a wife to look after himself, and not to amuse his

friends. The wonder used to be that he had done so well."

Not a word had there been,--not a word, since that sound of "Ayala"

had fallen upon her ears. No;--he was not handsome, and his name was

Jonathan Stubbs;--but surely no voice so sweet had ever fallen from a

man's lips! So she sat and dreamed far into the night. He, the Angel

of Light, would certainly have a sweeter voice! That was an attribute

without which no angel could be angelic! As to the face and the name,

that would not perhaps signify. But he must have an intellect high

soaring, a soul tuned to music, and a mind versed in nothing but

great matters. He might be an artist, or more probably a poet;--or

perhaps a musician. Yet she had read of poets, artists, and

musicians, who had misused their wives, been fond of money, and had

perhaps been drunkards. The Angel of Light must have the gifts, and

must certainly be without the vices.

The next day was Sunday and they all went to church. In the afternoon

they, as many of them as pleased, were to walk as far as Gobblegoose

Wood, which was only three miles from the house. They could not hunt

and therefore they must go to the very scene of the late contest and

again discuss it there. Sir Harry and the Captain would walk and

so would Ayala and Nina and some others. Lord Rufford did not like

walking, and Lady Rufford would stay at home to console him. Ayala

used her little wiles to keep herself in close company with Nina; but

the Colonel's wiles were more effective;--and then, perhaps, Nina

assisted the Colonel rather than Ayala. It came to pass that before

they had left Gobblegoose Wood Ayala and the Colonel were together.

When it was so he did not beat about the bush for a moment longer. He

had fixed his opportunity for himself and he put it to use at once.

"Ayala," he said, "am I to have any other answer?"

"What answer?"

"Nay, my dearest,--my own, own dearest as I fain would have you,--who

shall say what answer but you? Ayala, you know that I love you!"

"I thought you had given it up."

"Given it up. Never,--never! Does a man give up his joy,--the pride

of his life,--the one only delight on which his heart has set itself!

No, my darling, I have not given it up. Because you would not have it

as I wished when I first spoke to you, I have not gone on troubling

you. I thought I would wait till you were used again to the look of

me, and to my voice. I shall never give it up, Ayala. When you came

into the room that night with your new frock on--" Then he paused,

and she glanced round upon him, and saw that a tear again was in his

eye. "When you came in and curtseyed to Sir Harry I could hardly keep

within myself because I thought you were so beautiful."

"It was the new gown which he had given me."

"No, my pet;--no! You may add a grace to a dress, but it can do but

little for you. It was the little motion, the little word, the light

in your eye! It twinkles at me sometimes when you glance about, so

that I do not know whether it is meant for me or not. I fear that it

is never meant for me."

"It is meant for nothing," said Ayala.

"And yet it goes into my very bosom. When you were talking to that

clergyman at dinner I could see every sparkle that came from it. Then

I wonder to myself whether you can ever be thinking of me as I am

always thinking of you." She knew that she had been thinking of him

every waking moment since she had been at Albury and through many of

her sleeping moments also. "Ayala, one little word, one other glance

from your eyes, one slightest touch from your hand upon my arm, shall

tell me,--shall tell me,--shall tell me that I am the happiest, the

proudest man in all the world." She walked on steadfastly, closing

her very teeth against a word, with her eyes fixed before her so that

no slightest glance should wander. Her two hands were in her little

muff, and she kept them with her fingers clasped together, as though

afraid lest one might rebel, and fly away, and touch the sleeve of

his coat. "Ayala, how is it to be with me?"

"I cannot," she said sternly. And her eyes were still fixed before

her, and her fingers were still bound in one with another. And yet

she loved him. Yet she knew that she loved him. She could have hung

upon his arm and smiled up into his face, and frowned her refusal

only with mock anger as he pressed her to his bosom,--only that those

dreams were so palpable to her and so dear, had been to her so vast a

portion of her young life! "I cannot," she said again. "I cannot."

"Is that to be your answer for ever?" To this she made no immediate

reply. "Must it be so, Ayala?"

"I cannot," she said. But the last little word was so impeded by the

sobs which she could not restrain as almost to be inaudible.

"I will not make you unhappy, Ayala." Yes, she was unhappy. She was

unhappy because she knew that she could not rule herself to her own

happiness; because, even at this moment, she was aware that she was

wrong. If she could only release part of herself from the other, then

could she fly into his arms and tell him that that spirit which had

troubled her had flown. But the spirit was too strong for her, and

would not fly. "Shall we go and join them?" he asked her in a voice

altered, but still so sweet to her ears.

"If you think so," she replied.

"Perhaps it will be best, Ayala. Do not be angry with me now. I will

not call you so again." Angry! Oh, no! She was not angry with him!

But it was very bitter to her to be told that she should never hear

the word again from his lips.

"The hunted fox never went up Buddlecombe Hill;--never. If he did

I'll eat every fox in the Rufford and Ufford country." This was

heard, spoken in most angry tones by Captain Glomax, as the Colonel

and Ayala joined the rest of the party.

CHAPTER LI.

"NO!"

Ayala, on her return from the walk to the wood, spent the remainder

of the afternoon in tears. During the walk she kept close to Sir

Harry, pretending to listen to the arguments about the fox, but she

said nothing. Her ears were really intent on endeavouring to catch

the tones of her lover's voice as he went on in front of them talking

to Nina. Nothing could be more pleasant than the sound as he said a

word or two now and again, encouraging Nina in her rhapsodies as to

Lord George and all Lord George's family. But Ayala learned nothing

from that. She had come to know the man well enough to be aware that

he could tune his voice to the occasion, and could hide his feelings

let them be ever so strong. She did not doubt his love now. She did

not doubt but that at this moment his heart was heavy with rejected

love. She quite believed in him. But nevertheless his words were

pleasant and kind as he encouraged Nina.

Nor did she doubt her own love. She was alone in her room that

afternoon till she told herself at last the truth. Oh, yes; she loved

him. She was sure of that. But now he was gone! Why had she been

so foolish? Then it seemed as though at that moment the separation

took place between herself and the spirit which had haunted her. She

seemed to know now,--now at this very moment,--that the man was too

good for her. The knowledge had been coming to her. It had almost

come when he had spoken to her in the wood. If it could only have

been that he should have delayed his appeal to her yet for another

day or two! She thought now that if he could have delayed it but

for a few hours the cure would have been complete. If he had talked

to her as he so well knew how to talk while they were in the wood

together, while they were walking home,--so as to have exorcised the

spirit from her by the sweetness of his words,--and then have told

her that there was his love to have if she chose to have it, then she

thought she would have taken it. But he had come to her while those

words which she had prepared under the guidance of the spirit were

yet upon her tongue. "I cannot," she had said. "I cannot." But she

had not told him that she did not love him.

"I did love him," she said to herself, almost acknowledging that

the spirit had been wholly exorcised. The fashion of her mind was

altogether different from that which had so strongly prevailed

with her. He was an honest, noble man, high in the world's repute,

clever, a gentleman, a man of taste, and possessed of that gentle

ever-present humour which was so inexpressibly delightful to her. She

never again spoke to herself even in her thoughts of that Angel of

Light,--never comforted herself again with the vision of that which

was to come! There had appeared to her a man better than all other

men, and when he had asked her for her hand she had simply said,--"I

cannot." And yet she had loved him all the time. How foolish, how

false, how wicked she had been! It was thus that she thought of it

all as she sat there alone in her bedroom through the long hours of

the afternoon. When they sent up for her asking her to come down, she

begged that she might be allowed to remain there till dinner-time,

because she was tired with her walk.

He would not come again now. Oh, no,--he was too proud, too firm,

too manly for that. It was not for such a one as he to come whining

after a girl,--like her cousin Tom. Would it be possible that she

should even yet tell him? Could she say to him one little word,

contradicting that which she had so often uttered in the wood?

"Now I can," once whispered in his ear, would do it all. But as to

this she was aware that there was no room for hope. To speak such

a word, low as it might be spoken, simple and little as it might

be, was altogether impossible. She had had her chance and had lost

it,--because of those idle dreams. That the dreams had been all idle

she declared to herself,--not aware that the Ayala whom her lover had

loved would not have been an Ayala to be loved by him, but for the

dreams. Now she must go back to her uncle and aunt and to Kingsbury

Crescent, with the added sorrow that the world of dreams was closed

to her for ever. When the maid came to her she consented to have

the frock put on, the frock which Sir Harry had given her, boldly

resolving to struggle through her sorrow till Lady Albury should have

dismissed her to her home. Nobody would want her now at Stalham, and

the dismissal would soon come.

While she had been alone in her room the Colonel had been closeted

with Lady Albury. They had at least been thus shut up together for

some half-hour during which he had told his tale. "I have to own,"

said he, half-laughing as he began his tale, "that I thoroughly

respect Miss Dormer."

"Why is she to be called Miss Dormer?"

"Because she has shown herself worthy of my respect."

"What is it that you mean, Jonathan?"

"She knew her own mind when she told me at first that she could not

accept the offer which I did myself the honour of making her, and now

she sticks to her purpose. I think that a young lady who will do that

should be respected."

"She has refused you again?"

"Altogether."

"As how?"

"Well, I hardly know that I am prepared to explain the 'as how' even

to you. I am about as thick-skinned a man in such matters as you may

find anywhere, but I do not know that even I can bring myself to tell

the 'as how.' The 'as how' was very clear in one respect. It was

manifest that she knew her own mind, which is a knowledge not in the

possession of all young ladies. She told me that she could not marry

me."

"I do not believe it."

"Not that she told me so?"

"Not that she knew her own mind. She is a little simple fool, who

with some vagary in her brain is throwing away utterly her own

happiness, while she is vexing you."

"As to the vexation you are right."

"Cross-grained little idiot!"

"An idiot she certainly is not; and as to being cross-grained I have

never found it. A human being with the grains running more directly

all in the same way I have never come across."

"Do not talk to me, Jonathan, like that," she said. "When I call

her cross-grained I mean that she is running counter to her own

happiness."

"I cannot tell anything about that. I should have endeavoured,

I think, to make her happy. She has certainly run counter to my

happiness."

"And now?"

"What;--as to this very moment! I shall leave Stalham to-morrow."

"Why should you do that? Let her go if one must go."

"That is just what I want to prevent. Why should she lose her little

pleasure?"

"You don't suppose that we can make the house happy to her now! Why

should we care to do so when she will have driven you away?" He sat

silent for a minute or two looking at the fire, with his hands on his

two knees. "You must acknowledge, Jonathan," continued she, "that I

have taken kindly to this Ayala of yours."

"I do acknowledge it."

"But it cannot be that she should be the same to us simply as a young

lady, staying here as it were on her own behalf, as she was when we

regarded her as your possible wife. Then every little trick and grace

belonging to her endeared itself to us because we regarded her as one

who was about to become one of ourselves. But what are her tricks and

graces to us now?"

"They are all the world to me," said the Colonel.

"But you must wipe them out of your memory,--unless, indeed, you mean

to ask her again."

"Ah!--that is it."

"You will ask her again?"

"I do not say so; but I do not wish to rob myself of the chance. It

may be that I shall. Of course I should to-morrow if I thought there

was a hope. To-morrow there would be none,--but I should like to

know, that I could find her again in hands so friendly as yours,

if at the end of a month I should think myself strong enough to

encounter the risk of another refusal. Would Sir Harry allow her to

remain here for another month?"

"He would say, probably, nothing about it."

"My plan is this," he continued; "let her remain here, say, for three

weeks or a month. Do you continue all your kindness to her,--if not

for her sake then for mine. Let her feel that she is made one of

yourselves, as you say."

"That will be hard," said Lady Albury.

"It would not be hard if you thought that she was going to become so

at last. Try it, for my sake. Say not a word to her about me,--though

not shunning my name. Be to her as though I had told you nothing of

this. Then when the period is over I will come again,--if I find

that I can do so. If my love is still stronger than my sense of

self-respect, I shall do so." All this Lady Albury promised to do,

and then the interview between them was over.

"Colonel Stubbs is going to Aldershot to-morrow," said she to Ayala

in the drawing-room after dinner. "He finds now that he cannot very

well remain away." There was no hesitation in her voice as she said

this, and no look in her eye which taught Ayala to suppose that she

had heard anything of what had occurred in the wood.

"Is he indeed?" said Ayala, trying, but in vain, to be equally

undemonstrative.

"It is a great trouble to us, but we are quite unable to prevent

it,--unless you indeed can control him."

"I cannot control him," said Ayala, with that fixed look of

resolution with which Lady Albury had already become familiar.

That evening before they went to bed the Colonel bade them all

good-bye, as he intended to start early in the morning. "I never saw

such a fellow as you are for sudden changes," said Sir Harry.

"What is the good of staying here for hunting when the ground and

Tony's temper are both as hard as brick-bats. If I go now I can get

another week further on in March if the rain should come." With this

Sir Harry seemed to be satisfied; but Ayala felt sure that Tony's

temper and the rain had had nothing to do with it.

"Good-bye, Miss Dormer," he said, with his pleasantest smile, and his

pleasantest voice.

"Good-bye," she repeated. What would she not have given that her

voice should be as pleasant as his, and her smile! But she failed so

utterly that the little word was inaudible,--almost obliterated by

the choking of a sob. How bitterly severe had that word, Miss Dormer,

sounded from his mouth! Could he not have called her Ayala for the

last time,--even though all the world should have heard it? She was

wide awake in the morning and heard the wheels of his cart as he was

driven off. As the sound died away upon her ear she felt that he

was gone from her for ever. How had it been that she had said, "I

cannot," so often, when all her heart was set upon "I can?"

And now it remained to her to take herself away from Stalham as fast

as she might. She understood perfectly all those ideas which Lady

Albury had expressed to her well-loved friend. She was nothing to

anybody at Stalham, simply a young lady staying in the house;--as

might be some young lady connected with them by blood, or some

young lady whose father and mother had been their friends. She had

been brought there to Stalham, now this second time, in order that

Jonathan Stubbs might take her as his wife. Driven by some madness

she had refused her destiny, and now nobody would want her at Stalham

any longer. She had better begin to pack up at once,--and go. The

coldness of the people, now that she had refused to do as she had

been asked, would be unbearable to her. And yet she must not let it

appear that Stalham was no longer dear to her merely because Colonel

Stubbs had left it. She would let a day go by, and then say with all

the ease she could muster that she would take her departure on the

next. After that her life before her would be a blank. She had known

up to this,--so at least she told herself,--that Jonathan Stubbs

would afford her at any rate another chance. Now there could be no

other chance.

The first blank day passed away, and it seemed to her almost as

though she had no right to speak to any one. She was sure that Lady

Rufford knew what had occurred, because nothing more was said as

to the proposed visit. Mrs. Colonel Stubbs would have been welcome

anywhere, but who was Ayala Dormer? Even though Lady Albury bade her

come out in the carriage, it seemed to her to be done as a final

effort of kindness. Of course they would be anxious to be rid of her.

That evening the buxom woman did not come to help her dress herself.

It was an accident. The buxom woman was wanted here and there till it

was too late, and Ayala had left her room. Ayala, in truth, required

no assistance in dressing. When the first agonizing moment of the new

frock had been passed over, she would sooner have arrayed herself

without assistance. But now it seemed as though the buxom woman was

running away, because she, Ayala, was thought to be no longer worthy

of her services.

On the next morning she began her little speech to Lady Albury.

"Going away to-morrow?" said Lady Albury.

"Or perhaps the next day," suggested Ayala.

"My dear, it has been arranged that you should stay here for another

three weeks."

"No."

"I say it was arranged. Everybody understood it. I am sure your aunt

understood it. Because one person goes, everybody else isn't to

follow so as to break up a party. Honour among thieves!"

"Thieves!"

"Well;--anything else you like to call us all. The party has been

made up. And to tell the truth I don't think that young ladies have

the same right of changing their minds and rushing about as men

assume. Young ladies ought to be more steady. Where am I to get

another young lady at a moment's notice to play lawn tennis with Mr.

Greene? Compose yourself and stay where you are like a good girl."

"What will Sir Harry say?"

"Sir Harry will probably go on talking about the Stillborough fox and

quarreling with that odious Captain Glomax. That is, if you remain

here. If you go all of a sudden, he will perhaps hint--"

"Hint what, Lady Albury?"

"Never mind. He shall make no hints if you are a good girl." Nothing

was said at the moment about the Colonel,--nothing further than the

little allusion made above. Then there came the lawn tennis, and

Ayala regained something of her spirits as she contrived with the

assistance of Sir Harry to beat Nina and the curate. But on the

following day Lady Albury spoke out more plainly, "it was because of

Colonel Stubbs that you said that you would go away."

Ayala paused a moment, and then answered stoutly, "Yes, it was

because of Colonel Stubbs."

"And why?"

Ayala paused again and the stoutness almost deserted her. "Because--"

"Well, my dear?"

"I don't think I ought to be asked," said Ayala.

"Well, you shall not be asked. I will not be cruel to you. But do you

not know that if I ask anything it is with a view to your own good?"

"Oh, yes," said Ayala.

"But though I may not ask I suppose I may speak." To this Ayala made

no reply, either assenting or dissenting. "You know, do you not, that

I and Colonel Stubbs love each other like brother and sister,--more

dearly than many brothers and sisters?"

"I suppose so."

"And that therefore he tells me everything. He told me what took

place in the wood,--and because of that he has gone away."

"Of course you are angry with me;--because he has gone away."

"I am sorry that he has gone,--because of the cause of it. I always

wish that he should have everything that he desires; and now I wish

that he should have this thing because he desires it above all other

things." Does he desire it above all other things?--thought Ayala to

herself. And, if it be really so, cannot I now tell her that he shall

have it? Cannot I say that I too long to get it quite as eagerly

as he longs to have it? The suggestion rushed quickly to her mind;

but the answer to it came as quickly. No;--she would not do so. No

offer of the kind would come from her. By what she had said must she

abide,--unless, indeed, he should come to her again. "But why should

you go, Ayala, because he has gone? Why should you say aloud that you

had come here to listen to his offer, and that you had gone away as

soon as you had resolved that, for this reason or that, it was not

satisfactory to you?"

"Oh, Lady Albury."

"That would be the conclusion drawn. Remain here with us, and see if

you can like us well enough to be one of us."

"Dear Lady Albury, I do love you dearly."

"What he may do I cannot say. Whether he may bring himself to try

once again I do not know,--nor will I ask you whether there might

possibly be any other answer were he to do so."

"No!" said Ayala, driven by a sudden fit of obstinacy which she could

not control.

"I ask no questions about it, but I am sure it will be better for you

to remain here for a few weeks. We will make you happy if we can, and

you can learn to think over what has passed without emotion." Thus it

was decided that Ayala should prolong her visit into the middle of

March. She could not understand her own conduct when she again found

herself alone. Why had she ejaculated that sudden "No," when Lady

Albury had suggested to her the possibility of changing her purpose?

She knew that she would fain change it if it were possible; and yet

when the idea was presented to her she replied with a sudden denial

of its possibility. But still there was hope, even though the hope

was faint. "Whether he may bring himself to try again I do not know."

So it was that Lady Albury had spoken of him, and of what Lady Albury

said to her she now believed every word. "Whether he could bring

himself!" Surely such a one as he would not condescend so far as

that. But if he did one word should be sufficient. By no one else

would she allow it to be thought, for an instant, that she would wish

to reverse her decision. It must still be No to any other person from

whom such suggestion might come. But should he give her the chance

she would tell him instantly the truth of everything. "Can I love

you! Oh, my love, it is impossible that I should not love you!" It

would be thus that the answer should be given to him, should he allow

her the chance of making it.

CHAPTER LII.

"I CALL IT FOLLY."

Three weeks passed by, and Ayala was still at Stalham. Colonel Stubbs

had not as yet appeared, and very little had been said about him.

Sir Henry would sometimes suggest that if he meant to see any more

hunting he had better come at once, but this was not addressed to

Ayala. She made up her mind that he would not come, and was sure

that she was keeping him away by her presence. He could not--"bring

himself to try over again," as Lady Albury had put it! Why should

he--"bring himself"--to do anything on behalf of one who had treated

him so badly? It had been settled that she should remain to the 25th

of March, when the month should be up from the time in which Lady

Albury had decided upon that as the period of her visit. Of her

secret she had given no slightest hint. If he ever did come again it

should not be because she had asked for his coming. As far as she

knew how to carry out such a purpose, she concealed from Lady Albury

anything like a feeling of regret. And she was so far successful that

Lady Albury thought it expedient to bring in other assistance to help

her cause,--as will be seen by a letter which Ayala received when the

three weeks had passed by.

In the meantime there had been at first dismay, then wonder, and

lastly, some amusement, at the condition of Captain Batsby. When

Captain Batsby had first learned at Merle Park that Ayala and

Jonathan Stubbs were both at Stalham, he wrote very angrily to Lady

Albury. In answer to this his sister-in-law had pleaded guilty,--but

still defending herself. How could she make herself responsible

for the young lady,--who did not indeed seem ready to bestow her

affections on any of her suitors? But still she acknowledged that a

little favour was being shown to Colonel Stubbs,--wishing to train

the man to the idea that, in this special matter, Colonel Stubbs must

be recognised as the Stalham favourite. Then no further letters were

received from the Captain, but there came tidings that he was staying

at Merle Park. Ayala heard continually from her sister, and Lucy sent

some revelations as to the Captain. He seemed to be very much at home

at Merle Park, said Lucy; and then, at last, she expressed her own

opinion that Captain Batsby and Gertrude were becoming very fond of

each other. And yet the whole story of Gertrude and Mr. Houston was

known, of course, to Lucy, and through Lucy to Ayala. To Ayala these

sudden changes were very amusing, as she certainly did not wish to

retain her own hold on the Captain, and was not specially attached to

her cousin Gertrude. From Ayala the tidings went to Lady Albury, and

in this way the fears which had been entertained as to the Captain's

displeasure were turned to wonder and amusement. But up to this

period nothing had been heard of the projected trip to Ostend.

Then came the letter to Ayala, to which allusion has been made, a

letter from her old friend the Marchesa, who was now at Rome. It was

ostensibly in answer to a letter from Ayala herself, but was written

in great part in compliance with instructions received from Lady

Albury. It was as follows;--

DEAR AYALA,--

I was glad to get your letter about Nina. She is very

happy, and Lord George is here. Indeed, to tell the truth,

they arrived together,--which was not at all proper; but

everything will be made proper on Tuesday, 8th April,

which is the day at last fixed for the wedding. I wish you

could have been here to be one of the bridesmaids. Nina

says that you will have it that the Pope is to marry her.

Instead of that it is going to be done by Lord George's

uncle, the Dean of Dorchester, who is coming for this

purpose. Then they are going up to a villa they have

taken on Como, where we shall join them some time before

the spring is over. After that they seem to have no

plans,--except plans of connubial bliss, which is never to

know any interruption.

Now that I have come to connubial bliss, and feel so

satisfied as to Nina's prospects, I have a word or two

to say about the bliss of somebody else. Nina is my own

child, and of course comes first. But one Jonathan Stubbs

is my nephew, and is also very near to my heart. From all

that I hear, I fancy that he has set his mind also on

connubial bliss. Have you not heard that it is so?

A bird has whispered to me that you have not been kind

to him. Why should it be so? Nobody knows better than I

do that a young lady is entitled to the custody of her

own heart, and that she should not be compelled, or even

persuaded, to give her hand in opposition to her own

feelings. If your feelings and your heart are altogether

opposed to the poor fellow, of course there must be an end

of it. But I had thought that from the time you first met

him he had been a favourite of yours;--so much so that

there was a moment in which I feared that you might think

too much of the attentions of a man who has ever been a

favourite with all who have known him. But I have found

that in this I was altogether mistaken. When he came that

evening to see the last of you at the theatre, taking, as

I knew he did, considerable trouble to release himself

from other engagements, I was pretty sure how it was going

to be. He is not a man to be in love with a girl for a

month and then to be in love with another the next month.

When once he allowed himself to think that he was in

love, the thing was done and fixed either for his great

delight,--or else to his great trouble.

I knew how it was to be, and so it has been. Am I not

right in saying that on two occasions, at considerable

intervals, he has come to you and made distinct offers of

his hand? I fear, though I do not actually know it, that

you have just as distinctly rejected those offers. I do

not know it, because none but you and he can know the

exact words with which you received from him the tender

of all that he had to give you. I can easily believe that

he, with all his intelligence, might be deceived by the

feminine reserve and coyness of such a girl as you. If it

be so, I do pray that no folly may be allowed to interfere

with his happiness and with yours.

I call it folly, not because I am adverse to feminine

reserve, not because I am prone to quarrel even with what

I call coyness; but because I know his nature so well, and

feel that he would not bear rebuffs of which many another

man would think nothing; that he would not bring himself

to ask again, perhaps even for a seventh time, as they

might do. And, if it be that by some frequent asking his

happiness and yours could be insured, would it not be

folly that such happiness should be marred by childish

disinclination on your part to tell the truth?

As I said before, if your heart be set against him, there

must be an end of it. I can understand that a girl so

young as you should fail to see the great merit of such a

man. I therefore write as I do, thinking it possible that

in this respect you may be willing to accept from my mouth

something as to the man which shall be regarded as truth.

It is on the inner man, on his nature and disposition,

that the happiness of a wife must depend. A more noble

nature, a more truthful spirit than his, I have never

met. He is one on whom in every phase of life you may

depend,--or I may depend,--as on a rock. He is one without

vacillation, always steady to his purpose, requiring from

himself in the way of duty and conduct infinitely more

than he demands from those around him. If ever there was

a man altogether manly, he is one. And yet no woman, no

angel, ever held a heart more tender within his bosom. See

him with children! Think of his words when he has spoken

to yourself! Remember the estimation in which those

friends hold him who know him best,--such as I and your

friend, Lady Albury, and Sir Harry, and his cousin Nina.

I could name many others, but these are those with whom

you have seen him most frequently. If you can love such a

man, do you not think that he would make you happy? And

if you cannot, must there not be something wrong in your

heart,--unless indeed it be already predisposed to some

one else? Think of all this, dear Ayala, and remember that

I am always

Your affectionate friend,

JULIA BALDONI.

Ayala's first feeling as she read the letter was a conviction that

her friend had altogether wasted her labour in writing it. Of what

use was it to tell her of the man's virtues,--to tell her that the

man's heart was as tender as an angel's, his truth as assured as a

god's, his courage that of a hero,--that he was possessed of all

those attributes which should by right belong to an Angel of Light?

She knew all that without requiring the evidence of a lady from

Rome,--having no need of any evidence on that matter from any other

human being. Of what use could any evidence be on such a subject from

the most truthful lips that ever spoke! Had she not found it all out

herself would any words from others have prevailed with her? But she

had found it out herself. It was already her gospel. That he was

tender and true, manly, heroic,--as brightly angelic as could be

any Angel of Light,--was already an absolute fact to her. No!--her

heart had never been predisposed to any one else. It was of him she

had always dreamed even long before she had seen him. He was the

man, perfect in all good things, who was to come and take her with

him;--if ever man should come and take her. She wanted no Marchesa

Baldoni now to tell her that the angel had in truth come and realised

himself before her in all his glory.

But she had shown herself to be utterly unfit for the angel. Though

she recognised him now, she had not recognised him in time:--and even

when she had recognised him she had been driven by her madness to

reject him. Feminine reserve and coyness! Folly! Yes, indeed; she

knew all that, too, without need of telling from her elders. The kind

of coyness which she had displayed had been the very infatuation of

feminine imbecility. It was because nature had made her utterly unfit

for such a destiny that she had been driven by coyness and feminine

reserve to destroy herself! It was thus that Ayala conversed with

herself.

"I know his nature so well, and feel that he would not bear rebuffs

of which many another man would think nothing." Thus, she did not

doubt, the Marchesa had spoken very truly. But of what value was

all that now? She could not recall the rebuff. She could not now

eradicate the cowardice which had made her repeat those wicked fatal

words,--"I cannot." "I cannot." "I cannot." The letter had come too

late, for there was nothing she could do to amend her doom. She must

send some answer to her friend in Italy, but there could be nothing

in her answer to her to assist her. The feminine reserve and coyness

had become odious to her,--as it had been displayed by herself to

him. But it still remained in full force as to any assistance from

others. She could not tell another to send him back to her. She could

not implore help in her trouble. If he would come himself,--himself

of his own accord,--himself impelled once more by his great

tenderness of heart,--himself once more from his real, real love;

then there should be no more coyness. "If you will still have me,--oh

yes!"

But there was the letter to be written. She so wrote it that by far

the greater part of it,--the larger part at least,--had reference to

Nina and her wedding. "I will think of her on the 8th of April," she

said. "I shall then be at home at Kingsbury Crescent, and I shall

have nothing else to think of." In that was her first allusion to

her own condition with her lover. But on the last side of the sheet

it was necessary that she should say more than that. Something must

be said thoughtfully, carefully, and gratefully in reply to so much

thought, and care, and friendship, as had been shown to her. But it

must be so written that nothing of her secret should be read in it.

The task was so troublesome that she was compelled to recopy the

whole of her long letter, because the sentences as first written did

not please her. "I am so much obliged to you," she said, "by your

kindness about Colonel Stubbs. He did do me the honour of asking me

to be his wife. And I felt it so. You are not to suppose that I did

not understand that. It is all over now, and I cannot explain to

you why I felt that it would not do. It is all over, and therefore

writing about it is no good. Only I want you to be sure of two

things,--that there is no one else, and that I do love you so

much for all your kindness. And you may be sure of a third thing,

too,--that it is all over. I do hope that he will still let me be his

friend. As a friend I have always liked him so much." It was brave

and bold, she thought, in answer to such words as the Marchesa's; but

she did not know how to do it any better.

On Tuesday, the 25th of March, she was to return to Kingsbury

Crescent. Various little words were said at Stalham indicating an

intended break in the arrangement. "The Captain certainly won't come

now," said Lady Albury, alluding to the arrangement as though it had

been made solely with the view of saving Ayala from an encounter with

her objectionable lover. "Croppy has come back," said Sir Harry one

day;--Croppy being the pony which Ayala had ridden. "Miss Dormer can

have him now for what little there is left of the hunting." This was

said on the Saturday before she was to go. How could she ride Croppy

for the rest of the hunting when she would be at Kingsbury Crescent?

On neither of these occasions did she say a word, but she assumed

that little look of contradiction which her friends at Stalham

already knew how to read. Then, on the Sunday morning, there came

a letter for Lady Albury. "What does he say?" asked Sir Harry, at

breakfast. "I'll show it you before you go to church," answered his

wife. Then Ayala knew that the letter was from Colonel Stubbs.

But she did not expect that the letter should be shown her,--which,

however, came to be the case. When she was in the library, waiting

to start to church, Lady Albury came in and threw the letter to her

across the table. "That concerns you," she said, "you had better read

it." There was another lady in the room, also waiting to start on

their walk across the park, and therefore it was natural that nothing

else should be said at the moment. Ayala read the letter, returned

it to the envelope, and then handed it back to Lady Albury,--so that

there was no word spoken about it before church. The letter, which

was very short, was as follows;--

"I shall be at Stalham by the afternoon train on Sunday, 30th,--in

time for dinner, if you will send the dog-cart. I could not leave

this most exigeant of all places this week. I suppose Albury will

go on in the woodlands for a week or ten days in April, and I must

put up with that. I hear that Batsby is altogether fixed by the

fascinations of Merle Park. I hope that you and Albury will receive

consolation in the money." Then there was a postscript. "If Croppy

can be got back again, Miss Dormer might see me tumble into another

river."

It was evident that Lady Albury did not expect anything to be said

at present. She put the letter into her pocket, and there, for the

moment, was the end of it. It may be feared that Ayala's attention

was not fixed that morning so closely as it should have been on the

services of the Church. There was so much in that little letter which

insisted upon having all her attention! Had there been no postscript,

the letter would have been very different. In that case the body

of the letter itself would have intended to have no reference to

her,--or rather it would have had a reference altogether opposite to

that which the postscript gave it. In that case it would have been

manifest to her that he had intentionally postponed his coming till

she had left Stalham. Then his suggestion about the hunting would

have had no interest for her. Everything would have been over. She

would have been at Kingsbury Crescent, and he would have been at

Stalham. But the postscript declared his intention of finding her

still in the old quarters. She would not be there,--as she declared

to herself. After this there would be but one other day, and then she

would be gone. But even this allusion to her and to the pony made the

letter something to her of intense interest. Had it not been so Lady

Albury would not have shown it to her. As it was, why had Lady Albury

shown it to her in that quiet, placid, friendly way,--as though it

were natural that any letter from Colonel Stubbs to Stalham should be

shown to her?

At lunch Sir Harry began about the pony at once. "Miss Dormer," he

said, "the pony will hardly be fit to-morrow, and the distances

during the rest of the week are all too great for you; you had better

wait till Monday week, when Stubbs will be here to look after you."

"But I am going home on Tuesday," said Ayala.

"I've had the pony brought on purpose for you," said Sir Harry.

"You are not going at all," said Lady Albury. "All that has to be

altered. I'll write to Mrs. Dosett."

"I don't think--" began Ayala.

"I shall take it very much amiss," said Sir Harry, "if you go now.

Stubbs is coming on purpose."

"I don't think--" began Ayala again.

"My dear Ayala, it isn't a case for thinking," said Lady Albury. "You

most positively will not leave this house till some day in April,

which will have to be settled hereafter. Do not let us have a word

more about it." Then, on that immediate occasion, no further word

about it was spoken. Ayala was quite unable to speak as she sat

attempting to eat her lunch.

CHAPTER LIII.

HOW LUCY'S AFFAIRS ARRANGED THEMSELVES.

We must go again to Merle Park, where the Tringle family was still

living,--and from which Gertrude had not as yet been violently

abducted at the period to which the reader has been brought in the

relation which has been given of the affairs at Stalham. Jonathan

Stubbs's little note to Lady Albury was received on Sunday, 23rd

March, and Gertrude was not abducted till the 29th. On Sunday, the

30th, she was brought back,--not in great triumph. At that time the

house was considerably perturbed. Sir Thomas was very angry with

his daughter Augusta, having been led to believe that she had been

privy to Gertrude's escapade,--so angry that very violent words had

been spoken as to her expulsion from the house. Tom also was ill,

absolutely ill in bed, with a doctor to see him,--and all from love,

declaring that he would throw himself over the ship's side and drown

himself while there was yet a chance left to him for Ayala. And in

the midst of this Lady Tringle herself was by no means exempt from

the paternal wrath. She was told that she must have known what was

going on between her daughter and that idiot Captain,--that she

encouraged the Trafficks to remain,--that she coddled up her son

till he was sick from sheer lackadaisical idleness. The only one

in the house who seemed to be exempt from the wrath of Sir Thomas

was Lucy,--and therefore it was upon Lucy's head that fell the

concentrated energy of Aunt Emmeline's revenge. When Captain Batsby

was spoken of with contumely in the light of a husband,--this being

always done by Sir Thomas,--Lady Tringle would make her rejoinder to

this, when Sir Thomas had turned his back, by saying that a captain

in Her Majesty's army, with good blood in his veins and a competent

fortune, was at any rate better than a poor artist, who had, so to

say, no blood, and was unable to earn his bread; and when Tom was

ridiculed for his love for Ayala she would go on to explain,--always

after Sir Thomas's back had been turned,--that poor Tom had been

encouraged by his father, whereas Lucy had taken upon herself to

engage herself in opposition to her pastors and masters. And then

came the climax. It was all very well to say that Augusta was

intruding,--but there were people who intruded much worse than

Augusta, without half so much right. When this was said the poor

sore-hearted woman felt her own cruelty, and endeavoured to withdraw

the harsh words; but the wound had been given, and the venom rankled

so bitterly that Lucy could no longer bear her existence among the

Tringles. "I ought not to remain after that," she wrote to her lover.

"Though I went into the poor-house I ought not to remain."

"I wrote to Mr. Hamel," she said to her aunt, "and told him that as

you did not like my being here I had better,--better go away."

"But where are you to go? And I didn't say that I didn't like you

being here. You oughtn't to take me up in that way."

"I do feel that I am in the way, aunt, and I think that I had better

go."

"But where are you to go? I declare that everybody says everything to

break my heart. Of course you are to remain here till he has got a

house to keep you in." But the letter had gone and a reply had come

telling Lucy that whatever might be the poor-house to which she would

be destined he would be there to share it with her.

Hamel wrote this with high heart. He had already resolved, previous

to this, that he would at once prepare a home for his coming bride,

though he was sore distressed by the emergency of his position. His

father had become more and more bitter with him as he learned that

his son would in no respect be guided by him. There was a sum of

money which he now declared to be due to him, and which Isadore

acknowledged to have been lent to him. Of this the father demanded

repayment. "If," said he, "you acknowledge anything of the obedience

of a son, that money is at your disposal,--and any other that you may

want. But, if you determine to be as free from my control and as deaf

to my advice as might be any other young man, then you must be to me

as might be any other young man." He had written to his father saying

that the money should be repaid as soon as possible. The misfortune

had come to him at a trying time. It was, however, before he had

received Lucy's last account of her own misery at Merle Park, so that

when that was received he was in part prepared.

Our Colonel, in writing to Lady Albury, had declared Aldershot to be

a most exigeant place,--by which he had intended to imply that his

professional cares were too heavy to allow his frequent absence; but

nevertheless he would contrive occasionally to fly up to London for

a little relief. Once when doing so he had found himself sitting

in the sculptor's studio, and there listening to Hamel's account

of Lucy's troubles at Merle Park. Hamel said nothing as to his own

difficulties, but was very eager in explaining the necessity of

removing Lucy from the tyranny to which she was subjected. It will

perhaps be remembered that Hamel down in Scotland had declared to his

friend his purpose of asking Lucy Dormer to be his wife, and also

the success of his enterprise after he had gone across the lake to

Glenbogie. It will be borne in mind also that should the Colonel

succeed in winning Ayala to his way of thinking the two men would

become the husbands of the two sisters. Each fully sympathised with

the other, and in this way they had become sincere and intimate

friends.

"Is she like her sister?" asked the Colonel, who was not as yet

acquainted with Lucy.

"Hardly like her, although in truth there is a family likeness. Lucy

is taller, with perhaps more regular features, and certainly more

quiet in her manner."

"Ayala can be very quiet too," said the lover.

"Oh, yes,--because she varies in her moods. I remember her almost as

a child, when she would remain perfectly still for a quarter of an

hour, and then would be up and about the house everywhere, glancing

about like a ray of the sun reflected from a mirror as you move it in

your hand."

"She has grown steadier since that," said the Colonel.

"I cannot imagine her to be steady,--not as Lucy is steady. Lucy, if

it be necessary, can sit and fill herself with her own thoughts for

the hour together."

"Which of them was most like their father?"

"They were both of them like him in their thorough love for things

beautiful;--but they are both of them unlike him in this, that he

was self-indulgent, while they, like women in general, are always

devoting themselves to others." She will not devote herself to me,

thought Jonathan Stubbs to himself, but that may be because, like her

father, she loves things beautiful. "My poor Lucy," continued Hamel,

"would fain devote herself to those around her if they would only

permit it."

"She would probably prefer devoting herself to you," said the

Colonel.

"No doubt she would,--if it were expedient. If I may presume that she

loves me, I may presume also that she would wish to live with me."

"Is it not expedient?" asked the other.

"It will be so, I trust, before long."

"But it seems to be so necessary just at present." To this the

sculptor at the moment made no reply. "If," continued Stubbs, "they

treat her among them as you say, she ought at any rate to be relieved

from her misery."

"She ought to be relieved certainly. She shall be relieved."

"But you say that it is not expedient."

"I only meant that there were difficulties;--difficulties which will

have to be got over. I think that all difficulties are got over when

a man looks at them steadily."

"This, I suppose, is an affair of money."

"Well, yes. All difficulties seem to me to be an affair of money.

A man, of course, would wish to earn enough before he marries to

make his wife comfortable. I would struggle on as I am, and not be

impatient, were it not that I fear she is more uncomfortable as she

is now than she would be here in the midst of my poverty."

"After all, Hamel, what is the extent of the poverty? What are the

real circumstances? As you have gone so far you might as well tell

me everything." Then after considerable pressure the sculptor did

tell him everything. There was an income of less than three hundred

a year,--which would probably become about four within the next

twelvemonth. There were no funds prepared with which to buy the

necessary furniture for the incoming of a wife, and there was that

debt demanded by his father.

"Must that be paid?" asked the Colonel.

"I would starve rather than not pay it," said Hamel, "if I alone were

to be considered. It would certainly be paid within the next six

months if I were alone, even though I should starve."

Then his friend told him that the debt should be paid at once. It

amounted to but little more than a hundred pounds. And then, of

course, the conversation was carried further. When a friend inquires

as to the pecuniary distresses of a friend he feels himself as a

matter of course bound to relieve him. He would supply also the means

necessary for the incoming of the young wife. With much energy, and

for a long time, Hamel refused to accept the assistance offered

to him; but the Colonel insisted in the first place on what he

considered to be due from himself to Ayala's sister, and then on

the fact that he doubted not in the least the ultimate success

which would attend the professional industry of his friend. And so

before the day was over it was settled among them. The money was

to be forthcoming at once, so that the debt might be paid and the

preparations made, and Hamel was to write to Lucy and declare that he

should be ready to receive her as soon as arrangements should be made

for their immediate marriage. Then came the further outrage,--that

cruel speech as to intruders, and Lucy wrote to her lover, owning

that it would be well for her that she should be relieved.

The news was, of course, declared to the family at Merle Park. "I

never knew anything so hard," said Aunt Emmeline. "Of course you have

told him that it was all my fault." When Lucy made no answer to this,

she went on with her complaint. "I know that you have told him that I

have turned you out,--which is not true."

"I told him it was better I should go, as you did not like my being

here."

"I suppose Lucy was in a little hurry to have the marriage come off,"

said Augusta,--who would surely have spared her cousin if at the

moment she had remembered the haste which had been displayed by her

sister.

"I thought it best," said Lucy.

"I'm sure I don't know how it is to be done," said Aunt Emmeline.

"You must tell your uncle yourself. I don't know how you are to be

married from here, seeing the trouble we are in."

"We shall be up in London before that," said Gertrude.

"Or from Queen's Gate either," continued Aunt Emmeline.

"I don't suppose that will much signify. I shall just go to the

church."

"Like a servant-maid?" asked Gertrude.

"Yes;--like a servant-maid," said Lucy. "That is to say, a

servant-maid would, I suppose, simply walk in and be married; and I

shall do the same."

"I think you had better tell your uncle," said Aunt Emmeline. "But I

am sure I did not mean that you were to go away like this. It will be

your own doing, and I cannot help it if you will do it."

Then Lucy did tell her uncle. "And you mean to live upon three

hundred a year!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "You don't know what you are

talking about."

"I think Mr. Hamel knows."

"He is as ignorant as a babe unborn;--I mean about that kind of

thing. I don't doubt he can make things in stone as well as anybody."

"In marble, Uncle Tom."

"Marble is stone, I suppose;--or in iron."

"Bronze, Uncle Tom."

"Very well. There is iron in bronze, I suppose. But he doesn't know

what a wife will cost. Has he bought any furniture?"

"He is going to buy it,--just a little;--what will do?"

"Why should you want to bring him into this?" Lucy looked wistfully

up into his face. He himself had been personally kind to her, and she

found it to be impossible to complain to him of her aunt. "You are

not happy here?"

"My aunt and cousins think that I am wrong; but I must be married to

him now, Uncle Tom."

"Why did he kick up his heels when I wanted to help him?"

Nevertheless, he gave his orders on the subject very much in Lucy's

favour. She was to be married from Queen's Gate, and Gertrude must

be her bridesmaid. Ayala no doubt would be the other. When his wife

expostulated, he consented that the marriage should be very quiet,

but still he would have it as he had said. Then he bestowed a cheque

upon Lucy,--larger in amount than Stubbs's loan,--saying that after

what had passed in Lombard Street he would not venture to send money

to so independent a person as Mr. Isadore Hamel; but adding that

Lucy, perhaps, would condescend to accept it. There was a smile in

his eye as he said the otherwise ill-natured word, so that Lucy,

without any wound to her feelings, could kiss him and accept his

bounty.

"I suppose I am to have nothing to do in settling the day," said Aunt

Emmeline. It was, however, settled between them that the marriage

should take place on a certain day in May. Upon this Lucy was of

course overjoyed, and wrote to her lover in a full flow of spirits.

And she sent him the cheque, having written her name with great pride

on the back of it. There was a little trouble about this as a part of

it had to come back as her trousseau, but still the arrangement was

pleasantly made. Then Sir Thomas again became more kind to her, in

his rough manner,--even when his troubles were at the worst after

the return of Gertrude. "If it will not be altogether oppressive to

his pride you may tell him that I shall make you an allowance of a

hundred a year as my niece,--just for your personal expenses."

"I don't know that he is so proud, Uncle Tom."

"He seemed so to me. But if you say nothing to him about it, and just

buy a few gowns now and again, he will perhaps be so wrapt up in the

higher affairs of his art as not to take any notice."

"I am sure he will notice what I wear," said Lucy. However she

communicated her uncle's intentions to her lover, and he sent back

his grateful thanks to Sir Thomas. As one effect of all this the

Colonel's money was sent back to him, with an assurance that as

things were now settling themselves such pecuniary assistance was not

needed. But this was not done till Ayala had heard what the Angel of

Light had done on her sister's behalf. But as to Ayala's feelings

in that respect we must be silent here, as otherwise we should make

premature allusion to the condition in which Ayala found herself

before she had at last managed to escape from Stalham Park.

"Papa," said Gertrude, to her father one evening, "don't you think

you could do something for me too now?" Just at this time Sir Thomas,

greatly to his own annoyance, was coming down to Merle Park every

evening. According to their plans as at present arranged, they were

to stay in the country till after Easter, and then they were to go up

to town in time to despatch poor Tom upon his long journey round the

world. But poor Tom was now in bed, apparently ill, and there seemed

to be great doubt whether he could be made to go on the appointed

day in spite of the taking of his berth and the preparation of his

outfit. Tom, if well enough, was to sail on the nineteenth of April,

and there now wanted not above ten days to that time. "Don't you

think you could do something for me now?" asked Gertrude. Hitherto

Sir Thomas had extended no sign of pardon to his youngest daughter,

and never failed to allude to her and to Captain Batsby as "those two

idiots" whenever their names were mentioned before him.

"Yes, my dear; I will endeavour to do a good deal for you if you will

behave yourself."

"What do you call behaving myself, papa?"

"In the first place telling me that you are very sorry for your

misbehaviour with that idiot."

"Of course I am sorry if I have offended you."

"Well, that shall go for something. But how about the idiot?"

"Papa!" she exclaimed.

"Was he not an idiot? Would any one but an idiot have gone on such an

errand as that?"

"Gentlemen and ladies have done it before, papa."

"I doubt it," he said. "Gentlemen have run away with young ladies

before, and generally have behaved very badly when they have done so.

He behaved very badly indeed, because he had come to my house, with

my sanction, with the express purpose of expressing his affection

for another young lady. But I think that his folly in this special

running away was worse even than his conduct. How did he come

to think that he could get himself married merely by crossing

over the sea to Ostend? I should be utterly ashamed of him as a

son-in-law,--chiefly because he has shown himself to be an idiot."

"But, papa, you will accept him, won't you?"

"No, my dear, I will not."

"Not though I love him?"

"If I were to give you a choice which you would take, him or Mr.

Houston?"

"Houston is a scoundrel."

"Very likely; but then he is not an idiot. My choice would be

altogether in favour of Mr. Houston. Shall I tell you what I will do,

my dear? I will consent to accept Captain Batsby as my son-in-law if

he will consent to become your husband without having a shilling with

you."

"Would that be kind, papa?"

"I do not think that I can show you any greater kindness than to

protect you from a man who I am quite sure does not care a farthing

about you. He has, you tell me, an ample income of his own."

"Oh yes, papa."

"Then he can afford to marry you without a fortune. Poor Mr. Houston

could not have done so, because he had nothing of his own. I declare,

as I think of it all, I am becoming very tender-hearted towards Mr.

Houston. Don't you think we had better have Mr. Houston back again?

I suppose he would come if you were to send for him." Then she burst

into tears and went away and hid herself.

CHAPTER LIV.

TOM'S LAST ATTEMPT.

While Gertrude was still away on her ill-omened voyage in quest of a

parson, Lady Tringle was stirred up to a great enterprise on behalf

of her unhappy son. There wanted now little more than a fortnight

before the starting of the ship which his father still declared

should carry him out across the world, and he had progressed so far

in contemplating the matter as to own to himself that it would be

best for him to obey his father if there was no hope. But his mind

was still swayed by a theory of love and constancy. He had heard of

men who had succeeded after a dozen times of asking. If Stubbs, the

hated but generous Stubbs, were in truth a successful rival, then

indeed the thing would be over;--then he would go, the sooner the

better; and, as he told his mother half-a-dozen times a day, it would

matter nothing to him whether he were sent to Japan, or the Rocky

Mountains, or the North Pole. In such case he would be quite content

to go, if only for the sake of going. But how was he to be sure? He

was, indeed, nearly sure in the other direction. If Ayala were in

truth engaged to Colonel Stubbs it would certainly be known through

Lucy. Then he had heard, through Lucy, that, though Ayala was staying

at Stalham, the Colonel was not there. He had gone, and Ayala had

remained week after week without him. Then, towards the end of March,

he wrote a letter to his Uncle Reginald, which was very piteous in

its tone;--

"DEAR UNCLE REGINALD," the letter said,

I don't know whether you have heard of it, but I have

been very ill--and unhappy. I am now in bed, and nobody

here knows that I am sending this letter to you. It is

all about Ayala, and I am not such a fool as to suppose

that you can do anything for me. If you could I think

you would,--but of course you can't. She must choose for

herself,--only I do so wish that she should choose me.

Nobody would ever be more kind to her. But you can tell

me really how it is. Is she engaged to marry Colonel

Stubbs? I know that she refused him, because he told me

so himself. If she is not engaged to him I think that

I would have another shy at it. You know what the poet

says,--"Faint heart never won fair lady." Do tell me if

she is or is not engaged. I know that she is with those

Alburys, and that Colonel Stubbs is their friend. But

they can't make her marry Colonel Stubbs any more than my

friends can make her marry me. I wish they could. I mean

my friends, not his.

If she were really engaged I would go away and hide myself

in the furthermost corner of the world. Siberia or Central

Africa would be the same to me. They would have little

trouble in getting rid of me if I knew that it was all

over with me. BUT I WILL NEVER STIR FROM THESE REALMS TILL

I KNOW MY FATE!--Therefore, waiting your reply, I am your

affectionate nephew,

THOMAS TRINGLE, junior.

Mr. Dosett, when he received this letter, consulted his wife before

he replied to it, and then did so very shortly;--

MY DEAR TOM,

As far as I know, or her aunt, your cousin Ayala is not

engaged to marry any one. But I should deceive you if I

did not add my belief that she is resolved not to accept

the offer you have done her the honour to make her.

Your affectionate uncle,

REGINALD DOSETT.

The latter portion of this paragraph had no influence whatsoever

on Tom. Did he not know all that before? Had he ever attempted to

conceal from his relations the fact that Ayala had refused him again

and again? Was not that as notorious to the world at large as a

minister's promise that the income-tax should be abolished? But the

income-tax was not abolished,--and, as yet, Ayala was not married to

any one else. Ayala was not even engaged to any other suitor. Why

should she not change her mind as well as the minister? Certainly he

would not go either to the North Pole or to New York as long as there

should be a hope of bliss for him in England. Then he called his

mother to his bedside.

"Go to Stalham, my dear!" said his mother.

"Why not? They can't eat you. Lady Albury is no more than a Baronet's

wife,--just the same as you."

"It isn't about eating me, Tom. I shouldn't know what to say to

them."

"You need not tell them anything. Say that you had come to call upon

your niece."

"But it would be such an odd thing to do. I never do call on

Ayala,--even when I am in London."

"What does it matter being odd? You could learn the truth at any

rate. If she does not care for any one else why shouldn't she have

me? I could make her a baronet's wife,--that is, some day when the

governor--"

"Don't, Tom;--don't talk in that way."

"I only mean in the course of nature. Sons do come after their

fathers, you know. And as for money, I suppose the governor is quite

as rich as those Alburys."

"I don't think that would matter."

"It does count, mother. I suppose Ayala is the same as other girls in

that respect. I am sure I don't know why it is that she should have

taken such an aversion to me. I suppose it is that she doesn't think

me so much,--quite such a swell as some other men."

"One can't account for such things, Tom."

"No;--that is just it. And therefore she might come round without

accounting for it. At any rate, you might try. You might tell her

that it is ruining me;--that I shall have to go about wandering over

all the world because she is so hard-hearted."

"I don't think I could, my dear," said Lady Tringle, after

considering the matter for a while.

"Why not? Is it because of the trouble?"

"No, my dear; a mother does not think what trouble she may take for

her child, if any good may be done. It is not the trouble. I would

walk all round England to get her for you if that would do it."

"Why not, then? At any rate you might get an answer from her. She

would tell you something of her intention. Mother, I shall never

go away till I know more about it than I do now. The governor says

that he will turn me out. Let him turn me out. That won't make me go

away."

"Oh, Tom, he doesn't mean it."

"But he says it. If I knew that it was all over,--that every chance

was gone, then I would go away."

"It is not the Alburys that I am afraid of," said Lady Tringle.

"What then?"

"It is your father. I cannot go if he will not let me." Nevertheless

she promised before she left his bedside that she would ask Sir

Thomas when he came home whether he would permit her to make the

journey. All this occurred while Sir Thomas was away in quest of his

daughter. And it may be imagined that immediately after his return he

was hardly in a humour to yield to any such request as that which had

been suggested. He was for the moment almost sick of his children,

sick of Merle Park, sick of his wife, and inclined to think that

the only comfort to be found in the world was to be had among his

millions, in that little back parlour in Lombard Street.

It was on a Sunday that he returned, and on that day he did not see

his son. On the Monday morning he went into the room, and Tom was

about to press upon him the prayer which he had addressed to his

mother when his lips were closed by his father's harshness. "Tom,"

he said, "you will be pleased to remember that you start on the

nineteenth."

"But, father--"

"You start on the nineteenth," said Sir Thomas. Then he left the

room, closing the door behind him with none of the tenderness

generally accorded to an invalid.

"You have not asked him?" Tom said to his mother shortly afterwards.

"Not yet, my dear. His mind is so disturbed by this unfortunate

affair."

"And is not my mind disturbed? You may tell him that I will not go,

though he should turn me out a dozen times, unless I know more about

it than I do now."

Sir Thomas came home again that evening, very sour in temper, and

nothing could be said to him. He was angry with everybody, and Lady

Tringle hardly dared to go near him, either then or on the following

morning. On the Tuesday evening, however, he returned somewhat

softened in his demeanour. The millions had perhaps gone right,

though his children would go so wrong. When he spoke either to his

younger daughter or of her he did so in that jeering tone which he

afterwards always assumed when allusion was made to Captain Batsby,

and which, disagreeable as it was, seemed to imply something of

forgiveness. And he ate his dinner, and drank his glass of wine,

without making any allusion to the parsimonious habits of his

son-in-law, Mr. Traffick. Lady Tringle, therefore, considered that

she might approach him with Tom's request.

"You go to Stalham!" he exclaimed.

"Well, my dear, I suppose I could see her?"

"And what could you learn from her?"

"I don't suppose I could learn much. She was always a pig-headed,

stiff-necked creature. I am sure it wouldn't be any pleasure to me to

see her."

"What good would it do?" demanded Sir Thomas.

"Well, my dear; he says that he won't go unless he can get a message

from her. I am sure I don't want to go to Stalham. Nothing on earth

could be so disagreeable. But perhaps I could bring back a word or

two which would make him go upon his journey."

"What sort of word?"

"Why;--if I were to say that she were engaged to this Colonel Stubbs,

then he would go. He says that he would start at once if he knew that

his cousin were really engaged to somebody else."

"But if she be not?"

"Perhaps I could just colour it a little. It would be such a grand

thing to get him away, and he in this miserable condition! If he were

once on his travels, I do think he would soon begin to forget it

all."

"Of course he would," said Sir Thomas.

"Then I might as well try. He has set his heart upon it, and if he

thinks that I have done his bidding then he will obey you. As for

turning him out, Tom, of course you do not really mean that!"

In answer to this Sir Thomas said nothing. He knew well enough that

Tom couldn't be turned out. That turning out of a son is a difficult

task to accomplish, and one altogether beyond the power of Sir

Thomas. The chief cause of his sorrow lay in the fact that he, as the

head of Travers and Treason, was debarred from the assistance and

companionship of his son. All Travers and Treason was nothing to him,

because his son would run so far away from the right path. There was

nothing he would not do to bring him back. If Ayala could have been

bought by any reasonable, or even unreasonable, amount of thousands,

he would have bought her willingly for his boy's delight. It was a

thing wonderful to him that Tom should have been upset so absolutely

by his love. He did appreciate the feeling so far that he was willing

to condone all those follies already committed if Tom would only put

himself in the way of recovery. That massacreing of the policeman,

those ill-spent nights at the Mountaineers and at Bolivia's, that

foolish challenge, and the almost more foolish blow under the portico

at the Haymarket, should all be forgiven if Tom would only consent

to go through some slight purgation which would again fit him for

Travers and Treason. And the purgation should be made as pleasant as

possible. He should travel about the world with his pocket full of

money and with every arrangement for luxurious comfort. Only he must

go. There was no other way in which he could be so purged as to be

again fit for Travers and Treason. He did not at all believe that

Ayala could now be purchased. Whether pig-headed or not, Ayala was

certainly self-willed. No good such as Tom expected would come from

this projected visit to Stalham. But if he would allow it to be made

in obedience to Tom's request,--then perhaps some tidings might be

brought back which, whether strictly true or not, might induce Tom to

allow himself to be put on board the ship. Arguing thus with himself,

Sir Thomas at last gave his consent.

It was a most disagreeable task which the mother thus undertook.

She could not go from Merle Park to Stalham and back in one day. It

was necessary that she should sleep two nights in London. It was

arranged, therefore, that she should go up to London on the Thursday;

then make her journey down to Stalham and back on the Friday, and

get home on the Saturday. There would then still remain nearly a

fortnight before Tom would have to leave Merle Park. After much

consideration it was decided that a note should be written to Ayala

apprising her of her aunt's coming. "I hope Lady Albury will not be

surprised at my visit," said the note, "but I am so anxious to see

you, just for half-an-hour, upon a matter of great importance, that I

shall run my chance." She would prefer to have seen the girl without

any notice; but then, had no notice been given, the girl would

perhaps have been out of the way. As it was a telegram was received

back in reply. "I shall be at home. Lady Albury will be very glad to

see you at lunch. She says there shall be a room all ready if you

will sleep."

"I certainly shall not stay there," Lady Tringle said to Mrs.

Traffick, "but it is as well to know that they will be civil to me."

"They are stuck-up sort of people I believe," said Augusta; "just

like that Marchesa Baldoni, who is one of them. But, as to their

being civil, that is a matter of course. They would hardly be uncivil

to any one connected with Lord Boardotrade!"

Then came the Thursday on which the journey was to be commenced. As

the moment came near Lady Tringle was very much afraid of the task

before her. She was afraid even of her niece Ayala, who had assumed

increased proportions in her eyes since she had persistently refused

not only Tom but also Colonel Stubbs and Captain Batsby, and then in

spite of her own connexion with Lord Boardotrade,--of whom since her

daughter's marriage she had learned to think less than she had done

before,--she did feel that the Alburys were fashionable people, and

that Ayala as their guest had achieved something for herself. Stalham

was, no doubt, superior in general estimation to Merle Park, and with

her there had been always a certain awe of Ayala, which she had not

felt in reference to Lucy. Ayala's demand that Augusta should go

upstairs and fetch the scrap-book had had its effect,--as had also

her success in going up St. Peter's and to the Marchesa's dance; and

then there would be Lady Albury herself,--and all the Alburys! Only

that Tom was very anxious, she would even now have abandoned the

undertaking.

"Mother," said Tom, on the last morning, "you will do the best you

can for me."

"Oh yes, my dear."

"I do think that, if you would make her understand the real truth,

she might have me yet. She wouldn't like that a fellow should die."

"I am afraid that she is hard-hearted, Tom."

"I do not believe it, mother. I have seen her when she wouldn't kill

even a fly. If she could only be made to see all the good she could

do."

"I am afraid she won't care for that unless she can bring herself

really to love you."

"Why shouldn't she love me?"

"Ah, my boy; how am I to tell you? Perhaps if you hadn't loved her so

well it might have been different. If you had scorned her--"

"Scorn her! I couldn't scorn her. I have heard of that kind of thing

before, but how is one to help oneself? You can't scorn a friend

just because you choose to say so to yourself. When I see her she is

something so precious to me that I could not be rough to her to save

my life. When she first came it wasn't so. I could laugh at her then.

But now--! They talk about goddesses, but I am sure she is a goddess

to me."

"If you had made no more than a woman of her it might have been

better, Tom." All that was too late now. The doctrine which Lady

Tringle was enunciating to her son, and which he repudiated, is one

that has been often preached and never practised. A man when he is

conscious of the presence of a mere woman, to whom he feels that no

worship is due, may for his own purpose be able to tell a lie to her,

and make her believe that he acknowledges a divinity in her presence.

But, when he feels the goddess, he cannot carry himself before her as

though she were a mere woman, and, as such, inferior to himself in

her attributes. Poor Tom had felt the touch of something divine, and

had fallen immediately prostrate before the shrine with his face to

the ground. His chance with Ayala could in no circumstances have been

great; but she was certainly not one to have yielded to a prostrate

worshipper.

"Mother!" said Tom, recalling Lady Tringle as she was leaving the

room.

"What is it, my dear? I must really go now or I shall be too late for

the train."

"Mother, tell her, tell her,--tell her that I love her." His mother

ran back, kissed his brow, and then left the room.

Lady Tringle spent that evening in Queen's Gate, where Sir Thomas

remained with her. The hours passed heavily, as they had not much

present to their mind with which to console each other. Sir Thomas

had no belief whatever in the journey except in so far as it might

help to induce his son to proceed upon his travels;--but his wife had

been so far softened by poor Tom's sorrows as to hope a little, in

spite of her judgment, that Ayala might yet relent. Her heart was

soft towards her son, so that she felt that the girl would deserve

all manner of punishment unless she would at last yield to Tom's

wishes. She was all but sure that it could not be so, and yet, in

spite of her convictions, she hoped.

On the next morning the train took her safely to the Stalham Road

Station, and as she approached the end of her journey her heart

became heavier within her. She felt that she could not but fail to

give any excuse to the Alburys for such a journey,--unless, indeed,

Ayala should do as she would have her. At the station she found the

Albury carriage, with the Albury coachman, and the Albury footman,

and the Albury liveries, waiting for her. It was a closed carriage,

and for a moment she thought that Ayala might be there. In that case

she could have performed her commission in the carriage, and then

have returned to London without going to the house at all. But Ayala

was not there. Lady Tringle was driven up to the house, and then

taken through the hall into a small sitting-room, where for a moment

she was alone. Then the door opened, and Ayala, radiant with beauty,

in all the prettiness of her best morning costume, was in a moment

in her arms. She seemed in her brightness to be different from that

Ayala who had been known before at Glenbogie and in Rome. "Dear

aunt," said Ayala, "I am so delighted to see you at Stalham!"

CHAPTER LV.

IN THE CASTLE THERE LIVED A KNIGHT.

Ayala was compelled to consent to remain at Stalham. The "I don't

think" which she repeated so often was, of course, of no avail to

her. Sir Harry would be angry, and Lady Albury would be disgusted,

were she to go,--and so she remained. There was to be a week before

Colonel Stubbs would come, and she was to remain not only for the

week but also for some short time afterwards,--so that there might

be yet a few days left of hunting under the Colonel. It could

not, surely, have been doubtful to her after she had read that

letter,--with the postscript,--that if she remained her happiness

would be insured! He would not have come again and insisted on

her being there to receive him if nothing were to come of it. And

yet she had fought for permission to return to Kingsbury Crescent

after her little fashion, and had at last yielded, as she told Lady

Albury,--because Sir Harry seemed to wish it. "Of course he wishes

it," said Lady Albury. "He has got the pony on purpose, and nobody

likes being disappointed when he has done a thing so much as Sir

Harry." Ayala, delighted as she was, did not make her secret known.

She was fluttered, and apparently uneasy,--so that her friend did

not know what to make of it, or which way to take it. Ayala's secret

was to herself a secret still to be maintained with holy reticence.

It might still be possible that Jonathan Stubbs should never say

another word to her of his love. If he did,--why then all the world

might know. Then there would be no secret. Then she could sit and

discuss her love, and his love, all night long with Lady Albury,

if Lady Albury would listen to her. In the meantime the secret

must be a secret. To confess her love, and then to have her love

disappointed,--that would be death to her!

And thus it went on through the whole week, Lady Albury not quite

knowing what to make of it. Once she did say a word, thinking that

she would thus extract the truth, not as yet understanding how potent

Ayala could be to keep her secret. "That man has, at any rate, been

very true to you," she said. Ayala frowned, and shook her head,

and would not say a word upon the subject. "If she did not mean to

take him now, surely she would have gone," Lady Albury said to her

husband.

"She is a pretty little girl enough," said Sir Harry, "but I doubt

whether she is worth all the trouble."

"Of course she is not. What pretty little girl ever was? But as long

as he thinks her worth it the trouble has to be taken."

"Of course she'll accept him?"

"I am not at all so sure of it. She has been made to believe that you

wanted her to stay, and therefore she has stayed. She is quite master

enough of herself to ride out hunting with him again and then to

refuse him." And so Lady Albury doubted up to the Sunday, and all

through the Sunday,--up to the very moment when the last preparations

were to be made for the man's arrival.

The train reached the Stalham Road Station at 7 P.M., and the

distance was five miles. On Sundays they usually dined at Stalham at

7.30. The hour fixed was to be 8 on this occasion,--and even with

this there would be some bustling. The house was now nearly empty,

there being no visitors there except Mr. and Mrs. Gosling and Ayala.

Lady Albury gave many thoughts to the manner of the man's reception,

and determined at last that Jonathan should have an opportunity of

saying a word to Ayala immediately on his arrival if he so pleased.

"Mind you are down at half-past seven," she said to Ayala, coming to

her in her bedroom.

"I thought we should not dine till eight."

"There is no knowing. Sir Harry is so fussy. I shall be down, and I

should like you to be with me." Then Ayala promised. "And mind you

have his frock on."

"You'll make me wear it out before any one else sees it," she said,

laughing. But again she promised. She got a glimmer of light from it

all, nearly understanding what Lady Albury intended. But against such

intentions as these she had no reason to fight. Why should she not be

ready to see him? Why should she not have on her prettiest dress when

he came? If he meant to say the word,--then her prettiest dress would

all be too poor, and her readiest ears not quick enough to meet so

great a joy. If he were not to say the other word,--then should she

shun him by staying behind, or be afraid of the encounter? Should she

be less gaily attired because it would be unnecessary to please his

eye?

Oh, no! "I'll be there at half-past seven," she said. "But I know the

train will be late, and Sir Harry won't get his dinner till nine."

"Then, my dear, great as the Colonel is, he may come in and get what

is left for him in the middle. Sir Harry will not wait a minute after

eight."

The buxom woman came and dressed her. The buxom woman probably knew

what was going to happen;--was perhaps more keenly alive to the truth

than Lady Albury herself. "We have taken great care of it, haven't

we, Miss?" she said, as she fastened the dress behind. "It's just as

new still."

"New!" said Ayala. "It has got to be new with me for the next two

years."

"I don't know much about that, Miss. Somebody will have to pay for

a good many more new dresses before two years are over, I take it."

To this Ayala made no answer, but she was quite sure that the buxom

woman intended to imply that Colonel Stubbs would have to pay for the

new dresses.

Punctually at half-past seven she was in the drawing-room, and there

she remained alone for a few minutes. She endeavoured to sit down

and be quiet, but she found it impossible to compose herself. Almost

immediately he would be there, and then,--as she was quite sure,--her

fate would be known to her instantly. She knew that the first moment

of his presence in the room with her would tell her everything.

If that were told to her which she desired to hear, everything

should be re-told to him as quickly. But, if it were otherwise,

then she thought that when the moment came she would still have

strength enough to hide her sorrow. If he had come simply for the

hunting,--simply that they two might ride a-hunting together so that

he might show to her that all traces of his disappointment were

gone,--then she would know how to teach him to think that her heart

towards him was as it had ever been. The thing to be done would be so

sad as to call from her tears almost of blood in her solitude; but

it should be so done that no one should know that any sorrow such as

this had touched her bosom. Not even to Lucy should this secret be

told.

There was a clock on the mantelpiece to which her eye was continually

turned. It now wanted twenty minutes to eight, and she was aware that

if the train was punctual he might now be at the hall-door. At this

moment Lady Albury entered the room. "Your knight has come at last,"

she said; "I hear his wheels on the gravel."

"He is no knight of mine," said Ayala, with that peculiar frown of

hers.

"Whose ever knight he is, there he is. Knight or not, I must go and

welcome him." Then Lady Albury hurried out of the room and Ayala

was again alone. The door had been left partly open, so that she

could hear the sound of voices and steps across the inner hall or

billiard-room. There were the servants waiting upon him, and Sir

Harry bidding him to go up and dress at once so as not to keep

the whole house waiting, and Lady Albury declaring that there was

yet ample time as the dinner certainly would not be on the table

for half-an-hour. She heard it all, and heard him to whom all her

thoughts were now given laughing as he declared that he had never

been so cold in his life, and that he certainly would not dress

himself till he had warmed his fingers. She was far away from the

door, not having stirred from the spot on which she was standing

when Lady Albury left her; but she fancied that she heard the murmur

of some slight whisper, and she told herself that Lady Albury was

telling him where to seek her. Then she heard the sound of the man's

step across the billiard-room, she heard his hand upon the door, and

there he was in her presence!

When she thought of it all afterwards, as she did so many scores of

times, she never could tell how it had occurred. When she accused him

in her playfulness, telling him that he had taken for granted that

of which he had had no sign, she never knew whether there had been

aught of truth in her accusation. But she did know that he had hardly

closed the door behind him when she was in his arms, and felt the

burning love of his kisses upon her cheeks. There had been no more

asking whether he was to have any other answer. Of that she was quite

sure. Had there been such further question she would have answered

him, and some remembrance of her own words would have remained with

her. She was quite sure that she had answered no question. Some

memory of mingled granting and denying, of repulses and assents all

quickly huddled upon one another, of attempts to escape while she was

so happy to remain, and then of a deluge of love terms which fell

upon her ears,--"his own one, his wife, his darling, his Ayala, at

last his own sweet Ayala,"--this was what remained to her of that

little interview. She had not spoken a word. She thought she was sure

of that. Her breath had left her,--so that she could not speak. And

yet it had been taken for granted,--though on former occasions he had

pleaded with slow piteous words! How had it been that he had come to

know the truth so suddenly? Then she became aware that Lady Albury

was speaking to Mrs. Gosling in the billiard-room outside, detaining

her other guest till the scene within should be over. At that moment

she did speak a word which she remembered afterwards. "Go;--go; you

must go now." Then there had been one other soft repulse, one other

sweet assent, and the man had gone. There was just a moment for her,

in which to tell herself that the Angel of Light had come for her,

and had taken her to himself.

Mrs. Gosling, who was a pretty little woman, crept softly into the

room, hiding her suspicion if she had any. Lady Albury put out her

hand to Ayala behind the other woman's back, not raising it high, but

just so that her young friend might touch it if she pleased. Ayala

did touch it, sliding her little fingers into the offered grasp. "I

thought it would be so," whispered Lady Albury. "I thought it would

be so."

"What the deuce are you all up to," said Sir Harry, bursting into

the room. "It's eight now, and that man has only just gone up to his

room."

"He hasn't been in the house above five minutes yet," said Lady

Albury, "and I think he has been very quick." Ayala thought so too.

During dinner and afterwards they were very full of hunting for the

next day. It was wonderful to Ayala that there should be thought for

such a trifle when there was such a thing as love in the world. While

there was so much to fill her heart, how could there be thoughts

of anything else? But Jonathan,--he was Jonathan to her now, her

Jonathan, her Angel of Light,--was very keen upon the subject. There

was but one week left. He thought that Croppy might manage three days

as there was to be but one week. Croppy would have leisure and rest

enough afterwards. "It's a little sharp," said Sir Harry.

"Oh, pray don't," said Ayala.

But Lady Albury and Jonathan together silenced Sir Harry, and Mrs.

Gosling proved the absurdity of the objection by telling the story of

a pony who had carried a lady three days running. "I should not have

liked to be either the pony, or the owner, or the lady," said Sir

Harry. But he was silenced. What did it matter though the heavens

fell, so that Ayala was pleased? What is too much to be done for a

girl who proves herself to be an angel by accepting the right man at

the right time?

She had but one moment alone with her lover that night. "I always

loved you," she whispered to him as she fled away. The Colonel did

not quite understand the assertion, but he was contented with it as

he sat smoking his cigar with Sir Harry and Mr. Gosling.

But, though she could have but one word that night with her lover,

there were many words between her and Lady Albury before they went to

bed. "And so, like wise people, you have settled it all between you

at last," said Lady Albury.

"I don't know whether he is wise."

"We will take that for granted. At any rate he has been very true."

"Oh, yes."

"And you,--you knew all about it."

"No;--I knew nothing. I did not think he would ever ask again. I only

hoped."

"But why on earth did you give him so much trouble?"

"I can't tell you," said Ayala, shaking her head.

"Do you mean that there is still a secret?"

"No, not that. I would tell you anything that I could tell, because

you have been so very, very good to me. But I cannot tell. I cannot

explain even to myself. Oh, Lady Albury, why have you been so good to

me?"

"Shall I say because I have loved you?"

"Yes;--if it be true."

"But it is not true."

"Oh, Lady Albury!"

"I do love you dearly. I shall always love you now. I do hope I shall

love you now, because you will be his wife. But I have not been kind

to you as you call it because I loved you."

"Then why?"

"Because I loved him. Cannot you understand that? Because I was

anxious that he should have all that he wanted. Was it not necessary

that there should be some house in which he might meet you? Could

there have been much of a pleasant time for wooing between you in

your aunt's drawing-room in Kingsbury Crescent?"

"Oh, no," said Ayala.

"Could he have taken you out hunting unless you had been here? How

could he and you have known each other at all unless I had been kind

to you? Now you will understand."

"Yes," said Ayala, "I understand now. Did he ask you?"

"Well,--he consulted me. We talked you all over, and made up our

minds, between us, that if we petted you down here that would be the

best way to win you. Were we not right?"

"It was a very nice way. I do so like to be petted."

"Sir Harry was in the secret, and he did his petting by buying the

frock. That was a success too, I think."

"Did he care about that, Lady Albury?"

"What he?"

"Jonathan," said Ayala, almost stumbling over the word, as she

pronounced it aloud for the first time.

"I think he liked it. But whether he would have persevered without it

you must ask yourself. If he tells you that he would never have said

another word to you only for this frock, then I think you ought to

thank Sir Harry, and give him a kiss."

"I am sure he will not tell me that," said Ayala, with mock

indignation.

"And now, my dear, as I have told you all my secret, and have

explained to you how we laid our heads together, and plotted against

you, I think you ought to tell me your secret. Why was it that you

refused him so pertinaciously on that Sunday when you were out

walking, and yet you knew your mind about it so clearly as soon as he

arrived to-day?"

"I can't explain it," said Ayala.

"You must know that you liked him."

"I always liked him."

"You must have more than liked on that Sunday."

"I adored him."

"Then I don't understand you."

"Lady Albury, I think I fell in love with him the first moment I saw

him. The Marchesa took me to a party in London, and there he was."

"Did he say anything to you then?"

"No. He was very funny,--as he often is. Don't you know his way?

I remember every word he said to me. He came up without any

introduction and ordered me to dance with him."

"And you did?"

"Oh yes. Whatever he told me I should have done. Then he scolded me

because I did not stand up quick enough. And he invented some story

about a woman who was engaged to him and would not marry him because

he had red hair and his name was Jonathan. I knew it was all a joke,

and yet I hated the woman."

"That must have been love at first sight."

"I think it was. From that day to this I have always been thinking

about him."

"And yet you refused him twice over?"

"Yes."

"At ever so long an interval?" Ayala bobbed her head at her

companion. "And why?"

"Ah;--that I can't tell. I shall try to tell him some day, but I know

that I never shall. It was because--. But, Lady Albury, I cannot tell

it. Did you ever picture anything to yourself in a waking dream?"

"Build castles in the air?" suggested Lady Albury.

"That's just it."

"Very often. But they never come true."

"Never have come true,--exactly. I had a castle in the air, and in

the castle lived a knight." She was still ashamed to say that the

inhabitant of the castle was an Angel of Light. "I wanted to find out

whether he was the knight who lived there. He was."

"And you were not quite sure till to-day?"

"I have been sure a long time. But when we walked out on that Sunday

I was such an idiot that I did not know how to tell him. Oh, Lady

Albury, I was such a fool! What should I have done if he hadn't come

back?"

"Sent for him."

"Never;--never! I should have been miserable always! But now I am so

happy."

"He is the real knight?"

"Oh, yes; indeed. He is the real,--real knight, that has always been

living in my castle."

Ayala's promotion was now so firmly fixed that the buxom female came

to assist her off with her clothes when Lady Albury had left her.

From this time forth it was supposed that such assistance would be

necessary. "I take it, Miss," said the buxom female, "there will be a

many new dresses before the end of this time two years." From which

Ayala was quite sure that everybody in the house knew all about it.

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But it was now, now when she was quite alone, that the great sense

of her happiness came to her. In the fulness of her dreams there

had never been more than the conviction that such a being, and none

other, could be worthy of her love. There had never been faith in the

hope that such a one would come to her,--never even though she would

tell herself that angels had come down from heaven and had sought in

marriage the hands of the daughters of men. Her dreams had been to

her a barrier against love rather than an encouragement. But now he

that she had in truth dreamed of had come for her. Then she brought

out the Marchesa's letter and read that description of her lover.

Yes; he was all that; true, brave, tender,--a very hero. But then

he was more than all that,--for he was in truth the very "Angel of

Light."

CHAPTER LVI.

GOBBLEGOOSE WOOD AGAIN.

The Monday was devoted to hunting. I am not at all sure that riding

about the country with a pack of hounds is an amusement specially

compatible with that assured love entertainment which was now within

the reach of Ayala and her Angel. For the rudiments of love-making,

for little endearing attentions, for a few sweet words to be

whispered with shortened breath as one horse gallops beside another,

perhaps for a lengthened half-hour together, amidst the mazes of

a large wood when opportunities are no doubt given for private

conversation, hunting may be very well. But for two persons who are

engaged, with the mutual consent of all their friends, a comfortable

sofa is perhaps preferable. Ayala had heard as yet but very little

of her lover's intentions;--was acquainted only with that one single

intention which he had declared in asking her to be his wife. There

were a thousand things to be told,--the how, the where, and the when.

She knew hitherto the why, and that was all. Nothing could be told

her while she was galloping about a big wood on Croppy's back. "I

am delighted to see you again in these parts, Miss," said Larry

Twentyman, suddenly.

"Oh, Mr. Twentyman; how is the baby?"

"The baby is quite well, Miss. His mamma has been out ever so many

times."

"I ought to have asked for her first. Does baby come out too?"

"Not quite. But when the hounds are near mamma comes for an hour or

so. We have had a wonderful season,--quite wonderful. You have heard,

perhaps, of our great run from Dillsborough Wood. We found him there,

close to my place, you know, and run him down in the Brake country

after an hour and forty minutes. There were only five or six of them.

You'd have been one, Miss, to a moral, if you'd have been here on the

pony. I say we never changed our fox."

Ayala was well disposed towards Larry Twentyman, and was quite aware

that, according to the records and established usages of that hunt,

he was a man with whom she might talk safely. But she did not care

about the foxes so much as she had done before. There was nothing

now for which she cared much, except Jonathan Stubbs. He was always

riding near her throughout the day, so that he might be with her

should there arise anything special to be done; but he was not always

close to her,--as she would have had him. He had gained his purpose,

and he was satisfied. She had entered in upon the fruition of

positive bliss, but enjoyed it in perfection only when she heard the

sound of his voice, or could look into his eyes as she spoke to him.

She did not care much about the great run from Dillsborough, or even

for the compliment with which Mr. Twentyman finished his narrative.

They were riding about the big woods all day, not without killing

a fox, but with none of the excitement of a real run. "After that

Croppy will be quite fit to come again on Wednesday," suggested the

Colonel on their way home. To which Sir Harry assented.

"What do you folks mean to do to-day?" asked Lady Albury at breakfast

on the following morning. Ayala had her own little plan in her head,

but did not dare to propose it publicly. "Will you choose to be

driven, or will you choose to walk?" said Lady Albury, addressing

herself to Ayala. Ayala, in her present position, was considered to

be entitled to special consideration. Ayala thought she would prefer

to walk. At last there came a moment in which she could make her

request to the person chiefly concerned. "Walk with me to the wood

with that absurd name," suggested Ayala.

"Gobblegoose Wood," suggested the Colonel. Then that was arranged

according to Ayala's wishes.

A walk in a wood is perhaps almost as good as a comfortable seat in a

drawing-room, and is, perhaps, less liable to intrusion. They started

and walked the way which Ayala remembered so well when she had

trudged along, pretending to listen to Sir Harry and Captain Glomax

as they carried on their discussion about the hunted fox, but giving

all her ears to the Colonel, and wondering whether he would say

anything to her before the day was over. Then her mind had been in a

perturbed state which she herself had failed to understand. She was

sure that she would say "No" to him, should he speak, and yet she

desired that it should be "Yes." What a fool she had been, she told

herself as she walked along now, and how little she had deserved all

the good that had come to her!

The conversation was chiefly with him as they went. He told her much

now of the how, and the when, and the where. He hoped there might be

no long delay. He would live, he said, for the next year or two at

Aldershot, and would be able to get a house fit for her on condition

that they should be married at once. He did not explain why the house

could not be taken even though their marriage were delayed two or

three months,--but as to this she asked no questions. Of course they

must be married in London if Mrs. Dosett wished it; but if not it

might be arranged that the wedding should take place at Stalham.

Upon all this and many other things he had much to propose, and

all that he said Ayala accepted as gospel. As the Angel of Light

had appeared,--as the knight who was lord of the castle had come

forth,--of course he must be obeyed in everything. He could hardly

have made a suggestion to which she would not have acceded. When they

had entered the wood Ayala in her own quiet way led him to the very

spot in which on that former day he had asked her his question. "Do

you remember this path?" she asked.

"I remember that you and I were walking here together," he said.

"Ay, but this very turn? Do you remember this branch?"

"Well, no; not the branch."

"You put your hand on it when you said that 'never--never,' to me."

"Did I say 'never,--never'?"

"Yes, you did;--when I was so untrue to you."

"Were you untrue?" he asked.

"Jonathan, you remember nothing about it. It has all passed away from

you just as though you were talking to Captain Glomax about the fox."

"Has it, dear?"

"I remember every word of it. I remember how you stood and how you

looked, even to the hat you wore and the little switch you held in

your hand,--when you asked for one little word, one glance, one

slightest touch. There, now;--you shall have all my weight to bear."

Then she leant upon him with both her hands, turned round her arm,

glanced up into his face, and opened her lips as though speaking that

little word. "Do you remember that I said I thought you had given it

all up?"

"I remember that, certainly."

"And was not that untrue? Oh, Jonathan, that was such a story. Had I

thought so I should have been miserable."

"Then why did you swear to me so often that you could not love me?"

"I never said so," replied Ayala; "never."

"Did you not?" he asked.

"I never said so. I never told you such a story as that. I did love

you then, almost as well as I do now. Oh, I had loved you for so long

a time!"

"Then why did you refuse me?"

"Ah; that is what I would explain to you now,--here on this very

spot,--if I could. Does it not seem odd that a girl should have all

that she wants offered to her, and yet not be able to take it?"

"Was it all that you wanted?"

"Indeed it was. When I was in church that morning I told myself that

I never, never, could be happy unless you came to me again."

"But when I did come you would not have me."

"I knew how to love you," she said, "but I did not know how to tell

you that I loved you. I can tell you now; cannot I?" and then she

looked up at him and smiled. "Yes, I think I shall never be tired of

telling you now. It is sweet to hear you say that you love me, but it

is sweeter still to be always telling you. And yet I could not tell

you then. Suppose you had taken me at my word?"

"I told you that I should never give you up."

"It was only that that kept me from being altogether wretched.

I think that I was ashamed to tell you the truth when I had once

refused to do as you would have me. I had given you so much trouble

all for nothing. I think that if you had asked me on that first day

at the ball in London I should have said yes, if I had told the

truth."

"That would have been very sudden. I had never seen you before that."

"Nevertheless it was so. I don't mind owning it to you now, though

I never, never, would own it to any one else. When you came to us at

the theatre I was sure that no one else could ever have been so good.

I certainly did love you then."

"Hardly that, Ayala."

"I did," she said. "Now I have told you everything, and if you choose

to think I have been bad,--why you must think so, and I must put up

with it."

"Bad, my darling?"

"I suppose it was bad to fall in love with a man like that; and

very bad to give him the trouble of coming so often. But now I

have made a clean breast of it, and if you want to scold me you

must scold me now. You may do it now, but you must never scold me

afterwards,--because of that." It may be left to the reader to

imagine the nature of the scolding which she received.

Then on their way home she thanked him for all the good that he

had done to all those belonging to her. "I have heard it all from

Lucy;--how generous you have been to Isadore."

"That has all come to nothing," he said.

"How come to nothing? I know that you sent him the money."

"I did offer to lend him something, and, indeed, I sent him a cheque;

but two days afterwards he returned it. That tremendous uncle of

yours--"

"Uncle Tom?"

"Yes, your Uncle Tom; the man of millions! He came forward and cut

me out altogether. I don't know what went on down there in Sussex,

but when he heard that they intended to be married shortly he put

his hand into his pocket, as a magnificent uncle, overflowing with

millions, ought to do."

"I did not hear that."

"Hamel sent my money back at once."

"And poor Tom! You were so good to poor Tom."

"I like Tom."

"But he did behave badly."

"Well; yes. One gentleman shouldn't strike another, even though he be

ever so much in love. It's an uncomfortable proceeding, and never has

good results. But then, poor fellow, he has been so much in earnest."

"Why couldn't he take a No when he got it?"

"Why didn't I take a No when I got it?"

"That was very different. He ought to have taken it. If you had taken

it you would have been very wrong, and have broken a poor girl's

heart. I am sure you knew that all through."

"Did I?"

"And then you were too good-natured. That was it. I don't think you

really love me;--not as I love you. Oh, Jonathan, if you were to

change your mind now! Suppose you were to tell me that it was a

mistake! Suppose I were to awake and find myself in bed at Kingsbury

Crescent?"

"I hope there may be no such waking as that!"

"I should go mad,--stark mad. Shake me till I find out whether it is

real waking, downright, earnest. But, Jonathan, why did you call me

Miss Dormer when you went away? That was the worst of all. I remember

when you called me Ayala first. It went through and through me like

an electric shock. But you never saw it;--did you?"

On that afternoon when she returned home she wrote to her sister

Lucy, giving a sister's account to her sister of all her happiness.

"I am sure Isadore is second best, but Jonathan is best. I don't want

you to say so; but if you contradict me I shall stick to it. You

remember my telling you that the old woman in the railway said that

I was perverse. She was a clever old woman, and knew all about it,

for I was perverse. However, it has come all right now, and Jonathan

is best of all. Oh, my man,--my man! Is it not sweet to have a man

of one's own to love?" If this letter had been written on the day

before,--as would have been the case had not Ayala been taken out

hunting,--it would have reached Merle Park on the Wednesday, the news

would have been made known to Aunt Emmeline, and so conveyed to poor

Tom, and that disagreeable journey from Merle Park to Stalham would

have been saved. But there was no time for writing on the Monday. The

letter was sent away in the Stalham post-bag on the Tuesday evening,

and did not reach Merle Park till the Thursday, after Lady Tringle

had left the house. Had it been known on that morning that Ayala was

engaged to Colonel Stubbs that would have sufficed to send Tom away

upon his travels without any more direct messenger from Stalham.

On the Wednesday there was more hunting, and on this day Ayala,

having liberated her mind to her lover in Gobblegoose Wood, was able

to devote herself more satisfactorily to the amusement in hand. Her

engagement was now an old affair. It had already become matter for

joking to Sir Harry, and had been discussed even with Mrs. Gosling.

It was, of course, "a joy for ever,"--but still she was beginning to

descend from the clouds and to walk the earth,--no more than a simple

queen. When, therefore, the hounds went away and Larry told her that

he knew the best way out of the wood, she collected her energies and

rode "like a little brick," as Sir Harry said when they got back to

Stalham. On that afternoon she received the note from her aunt and

replied to it by telegram.

On the Thursday she stayed at home and wrote various letters. The

first was to the Marchesa, and then one to Nina,--in both of which

much had to be said about "Jonathan." To Nina also she could repeat

her idea of the delight of having a man to love. Then there was a

letter to Aunt Margaret,--which certainly was due, and another to

Aunt Emmeline,--which was not however received until after Lady

Tringle's visit to Stalham. There was much conversation between her

and Lady Albury as to the possible purpose of the visit which was to

be made on the morrow. Lady Albury was of opinion that Lady Tringle

had heard of the engagement, and was coming with the intention of

setting it on one side on Tom's behalf. "But she can't do that, you

know," said Ayala, with some manifest alarm. "She is nothing to me

now, Lady Albury. She got rid of me, you know. I was changed away for

Lucy."

"If there had been no changing away, she could do nothing," said Lady

Albury.

About a quarter of an hour before the time for lunch on the following

day Lady Tringle was shown into the small sitting-room which has been

mentioned in a previous chapter, and Ayala, radiant with happiness

and beauty, appeared before her. There was a look about her of being

at home at Stalham, as though she were almost a daughter of the

house, that struck her aunt with surprise. There was nothing left

of that submissiveness which, though Ayala herself had not been

submissive, belonged, as of right, to girls so dependent as she and

her sister Lucy. "I am so delighted to see you at Stalham," said

Ayala, as she embraced her aunt.

"I am come to you," said Lady Tringle, "on a matter of very

particular business." Then she paused, and assumed a look of peculiar

solemnity.

"Have you got my letter?" demanded Ayala.

"I got your telegram, and I thought it very civil of Lady Albury. But

I cannot stay. Your poor cousin Tom is in such a condition that I

cannot leave him longer than I can help."

"But you have not got my letter?"

"I have had no letter from you, Ayala."

"I have sent you such news,--oh, such news, Aunt Emmeline!"

"What news, my dear?" Lady Tringle as she asked the question seemed

to become more solemn than ever.

"Oh, Aunt Emmeline--; I am--"

"You are what, Ayala?"

"I am engaged to be married to Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"Engaged!"

"Yes, Aunt Emmeline;--engaged. I wrote to you on Tuesday to tell you

all about it. I hope you and Uncle Tom will approve. There cannot

possibly be any reason against it,--except only that I have nothing

to give him in return; that is in the way of money. Colonel Stubbs,

Aunt Emmeline, is not what Uncle Tom will call a rich man, but

everybody here says that he has got quite enough to be comfortable.

If he had nothing in the world it could not make any difference to

me. I don't understand how anybody is to love any one or not to love

him just because he is rich or poor."

"But you are absolutely engaged!" exclaimed Lady Tringle.

"Oh dear yes. Perhaps you would like to ask Lady Albury about it. He

did want it before, you know."

"But now you are engaged to him?" In answer to this Ayala thought it

sufficient simply to nod her head. "It is all over then?"

"All over!" exclaimed Ayala. "It is just going to begin."

"All over for poor Tom," said Lady Tringle.

"Oh yes. It was always over for him, Aunt Emmeline. I told him ever

so many times that it never could be so. Don't you know, Aunt

Emmeline, that I did?"

"But you said that to this man just the same."

"Aunt Emmeline," said Ayala, putting on all the serious dignity which

she knew how to assume, "I am engaged to Colonel Stubbs, and nothing

on earth that anybody can say can change it. If you want to hear all

about it, Lady Albury will tell you. She knows that you are my aunt,

and therefore she will be quite willing to talk to you. Only nothing

that anybody can say can change it."

"Poor Tom!" ejaculated the rejected lover's mother.

"I am very sorry if my cousin is displeased."

"He is ill,--terribly ill. He will have to go away and travel all

about the world, and I don't know that ever he will come back again.

I am sure this Stubbs will never love you as he has done."

"Oh, aunt, what is the use of that?"

"And then Tom will have twice as much. But, however--" Ayala stood

silent, not seeing that any good could be done by addition to her

former assurances. "I will go and tell him, my dear, that's all. Will

you not send him some message, Ayala?"

"Oh, yes; any message that I can that shall go along with my sincere

attachment to Colonel Stubbs. You must tell him that I am engaged to

Colonel Stubbs. You will tell him, Aunt Emmeline?"

"Oh, yes; if it must be so."

"It must," said Ayala. "Then you may give him my love, and tell him

that I am very unhappy that I should have been a trouble to him, and

that I hope he will soon be well, and come back from his travels."

By this time Aunt Emmeline was dissolved in tears. "I could not help

it, Aunt Emmeline, could I?" Her aunt had once terribly outraged her

feelings by telling her that she had encouraged Tom. Ayala remembered

at this moment the cruel words and the wound which they had inflicted

on her; but, nevertheless, she behaved tenderly, and endeavoured to

be respectful and submissive. "I could not help it,--could I, Aunt

Emmeline?"

"I suppose not, my dear."

After that Lady Tringle declared that she would return to London at

once. No;--she would rather not go in to lunch. She would rather go

back at once to the station if they would take her. She had been

weeping, and did not wish to show her tears. Therefore, at Ayala's

request, the carriage came round again,--to the great disgust, no

doubt, of the coachman,--and Lady Tringle was taken back to the

station without having seen any of the Albury family.

CHAPTER LVII.

CAPTAIN BATSBY IN LOMBARD STREET.

It was not till Colonel Stubbs had been three or four days at

Stalham, basking in the sunshine of Ayala's love, that any of the

Stalham family heard of the great event which had occurred in the

life of Ayala's third lover. During that walk to and from Gobblegoose

Wood something had been said between the lovers as to Captain

Batsby,--something, no doubt, chiefly in joke. The idea of the poor

Captain having fallen suddenly into so melancholy a condition was

droll enough. "But he never spoke to me," said Ayala. "He doesn't

speak very much to any one," said the Colonel, "but he thinks a great

deal about things. He has had ever so many affairs with ever so many

ladies, who generally, I fancy, want to marry him because of his

money. How he has escaped so long nobody knows." A man when he has

just engaged himself to be married is as prone as ever to talk of

other men "escaping," feeling that, though other young ladies were no

better than evils to be avoided, his young lady is to be regarded as

almost a solitary instance of a blessing. Then, two days afterwards,

arrived the news of the trip to Ostend. Sir Harry received a letter

from a friend in which an account was given of his half-brother's

adventure. "What do you think has happened?" said Sir Harry, jumping

up from his chair at the breakfast table.

"What has happened?" asked his wife.

"Benjamin has run off to Ostend with a young lady."

"Benjamin,--with a young lady!" exclaimed Lady Albury. Ayala and

Stubbs were equally astonished, each of them knowing that the

Captain had been excluded from Stalham because of the ardour of his

unfortunate love for Ayala. "Ayala, that is your doing!"

"No!" said Ayala. "But I am very glad if he's happy."

"Who is the young lady?" asked Stubbs.

"It is that which makes it so very peculiar," said Sir Harry, looking

at Ayala. He had learned something of the Tringle family, and was

aware of Ayala's connection with them.

"Who is it, Harry?" demanded her ladyship.

"Sir Thomas Tringle's younger daughter."

"Gertrude!" exclaimed Ayala, who also knew of the engagement with Mr.

Houston.

"But the worst of it is," continued Sir Harry, "that he is not at

all happy. The young lady has come back, while nobody knows what has

become of Benjamin."

"Benjamin never will get a wife," said Lady Albury. Thus all the

details of the little event became known at Stalham,--except the

immediate condition and whereabouts of the lover.

Of the Captain's condition and whereabouts something must be told.

When the great disruption came, and he had been abused and ridiculed

by Sir Thomas at Ostend, he felt that he could neither remain there

where the very waiters knew what had happened, nor could he return

to Dover in the same vessel with Sir Thomas and his daughter. He

therefore took the first train and went to Brussels.

But Brussels did not offer him many allurements in his present frame

of mind. He found nobody there whom he particularly knew, and nothing

particular to do. Solitude in a continental town with no amusements

beyond those offered by the table d'hÃ´te and the theatre is

oppressing. His time he endeavoured to occupy with thinking of the

last promise he had made to Gertrude. Should he break it or should

he keep it? Sir Thomas Tringle was, no doubt, a very rich man,--and

then there was the fact which would become known to all the world,

that he had run off with a young lady. Should he ultimately succeed

in marrying the young lady the enterprise would bear less of an

appearance of failure than it would do otherwise. But then, should

the money not be forthcoming, the consolation coming from the

possession of Gertrude herself would hardly suffice to make him a

happy man. Sir Thomas, when he came to consider the matter, would

certainly feel that his daughter had compromised herself by her

journey, and that it would be good for her to be married to the man

who had taken her. It might be that Sir Thomas would yield, and

consent to make, at any rate, some compromise. A rumour had reached

his ears that Traffick had received Â£200,000 with the elder daughter.

He would consent to take half that sum. After a week spent amidst

the charms of Brussels he returned to London, without any public

declaration of his doing so,--"sneaked back," as a friend of his said

of him at the club;--and then went to work to carry out his purpose

as best he might. All that was known of it at Stalham was that he had

returned to his lodgings in London.

On Friday, the 11th of April, when Ayala was a promised bride of

nearly two weeks' standing, and all the uncles and aunts were aware

that her lot in life had been fixed for her, Sir Thomas was alone in

the back-room in Lombard Street, with his mind sorely diverted from

the only joy of his life. The whole family were now in town, and

Septimus Traffick with his wife was actually occupying a room in

Queen's Gate. How it had come to pass Sir Thomas hardly knew. Some

word had been extracted from him signifying a compliance with a

request that Augusta might come to the house for a night or two until

a fitting residence should be prepared for her. Something had been

said of Lord Boardotrade's house being vacated for her and her

husband early in April. An occurrence to which married ladies are

liable was about to take place with Augusta, and Sir Thomas certainly

understood that the occurrence was to be expected under the roof of

the coming infant's noble grandfather. Something as to ancestral

halls had been thrown out in the chance way of conversation. Then he

certainly had assented to some minimum of London hospitality for his

daughter,--as certainly not including the presence of his son-in-law;

and now both of them were domiciled in the big front spare bed-room

at Queen's Gate! This perplexed him sorely. And then Tom had been

brought up from the country still as an invalid, his mother moaning

and groaning over him as though he were sick almost past hope of

recovery. And yet the nineteenth of the month, now only eight days

distant, was still fixed for his departure. Tom, on the return of his

mother from Stalham, had to a certain extent accepted as irrevocable

the fact of which she bore the tidings. Ayala was engaged to Stubbs,

and would, doubtless, with very little delay, become Mrs. Jonathan

Stubbs. "I knew it," he said; "I knew it. Nothing could have

prevented it unless I had shot him through the heart. He told me that

she had refused him; but no man could have looked like that after

being refused by Ayala." Then he never expressed a hope again. It

was all over for him as regarded Ayala. But still he refused to be

well, or even, for a day or two, to leave his bed. He had allowed

his mother to understand that if the fact of her engagement were

indubitably brought home to him he would gird up his loins for his

journey and proceed at once wherever it might be thought good to send

him. His father had sternly reminded him of his promise; but, when

so reminded, Tom had turned himself in his bed and uttered groans

instead of replies. Now he had been brought up to London and was

no longer actually in bed; but even yet he had not signified his

intention of girding up his loins and proceeding upon his journey.

Nevertheless the preparations were going on, and, under Sir Thomas's

directions, the portmanteaus were already being packed. Gertrude also

was a source of discomfort to her father. She considered herself

to have been deprived of her two lovers, one after the other, in a

spirit of cruel parsimony. And with this heavy weight upon her breast

she refused to take any part in the family conversations. Everything

had been done for Augusta, and everything was to be done for Tom. For

her nothing had been done, and nothing had been promised;--and she

was therefore very sulky. With these troubles all around him, Sir

Thomas was sitting oppressed and disheartened in Lombard Street on

Friday, the 11th of April.

Then there entered to him one of the junior clerks with a card

announcing the name of Captain Batsby. He looked at it for some

seconds before he gave any notification of his intention, and then

desired the young man to tell the gentleman that he would not see

him. The message had been delivered, and Captain Batsby with a frown

of anger on his brow was about to shake the dust off from his feet on

the uncourteous threshold when there came another message saying that

Captain Batsby could go in and see Sir Thomas if he wished it. Upon

this he turned round and was shown into the little sitting-room.

"Well, Captain Batsby," said Sir Thomas; "what can I do for you now?

I am glad to see that you have come back safely from foreign parts."

"I have called," said the Captain, "to say something about your

daughter."

"What more can you have to say about her?"

At this the Captain was considerably puzzled. Of course Sir Thomas

must know what he had to say. "The way in which we were separated at

Ostend was very distressing to my feelings."

"I daresay."

"And also I should think to Miss Tringle's."

"Not improbably. I have always observed that when people are

interrupted in the performance of some egregious stupidity their

feelings are hurt. As I said before, what can I do for you now?"

"I am very anxious to complete the alliance which I have done myself

the honour to propose to you."

"I did not know that you had proposed anything. You came down to my

house under a false pretence; and then you persuaded my daughter,--or

else she persuaded you,--to go off together to Ostend. Is that what

you call an alliance?"

"That, as far as it went was,--was an elopement."

"Am I to understand that you now want to arrange another elopement,

and that you have come to ask my consent?"

"Oh dear no."

"Then what do you mean by completing an alliance?"

"I want to make," said the Captain, "an offer for the young lady's

hand in a proper form. I consider myself to be in a position which

justifies me in doing so. I am possessed of the young lady's

affections, and have means of my own equal to those which I presume

you will be disposed to give her."

"Very much better means I hope, Captain Batsby. Otherwise I do not

see what you and your wife would have to live upon. I will tell you

exactly what my feelings are in this matter. My daughter has gone

off with you, forgetting all the duty that she owed to me and to her

mother, and throwing aside all ideas of propriety. After that I will

not say that you shall not marry her if both of you think fit. I do

not doubt your means, and I have no reason for supposing that you

would be cruel to her. You are two fools, but after all fools must

live in the world. What I do say is, that I will not give a sixpence

towards supporting you in your folly. Now, Captain Batsby, you can

complete the alliance or not as you please."

Captain Batsby had been called a fool also at Ostend, and there,

amidst the distressing circumstances of his position, had been

constrained to bear the opprobious name, little customary as it is

for one gentleman to allow himself to be called a fool by another;

but now he had collected his thoughts, had reminded himself of his

position in the world, and had told himself that it did not become

him to be too humble before this City man of business. It might have

been all very well at Ostend; but he was not going to be called a

fool in London without resenting it. "Sir Thomas," said he, "fool and

folly are terms which I cannot allow you to use to me."

"If you do not present yourself to me here, Captain Batsby, or at my

own house,--or, perhaps I may say, at Ostend,--I will use no such

terms to you."

"I suppose you will acknowledge that I am entitled to ask for your

daughter's hand."

"I suppose you will acknowledge that when a man runs away with my

daughter I am entitled to express my opinion of his conduct."

"That is all over now, Sir Thomas. What I did I did for love. There

is no good in crying over spilt milk. The question is as to the

future happiness of the young lady."

"That is the only wise word I have heard you say, Captain Batsby.

There is no good in crying after spilt milk. Our journey to Ostend is

done and gone. It was not very agreeable, but we have lived through

it. I quite think that you show a good judgment in not intending to

go there again in quest of a clergyman. If you want to be married

there are plenty of them in London. I will not oppose your marriage,

but I will not give you a shilling. No man ever had a better

opportunity of showing the disinterestedness of his affection. Now,

good morning."

"But, Sir Thomas--"

"Captain Batsby, my time is precious. I have told you all that there

is to tell." Then he stood up, and the Captain with a stern demeanour

and angry brow left the room and took himself in silence away from

Lombard Street.

"Do you want to marry Captain Batsby?" Sir Thomas said to his

daughter that evening, having invited her to come apart with him

after dinner.

"Yes, I do."

"You think that you prefer him on the whole to Mr. Houston?"

"Mr. Houston is a scoundrel. I wish that you would not talk about

him, papa."

"I like him so much the best of the two," said Sir Thomas. "But of

course it is for you to judge. I could have brought myself to give

something to Houston. Luckily, however, Captain Batsby has got an

income of his own."

"He has, papa."

"And you are sure that you would like to take him as your husband?"

"Yes, papa."

"Very well. He has been with me to-day."

"Is he in London?"

"I tell you that he has been with me to-day in Lombard Street."

"What did he say? Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes, my dear. He came to ask me for your hand."

"Well, papa."

"I told him that I should make no objection,--that I should leave

it altogether to you. I only interfered with one small detail as to

my own wishes. I assured him that I should never give him or you

a single shilling. I don't suppose it will matter much to him, as

he has, you know, means of his own." It was thus that Sir Thomas

punished his daughter for her misconduct.

Captain Batsby and the Trafficks were acquainted with each other. The

Member of Parliament had, of course, heard of the journey to Ostend

from his wife, and had been instigated by her to express an opinion

that the young people ought to be married. "It is such a very serious

thing," said Augusta to her husband, "to be four hours on the sea

together! And then you know--!" Mr. Traffick acknowledged that it was

serious, and was reminded by his wife that he, in the capacity of

brother, was bound to interfere on his sister's behalf. "Papa, you

know, understands nothing about these kind of things. You, with your

family interest, and your seat in Parliament, ought to be able to

arrange it." Mr. Traffick probably knew how far his family interest

and his seat in Parliament would avail. They had, at any rate, got

him a wife with a large fortune. They were promising for him, still

further, certain domiciliary advantages. He doubted whether he could

do much for Batsby; but still he promised to try. If he could arrange

these matters it might be that he would curry fresh favour with Sir

Thomas by doing so. He therefore made it his business to encounter

Captain Batsby on the Sunday afternoon at a club to which they both

belonged. "So you have come back from your little trip?" said the

Member of Parliament.

The Captain was not unwilling to discuss the question of their family

relations with Mr. Traffick. If anybody would have influence with Sir

Thomas it might probably be Mr. Traffick. "Yes; I have come back."

"Without your bride."

"Without my bride,--as yet. That is a kind of undertaking in which a

man is apt to run many dangers before he can carry it through."

"I dare say. I never did anything of the kind myself. Of course you

know that I am the young lady's brother-in-law."

"Oh yes."

"And therefore you won't mind me speaking. Don't you think you ought

to do something further?"

"Something further! By George, I should think so," said the Captain,

exultingly. "I mean to do a great many things further. You don't

suppose I am going to give it up?"

"You oughtn't, you know. When a man has taken a girl off with him in

that way, he should go on with it. It's a deuced serious thing, you

know."

"It was his fault in coming after us."

"That was a matter of course. If he hadn't done it, I must. I have

made the family my own, and, of course, must look after its honour."

The noble scion of the house of Traffick, as he said this, showed by

his countenance that he perfectly understood the duty which

circumstances had imposed upon him.

"He made himself very rough, you know," said the Captain.

"I dare say he would."

"And said things,--well,--things which he ought not to have said."

"In such a case as that a father may say pretty nearly what comes

uppermost."

"That was just it. He did say what came uppermost,--and very rough it

was."

"What does it matter?"

"Not much if he'd do as he ought to do now. As you are her

brother-in-law, I'll tell you just how it stands. I have been to him

and made a regular proposal."

"Since you have been back?"

"Yes; the day before yesterday. And what do you think he says?"

"What does he say?"

"He gives his consent; only--"

"Only what?"

"He won't give her a shilling! Such an idea, you know! As though she

were to be punished after marriage for running away with the man she

did marry."

"Take your chance, Batsby," said the Member of Parliament.

"What chance?"

"Take your chance of the money. I'd have done it; only, of course,

it was different with me. He was glad to catch me, and therefore the

money was settled."

"I've got a tidy income of my own, you know," said the Captain,

thinking that he was entitled to be made more welcome as a son-in-law

than the younger son of a peer who had no income.

"Take your chance," continued Traffick. "What on earth can a man

like Tringle do with his money except give it to his children? He is

rough, as you say, but he is not hard-hearted, nor yet stubborn. I

can do pretty nearly what I like with him."

"Can you, though?"

"Yes; by smoothing him down the right way. You run your chance, and

we'll get it all put right for you." The Captain hesitated, rubbing

his head carefully to encourage the thoughts which were springing up

within his bosom. The Honourable Mr. Traffick might perhaps succeed

in getting the affair put right, as he called it, in the interest

rather of the elder than of the second daughter. "I don't see how

you can hesitate now, as you have been off with the girl," said Mr.

Traffick.

"I don't know about that. I should like to see the money settled."

"There would have been nothing settled if you had married her at

Ostend."

"But I didn't," said the Captain. "I tell you what you might do. You

might talk him over and make him a little more reasonable. I should

be ready to-morrow if he'd come forward."

"What's the sum you want?"

"The same as yours, I suppose."

"That's out of the question," said Mr. Traffick, shaking his head.

"Suppose we say sixty thousand pounds." Then after some chaffering on

the subject it was decided between them that Mr. Traffick should use

his powerful influence with his father-in-law to give his daughter on

her marriage,--say a hundred thousand pounds if it were possible, or

sixty thousand pounds at the least.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MR. TRAFFICK IN LOMBARD STREET.

Mr. Traffick entertained some grand ideas as to the house of Travers

and Treason. Why should not he become a member, and ultimately the

leading member, of that firm? Sir Thomas was not a young man, though

he was strong and hearty. Tom had hitherto succeeded only in making

an ass of himself. As far as transacting the affairs of the firm,

Tom,--so thought Mr. Traffick,--was altogether out of the question.

He might perish in those extensive travels which he was about to

take. Mr. Traffick did not desire any such catastrophe;--but the

young man might perish. There was a great opening. Mr. Traffick, with

his thorough knowledge of business, could not but see that there was

a great opening. Besides Tom, there were but two daughters, one of

whom was his own wife. Augusta, his wife, was, he thought, certainly

the favourite at the present moment. Sir Thomas could, indeed, say

rough things even to her; but then Sir Thomas was of his nature

rough. Now, at this time, the rough things said to Gertrude were

very much the rougher. In all these circumstances the wisdom of

interfering in Gertrude's little affairs was very clear to Mr.

Traffick. Gertrude would, of course, get herself married sooner or

later, and almost any other husband would obtain a larger portion

than that which would satisfy Batsby. Sir Thomas was now constantly

saying good things about Mr. Houston. Mr. Houston would be much more

objectionable than Captain Batsby,--much more likely to interfere.

He would require more money at once, and might possibly come forward

himself in the guise of a partner. Mr. Traffick saw his way clearly.

It was incumbent upon him to see that Gertrude should become Mrs.

Batsby with as little delay as possible.

But one thing he did not see. One thing he had failed to see since

his first introduction to the Tringle family. He had not seen the

peculiar nature of his father-in-law's foibles. He did not understand

either the weakness or the strength of Sir Thomas,--either the

softness or the hardness. Mr. Traffick himself was blessed with a

very hard skin. In the carrying out of a purpose there was nothing

which his skin was not sufficiently serviceable to endure. But Sir

Thomas, rough as he was, had but a thin skin;--a thin skin and a

soft heart. Had Houston and Gertrude persevered he would certainly

have given way. For Tom, in his misfortune, he would have made any

sacrifice. Though he had given the broadest hints which he had been

able to devise he had never as yet brought himself absolutely to turn

Traffick out of his house. When Ayala was sent away he still kept her

name in his will, and added also that of Lucy as soon as Lucy had

been entrusted to him. Had things gone a little more smoothly between

him and Hamel when they met,--had he not unluckily advised that all

the sculptor's grand designs should be sold by auction for what they

would fetch,--he would have put Hamel and Lucy upon their legs. He

was a soft-hearted man;--but there never was one less willing to

endure interference in his own affairs.

At the present moment he was very sore as to the presence of Traffick

in Queen's Gate. The Easter parliamentary holidays were just at

hand, and there was no sign of any going. Augusta had whispered

to her mother that the poky little house in Mayfair would be very

uncomfortable for the coming event,--and Lady Tringle, though she had

not dared to say even as much as that in plain terms to her husband,

had endeavoured to introduce the subject by little hints,--which

Sir Thomas had clearly understood. He was hardly the man to turn a

daughter and an expected grandchild into the streets; but he was,

in his present mood, a father-in-law who would not unwillingly

have learned that his son-in-law was without a shelter except that

afforded by the House of Commons. Why on earth should he have given

up one hundred and twenty thousand pounds,--Â£6,000 a-year as it was

under his fostering care,--to a man who could not even keep a house

over his wife's head? This was the humour of Sir Thomas when Mr.

Traffick undertook to prevail with him to give an adequate fortune to

his youngest daughter on her marriage with Captain Batsby.

The conversation between Traffick and Batsby took place on a Sunday.

On the following day the Captain went down to the House and saw the

Member. "No; I have not spoken to him yet."

"I was with him on Friday, you know," said Batsby. "I can't well

go and call on the ladies in Queen's Gate till I hear that he has

changed his mind."

"I should. I don't see what difference it would make."

Then Captain Batsby was again very thoughtful. "It would make a

difference, you know. If I were to say a word to Gertrude now,--as to

being married or anything of that kind,--it would seem that I meant

to go on whether I got anything or not."

"And you should seem to want to go on," said Traffick, with all that

authority which the very surroundings of the House of Commons always

give to the words and gait of a Member.

"But then I might find myself dropped in a hole at last."

"My dear Batsby, you made that hole for yourself when you ran off

with the young lady."

"We settled all that before."

"Not quite. What we did settle was that we'd do our best to fill the

hole up. Of course you ought to go and see them. You went off with

the young lady,--and since that have been accepted as her suitor by

her father. You are bound to go and see her."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly! Certainly! It never does to talk to Tringle about

business at his own house. I'll make an hour to see him in the City

to-morrow. I'm so pressed by business that I can hardly get away from

the House after twelve;--but, I'll do it. But, while I'm in Lombard

Street, do you go to Queen's Gate." The Captain after further

consideration said that he would go to Queen's Gate.

At three o'clock on the next day he did go to Queen's Gate. He had

many misgivings, feeling that by such a step he would be committing

himself to matrimony with or without the money. No doubt he could so

offer himself, even to Lady Tringle, as a son-in-law, that it should

be supposed that the offer would depend upon the father-in-law's

goodwill. But then the father-in-law had told him that he would be

welcome to the young lady,--without a farthing. Should he go on

with his matrimonial purpose, towards which this visit would be an

important step, he did not see the moment in which he could stop the

proceedings by a demand for money. Nevertheless he went, not being

strong enough to oppose Mr. Traffick.

Yes;--the ladies were at home, and he found himself at once in Lady

Tringle's presence. There was at the time no one with her, and the

Captain acknowledged to himself that a trying moment had come to him.

"Dear me! Captain Batsby!" said her ladyship, who had not seen him

since he and Gertrude had gone off together.

"Yes, Lady Tringle. As I have come back from abroad I thought that I

might as well come and call. I did see Sir Thomas in the City."

"Was not that a very foolish thing you did?"

"Perhaps it was, Lady Tringle. Perhaps it would have been better to

ask permission to address your daughter in the regular course of

things. There was, perhaps,--perhaps a little romance in going off in

that way."

"It gave Sir Thomas a deal of trouble."

"Well, yes; he was so quick upon us you know. May I be allowed to see

Gertrude now?"

"Upon my word I hardly know," said Lady Tringle, hesitating.

"I did see Sir Thomas in the City."

"But did he say you were to come and call?"

"He gave his consent to the marriage."

"But I am afraid there was to be no money," whispered Lady Tringle.

"If money is no matter I suppose you may see her." But before

the Captain had resolved how he might best answer this difficult

suggestion the door opened, and the young lady herself entered the

room, together with her sister.

"Benjamin," said Gertrude, "is this really you?" And then she flew

into his arms.

"My dear," said Augusta, "do control your emotions."

"Yes, indeed, Gertrude," said the mother. "As the things are at

present you should control yourself. Nobody as yet knows what may

come of it."

"Oh, Benjamin!" again exclaimed Gertrude, tearing herself from his

arms, throwing herself on the sofa, and covering her face with both

her hands. "Oh, Benjamin,--so you have come at last."

"I am afraid he has come too soon," said Augusta, who however had

received her lesson from her husband, and had communicated some

portion of her husband's tidings to her sister.

"Why too soon?" exclaimed Gertrude. "It can never be too soon. Oh,

mamma, tell him that you make him welcome to your bosom as your

second son-in-law."

"Upon my word, my dear, I do not know, without consulting your

father."

"But papa has consented," said Gertrude.

"But only if--"

"Oh, mamma," said Mrs. Traffick, "do not talk about matters of

business on such an occasion as this. All that must be managed

between the gentlemen. If he is here as Gertrude's acknowledged

lover, and if papa has told him that he shall be accepted as such, I

don't think that we ought to say a word about money. I do hate money.

It does make things so disagreeable."

"Nobody can be more noble in everything of that kind than Benjamin,"

said Gertrude. "It is only because he loves me with all his heart

that he is here. Why else was it that he took me off to Ostend?"

Captain Batsby as he listened to all this felt that he ought to say

something. And yet how dangerous might a word be! It was apparent to

him, even in his perturbation, that the ladies were in fact asking

him to renew his offer, and to declare that he renewed it altogether

independently of any money consideration. He could not bring himself

quite to agree with that noble sentiment in expressing which Mrs.

Traffick had declared her hatred of money. In becoming the son-in-law

of a millionaire he would receive the honest congratulations of all

his friends,--on condition that he received some comfortable fraction

out of the millions, but he knew well that he would subject himself

to their ridicule were he to take the girl and lose the plunder. If

he were to answer them now as they would have him answer he would

commit himself to the girl without any bargain as to the plunder.

And yet what else was there for him to do? He must be a brave man

who can stand up before a girl and declare that he will love her for

ever,--on condition that she shall have so many thousand pounds; but

he must be more than brave, he will be heroic, who can do so in the

presence not only of the girl but of the girl's mother and married

sister as well. Captain Batsby was no such hero. "Of course," he said

at last.

"Of course what?" asked Augusta.

"It was because I loved her."

"I knew that he loved me," sobbed Gertrude.

"And you are here, because you intend to make her your wife in

presence of all men?" asked Augusta.

"Oh certainly."

"Then I suppose that it will be all right," said Lady Tringle.

"It will be all right," said Augusta. "And now, mamma, I think that

we may leave them alone together." But to this Lady Tringle would

not give her assent. She had not had confided to her the depth of Mr.

Traffick's wisdom, and declared herself opposed to any absolute overt

love-making until Sir Thomas should have given his positive consent.

"It is all the same thing, Benjamin, is it not?" said Augusta,

assuming already the familiarity of a sister in-law.

"Oh quite," said the Captain.

But Gertrude looked as though she did not think it to be exactly

the same. Such deficiency as that, however, she had to endure; and

she received from her sister after the Captain's departure full

congratulations as to her lover's return. "To tell you the truth,"

said Augusta, "I didn't think that you would ever see him again.

After what papa said to him in the City he might have got off and

nobody could have said a word to him. Now he's fixed."

Captain Batsby effected his escape as quickly as he could, and went

home a melancholy man. He, too, was aware that he was fixed; and, as

he thought of this, a dreadful idea fell upon him that the Honourable

Mr. Traffick had perhaps played him false.

In the meantime Mr. Traffick was true to his word and went into the

City. In the early days of his married life his journeys to Lombard

Street were frequent. The management and investing of his wife's

money had been to him a matter of much interest, and he had felt a

gratification in discussing any money matter with the man who handled

millions. In this way he had become intimate with the ways of the

house, though latterly his presence there had not been encouraged.

"I suppose I can go in to Sir Thomas," he said, laying his hand upon

a leaf in the counter, which he had been accustomed to raise for the

purpose of his own entrance. But here he was stopped. His name should

be taken in and Sir Thomas duly apprised. In the meantime he was

relegated to a dingy little waiting-room, which was odious to him,

and there he was kept waiting for half-an-hour. This made him angry,

and he called to one of the clerks. "Will you tell Sir Thomas that

I must be down at the House almost immediately, and that I am

particularly anxious to see him on business of importance?" For

another ten minutes he was still kept, and then he was shown into

his father-in law's presence. "I am very sorry, Traffick," said Sir

Thomas, "but I really can't turn two Directors of the Bank of England

out of my room, even for you."

"I only thought I would just let you know that I am in a hurry."

"So am I, for the matter of that. Have you gone to your father's

house to-day, so that you would not be able to see me in Queen's

Gate?"

This was intended to be very severe, but Mr. Traffick bore it. It

was one of those rough things which Sir Thomas was in the habit of

saying, but which really meant nothing. "No. My father is still at

his house as yet, though they are thinking of going every day. It is

about another matter, and I did not want to trouble you with it at

home."

"Let us hear what it is."

"Captain Batsby has been with me."

"Oh, he has, has he?"

"I've known him ever so long. He's a foolish fellow."

"So he seems."

"But a gentleman."

"Perhaps I am not so good a judge of that. His folly I did perceive."

"Oh yes; he's a gentleman. You may take my word for that. And he has

means."

"That's an advantage."

"While that fellow Houston is hardly more than a beggar. And Batsby

is quite in earnest about Gertrude."

"If the two of them wish it he can have her to-morrow. She has made

herself a conspicuous ass by running away with him, and perhaps it's

the best thing she can do."

"That's just it. Augusta sees it quite in the same light."

"Augusta was never tempted. You wouldn't have run away."

"It wasn't necessary, Sir Thomas, was it? There he is,--ready to

marry her to-morrow. But, of course, he is a little anxious about the

money."

"I dare say he is."

"I've been talking to him,--and the upshot is, that I have promised

to speak to you. He isn't at all a bad fellow."

"He'd keep a house over his wife's head, you think?" Sir Thomas had

been particularly irate that morning, and before the arrival of his

son-in-law had sworn to himself that Traffick should go. Augusta

might remain, if she pleased, for the occurrence; but the Honourable

Septimus should no longer eat and drink as an inhabitant of his

house.

"He'd do his duty by her as a man should do," said Traffick,

determined to ignore the disagreeable subject.

"Very well. There she is."

"But of course he would like to hear something about money."

"Would he?"

"That's only natural."

"You found it so,--did you not? What's the good of giving a girl

money when her husband won't spend it. Perhaps this Captain Batsby

would expect to live at Queen's Gate or Merle Park."

It was impossible to go on enduring this without notice. Mr.

Traffick, however, only frowned and shook his head. It was clear

at last that Sir Thomas intended to be more than rough, and it was

almost imperative upon Mr. Traffick to be rough in return. "I am

endeavouring to do my duty by the family," he said.

"Oh indeed."

"Gertrude has eloped with this man, and the thing is talked about

everywhere. Augusta feels it very much."

"She does, does she?"

"And I have thought it right to ask his intentions."

"He didn't knock you down, or anything of that sort?"

"Knock me down?"

"For interfering. But he hasn't pluck for that. Houston would have

done it immediately. And I should have said he was right. But if you

have got anything to say, you had better say it. When you have done,

then I shall have something to say."

"I've told him that he couldn't expect as much as you would have

given her but for this running away."

"You told him that?"

"Yes; I told him that. Then some sum had to be mentioned. He

suggested a hundred thousand pounds."

"How very modest. Why should he have put up with less than you,

seeing that he has got something of his own?"

"He hasn't my position, Sir. You know that well enough. Now to make a

long and short of it, I suggested sixty."

"Out of your own pocket?"

"Not exactly."

"But out of mine?"

"You're her father, and I suppose you intend to provide for her."

"And you have come here to dictate to me the provision which I am to

make for my own child! That is an amount of impudence which I did not

expect even from you. But suppose that I agree to the terms. Will he,

do you think, consent to have a clause put into the settlement?"

"What clause?"

"Something that shall bind him to keep a house for his own wife's

use, so that he should not take my money and then come and live upon

me afterwards."

"Sir Thomas," said the Member of Parliament, "that is a mode of

expression so uncourteous that I cannot bear it even from you."

"Is there any mode of expression that you cannot bear?"

"If you want me to leave your house, say it at once."

"Why I have been saying it for the last six months! I have been

saying it almost daily since you were married."

"If so you should have spoken more clearly, for I have not understood

you."

"Heavens and earth," ejaculated Sir Thomas.

"Am I to understand that you wish your child to leave your roof

during this inclement weather in her present delicate condition?"

"Are you in a delicate condition?" asked Sir Thomas. To this Mr.

Traffick could condescend to make no reply. "Because, if not, you, at

any rate, had better go,--unless you find the weather too inclement."

"Of course I shall go," said Mr. Traffick. "No consideration on earth

shall induce me to eat another meal under your roof until you shall

have thought good to have expressed regret for what you have said."

"Then it is very long before I shall have to give you another meal."

"And now what shall I say to Captain Batsby?"

"Tell him from me," said Sir Thomas, "that he cannot possibly set

about his work more injudiciously than by making you his ambassador."

Then Mr. Traffick took his departure.

It may be as well to state here that Mr. Traffick kept his threat

religiously,--at any rate, to the end of the Session. He did not eat

another meal during that period under his father-in-law's roof. But

he slept there for the next two or three days until he had suited

himself with lodgings in the neighbourhood of the House. In doing

this, however, he contrived to get in and out without encountering

Sir Thomas. His wife in her delicate condition,--and because of the

inclemency of the weather,--awaited the occurrence at Queen's Gate.

CHAPTER LIX.

TREGOTHNAN.

The writer, in giving a correct chronicle of the doings of the

Tringle family at this time, has to acknowledge that Gertrude, during

the prolonged absence of Captain Batsby at Brussels,--an absence

that was cruelly prolonged for more than a week,--did make another

little effort in another direction. Her father, in his rough way, had

expressed an opinion that she had changed very much for the worse in

transferring her affections from Mr. Houston to Captain Batsby, and

had almost gone so far as to declare that had she been persistent

with her Houston the money difficulty might have been overcome. This

was imprudent,--unless, indeed, he was desirous of bringing back Mr.

Houston into the bosom of the Tringles. It instigated Gertrude to

another attempt,--which, however, she did not make till Captain

Batsby had been away from her for at least four days without writing

a letter. Then it occurred to her that if she had a preference it

certainly was for Frank Houston. No doubt the general desirability of

marriage was her chief actuating motive. Will the world of British

young ladies be much scandalised if I say that such is often an

actuating motive? They would be justly scandalised if I pretended

that many of its members were capable of the speedy transitions which

Miss Tringle was strong enough to endure; but transitions do take

place, and I claim, on behalf of my young lady, that she should be

regarded as more strong-minded and more determined than the general

crowd of young ladies. She had thought herself to be off with the old

love before she was on with the new. Then the "new" had gone away to

Brussels,--or heaven only knows where,--and there seemed to be an

opportunity of renewing matters with the "old." Having perceived the

desirability of matrimony, she simply carried out her purpose with

a determined will. It was with a determined will, but perhaps with

deficient judgment, that she had written as follows:

"Papa has altered his mind altogether. He speaks of you in the

highest terms, and says that had you persevered he would have yielded

about the money. Do try him again. When hearts have been united it is

terrible that they should be dragged asunder." Mr. Traffick had been

quite right in telling his father-in-law that "the thing had been

talked about everywhere." The thing talked about had been Gertrude's

elopement. The daughter of a baronet and a millionaire cannot go off

with the half-brother of another baronet and escape that penalty. The

journey to Ostend was in everybody's mouth, and had surprised Frank

Houston the more because of the recent termination of his own little

affair with the lady. That he should already have re-accommodated

himself with Imogene was intelligible to him, and seemed to admit of

valid excuse before any jury of matrons. It was an old affair, and

the love,--real, true love,--was already existing. He, at any rate,

was going back to the better course,--as the jury of matrons would

have admitted. But Gertrude's new affair had had to be arranged

from the beginning, and shocked him by its celerity. "Already!"

he had said to himself,--"gone off with another man already?"

He felt himself to have been wounded in a tender part, and was

conscious of a feeling that he should like to injure the successful

lover,--blackball him at a club, or do him some other mortal

mischief. When, therefore, he received from the young lady the little

billet above given, he was much surprised. Could it be a hoax? It was

certainly the young lady's handwriting. Was he to be enticed once

again into Lombard Street, in order that the clerks might set upon

him in a body and maltreat him? Was he to be decoyed into Queen's

Gate, and made a sacrifice of by the united force of the housemaids?

Not understanding the celerity of the young lady, he could hardly

believe the billet.

When he received the note of which we have here spoken two months

had elapsed since he had seen Imogene and had declared to her his

intention of facing the difficulties of matrimony in conjunction with

herself as soon as she would be ready to undergo the ceremony with

him. The reader will remember that her brother, Mudbury Docimer, had

written to him with great severity, abusing both him and Imogene for

the folly of their intention. And Houston, as he thought of their

intention, thought to himself that perhaps they were foolish. The

poverty, and the cradles, and the cabbages, were in themselves evils.

But still he encouraged himself to think that there might be an evil

worse even than folly. After that scene with Imogene, in which she

had offered to sacrifice herself altogether, and to be bound to

him, even though they should never be married, on condition that he

should take to himself no other wife, he had quite resolved that it

behoved him not to be exceeded by her in generosity. He had stoutly

repudiated her offer, which he had called a damnable compact. And

then there had been a delightful scene between them, in which it had

been agreed that they should face the cradles and the cabbages with

bold faces. Since that he had never allowed himself to fluctuate in

his purpose. Had Sir Thomas come to him with Gertrude in one hand and

the much-desired Â£120,000 in the other, he would have repudiated the

lot of them. He declared to himself with stern resolution that he

had altogether washed his hands from dirt of that kind. Cabbages

and cradles for ever was the unpronounced cry of triumph with which

he buoyed up his courage. He set himself to work earnestly, if not

altogether steadfastly, to alter the whole tenor of his life. The

champagne and the woodcocks,--or whatever might be the special

delicacies of the season,--he did avoid. For some few days he

absolutely dined upon a cut of mutton at an eating-house, and as he

came forth from the unsavoury doors of the establishment regarded

himself as a hero. Cabbages and cradles for ever! he would say to

himself, as he went away to drink a cup of tea with an old maiden

aunt, who was no less surprised than gratified by his new virtue.

Therefore, when it had at last absolutely come home to him that

the last little note had in truth been written by Gertrude with no

object of revenge, but with the intention of once more alluring

him into the wealth of Lombard Street, he simply put it into his

breastcoat-pocket, and left it there unanswered.

Mudbury Docimer did not satisfy himself with writing the very

uncourteous letter which the reader has seen, but proceeded to do his

utmost to prevent the threatened marriage. "She is old enough to look

after herself," he had said, as though all her future actions must be

governed by her own will. But within ten days of the writing of that

letter he had found it expedient to go down into the country, and

to take his sister with him. As the head of the Docimer family he

possessed a small country-house almost in the extremity of Cornwall;

and thither he went. It was a fraternal effort made altogether on his

sister's behalf, and was so far successful that Imogene was obliged

to accompany him. It was all very well for her to feel that as

she was of age she could do as she pleased. But a young lady is

constrained by the exigencies of society to live with somebody. She

cannot take a lodging by herself, as her brother may do. Therefore,

when Mudbury Docimer went down to Cornwall, Imogene was obliged to

accompany him.

"Is this intended for banishment?" she said to him, when they had

been about a week in the country.

"What do you call banishment? You used to like the country in the

spring." It was now the middle of April.

"So I do, and in summer also. But I like nothing under constraint."

"I am sorry that circumstances should make it imperative upon me to

remain here just at present."

"Why cannot you tell the truth, Mudbury?"

"Have I told you any falsehood?"

"Why do you not say outright that I have been brought down here to be

out of Frank Houston's way?"

"Because Frank Houston is a name which I do not wish to mention to

you again,--at any rate for some time."

"What would you do if he were to show himself here?" she asked.

"Tell him at once that he was not welcome. In other words, I would

not have him here. It is very improbable I should think that he would

come without a direct invitation from me. That invitation he will

never have until I feel satisfied that you and he have changed your

mind again, and that you mean to stick to it."

"I do not think we shall do that."

"Then he shall not come down here; nor, as far as I am able to

arrange it, shall you go up to London."

"Then I am a prisoner?"

"You may put it as you please," said her brother. "I have no power of

detaining you. Whatever influence I have I think it right to use. I

am altogether opposed to this marriage, believing it to be an absurd

infatuation. I think that he is of the same opinion."

"No!" said she, indignantly.

"That I believe to be his feeling," he continued, taking no notice

of her assertion. "He is as perfectly aware as I am that you two are

not adapted to live happily together on an income of a few hundreds

a year. Some time ago it was agreed between you that it was so. You

both were quite of one mind, and I was given to understand that the

engagement was at an end. It was so much at an end that he made

an arrangement for marrying another woman. But your feelings are

stronger than his, and you allowed them to get the better of you.

Then you enticed him back from the purpose on which you had both

decided."

"Enticed!" said she. "I did nothing of the kind!"

"Would he have changed his mind if you had not enticed him?"

"I did nothing of the kind. I offered to remain just as we are."

"That is all very well. Of course he could not accept such an offer.

Thinking as I do, it is my duty to keep you apart as long as I can.

If you contrive to marry him in opposition to my efforts, the misery

of both of you must be on your head. I tell you fairly that I do not

believe he wishes anything of the kind."

"I am quite sure he does," said Imogene.

"Very well. Do you leave him alone; stay down here, and see what will

come of it. I quite agree that such a banishment, as you call it,

is not a happy prospect for you;--but it is happier than that of a

marriage with Frank Houston. Give that up, and then you can go back

to London and begin the world again."

Begin the world again! She knew what that meant. She was to throw

herself into the market, and look for such other husband as

Providence might send her. She had tried that before, and had

convinced herself that Providence could never send her any that could

be acceptable. The one man had taken possession of her, and there

never could be a second. She had not known her own strength,--or her

own weakness as the case might be,--when she had agreed to surrender

the man she loved because there had been an alteration in their

prospects of an income. She had struggled with herself, had attempted

to amuse herself with the world, had told herself that somebody would

come who would banish that image from her thoughts and heart. She had

bade herself to submit to the separation for his welfare. Then she

had endeavoured to quiet herself by declaring to herself that the

man was no hero,--was unworthy of so much thinking. But it had all

been of no avail. Gertrude Tringle had been a festering sore to her.

Frank, whether a hero or only a commonplace man, was,--as she owned

to herself,--hero enough for her. Then came the opening for a renewal

of the engagement. Frank had been candid with her, and had told her

everything. The Tringle money would not be forthcoming on his behalf.

Then,--not resolving to entice him back again,--she had done so.

The word was odious to her, and was rejected with disdain when used

against her by her brother;--but, when alone, she acknowledged to

herself that it was true. She had enticed her lover back again,--to

his great detriment. Yes; she certainly had enticed him back. She

certainly was about to sacrifice him because of her love. "If I could

only die, and there be an end of it!" she exclaimed to herself.

Though Tregothnan Hall, as the Docimers' house was called, was not

open to Frank Houston, there was the post running always. He had

written to her half-a-dozen times since she had been in Cornwall,

and had always spoken of their engagement as an affair at last

irrevocably fixed. She, too, had written little notes, tender and

loving, but still tinged by that tone of despondency which had become

common to her. "As for naming a day," she said once, "suppose we fix

the first of January, ten years hence. Mudbury's opposition will be

worn out by old age, and you will have become thoroughly sick of the

pleasures of London." But joined to this there would be a few jokes,

and then some little word of warmest, most enduring, most trusting

love. "Don't believe me if I say that I am not happy in knowing that

I am altogether your own." Then there would come a simple "I" as

a signature, and after that some further badinage respecting her

"Cerberus," as she called her brother.

But after that word, that odious word, "enticed," there went another

letter up to London of altogether another nature.

"I have changed my mind again," she said,

and have become aware that, though I should die in doing

it,--though we should both die if it were possible,--there

should be an end of everything between you and me. Yes,

Frank; there! I send you back my troth, and demand my own

in return. After all why should not one die;--hang oneself

if it be necessary? To be self-denying is all that is

necessary,--at any rate to a woman. Hanging or lying down

and dying, or lingering on and saying one's prayers and

knitting stockings, is altogether immaterial. I have

sometimes thought Mudbury to be brutal to me, but I have

never known him to be untrue,--or even, as I believe,

mistaken. He sees clearly and knows what will happen. He

tells me that I have enticed you back. I am not true as

he is. So I threw him back the word in his teeth,--though

its truth at the moment was going like a dagger through

my heart. I know myself to have been selfish, unfeeling,

unfeminine, when I induced you to surrender yourself to

a mode of life which will make you miserable. I have

sometimes been proud of myself because I have loved you so

truly; but now I hate myself and despise myself because I

have been incapable of the first effort which love should

make. Love should at any rate be unselfish.

He tells me that you will be miserable and that the misery

will be on my head,--and I believe him. There shall be an

end of it. I want no promise from you. There may, perhaps,

be a time in which Imogene Docimer as a sturdy old maid

shall be respected and serene of mind. As a wife who had

enticed her husband to his misery she would be respected

neither by him nor by herself,--and as for serenity

it would be quite out of the question. I have been

unfortunate. That is all;--but not half so unfortunate as

others that I see around me.

\_Pray\_, \_pray\_, PRAY, take this as final, and thus save

me from renewed trouble and renewed agony.

Now I am yours truly,--

never again will I be affectionate to any one

with true feminine love,

IMOGENE DOCIMER.

Houston when he received the above letter of course had no

alternative but to declare that it could not possibly be regarded

as having any avail. And indeed he had heart enough in his bosom to

be warmed to something like true heat by such words as these. The

cabbages and cradles ran up in his estimation. The small house at

Pau, which in some of his more despondent moments had assumed an

unqualified appearance of domestic discomfort, was now ornamented and

accoutred till it seemed to be a little paradise. The very cabbages

blossomed into roses, and the little babies in the cradles produced

a throb of paternal triumph in his heart. If she were woman enough

to propose to herself such an agony of devotion, could he not be

man enough to demand from her a devotion of a different kind? As to

Mudbury Docimer's truth, he believed in it not at all, but was quite

convinced of the man's brutality. Yes; she should hang herself--but

it should be round his neck. The serenity should be displayed by her

not as an aunt but as a wife and mother. As for enticing, did he

not now,--just in this moment of his manly triumph,--acknowledge to

himself that she had enticed him to his happiness, to his glory, to

his welfare? In this frame of mind he wrote his answer as follows;--

MY DEAREST,

You have no power of changing your mind again. There must

be some limit to vacillations, and that has been reached.

Something must be fixed at last. Something has been fixed

at last, and I most certainly shall not consent to any

further unfixing. What right has Mudbury to pretend to

know my feelings? or, for the matter of that, what right

have you to accept his description of them? I tell you now

that I place my entire happiness in the hope of making

you my wife. I call upon you to ignore all the selfish

declarations as to my own ideas which I have made in times

past. The only right which you could now possibly have

to separate yourself from me would come from your having

ceased to love me. You do not pretend to say that such is

the case; and therefore, with considerable indignation,

but still very civilly, I desire that Mudbury with his

hard-hearted counsels may go to the ----

Enticed! Of course you have enticed me. I suppose that

women do as a rule entice men, either to their advantage

or disadvantage. I will leave it to you to say whether

you believe that such enticement, if it be allowed its

full scope, will lead to one or the other as far as I am

concerned. I never was so happy as when I felt that you

had enticed me back to the hopes of former days.

Now I am yours, as always, and most affectionately,

FRANK HOUSTON.

I shall expect the same word back from you by return of

post scored under as eagerly as those futile "prays."

Imogene when she received this was greatly disturbed,--not knowing

how to carry herself in her great resolve,--or whether indeed that

resolve must not be again abandoned. She had determined, should her

lover's answer be as she had certainly intended it to be when she

wrote her letter, to go at once to her brother and to declare to him

that the danger was at an end, and that he might return to London

without any fear of a relapse on her part. But she could not do so

with such a reply as that she now held in her pocket. If that reply

could, in very truth, be true, then there must be another revulsion,

another change of purpose, another yielding to absolute joy. If it

could be the case that Frank Houston no longer feared the dangers

that he had feared before, if he had in truth reconciled himself to

a state of things which he had once described as simple poverty,

if he really placed his happiness on the continuation of his love,

then,--then, why should she make the sacrifice? Why should she place

such implicit confidence in her brother's infallibility against

error, seeing that by doing so she would certainly shipwreck her own

happiness,--and his too, if his words were to be trusted?

He called upon her to write to him again by return of post. She was

to write to him and unsay those prayers, and comfort him with a

repetition of that dear word which she had declared that she would

never use again with all its true meaning. That was his express order

to her. Should she obey it, or should she not obey it? Should she

vacillate again, or should she leave his last letter unanswered

with stern obduracy? She acknowledged to herself that it was a dear

letter, deserving the best treatment at her hands, giving her lover

credit, probably, for more true honesty than he deserved. What was

the best treatment? Her brother had plainly shown his conviction that

the best treatment would be to leave him without meddling with him

any further. Her sister-in-law, though milder in her language, was,

she feared, of the same opinion. Would it not be better for him not

to be meddled with? Ought not that to be her judgment, looking at the

matter all round?

She did not at any rate obey him at all points, for she left his

letter in her pocket for three or four days, while she considered the

matter backwards and forwards.

CHAPTER LX.

AUNT ROSINA.

During this period of heroism it had been necessary to Houston to

have some confidential friend to whom from time to time he could

speak of his purpose. He could not go on eating slices of boiled

mutton at eating-houses, and drinking dribblets of bad wine out

of little decanters no bigger than the bottles in a cruet stand,

without having some one to encourage him in his efforts. It was a

hard apprenticeship, and, coming as it did rather late in life for

such a beginning, and after much luxurious indulgence, required some

sympathy and consolation. There were Tom Shuttlecock and Lord John

Battledore at the club. Lord John was the man as to whose expulsion

because of his contumacious language so much had been said, but who

lived through that and various other dangers. These had been his

special friends, and to them he had confided everything in regard

to the Tringle marriage. Shuttlecock had ridiculed the very idea of

love, and had told him that everything else was to be thrown to the

dogs in pursuit of a good income. Battledore had reminded him that

there was "a deuced deal of cut-and-come-again in a hundred and

twenty thousand pounds." They had been friends, not always altogether

after his own heart, but friends who had served his purpose when he

was making his raid upon Lombard Street. But they were not men to

whom he could descant on the wholesomeness of cabbages as an article

of daily food, or who would sympathise with the struggling joys of

an embryo father. To their thinking, women were occasionally very

convenient as being the depositaries of some of the accruing wealth

of the world. Frank had been quite worthy of their friendship as

having "spotted" and nearly "run down" for himself a well-laden

city heiress. But now Tom Shuttlecock and Lord John Battledore

were distasteful to him,--as would he be to them. But he found the

confidential friend in his maiden aunt.

Miss Houston was an old lady,--older than her time, as are some

people,--who lived alone in a small house in Green Street. She was

particular in calling it Green Street, Hyde Park. She was very

anxious to have it known that she never occupied it during the months

of August, September, and October,--though it was often the case with

her that she did not in truth expatriate herself for more than six

weeks. She was careful to have a fashionable seat in a fashionable

church. She dearly loved to see her name in the papers when she was

happy enough to be invited to a house whose entertainments were

chronicled. There were a thousand little tricks,--I will not be harsh

enough to call them unworthy,--by which she served Mammon. But she

did not limit her service to the evil spirit. When in her place in

church she sincerely said her prayers. When in London, or out of it,

she gave a modicum of her slender income to the poor. And, though she

liked to see her name in the papers as one of the fashionable world,

she was a great deal too proud of the blood of the Houstons to toady

any one or to ask for any favour. She was a neat, clean, nice-looking

old lady, who understood that if economies were to be made in eating

and drinking they should be effected at her own table and not at that

of the servants who waited upon her. This was the confidential friend

whom Frank trusted in his new career.

It must be explained that Aunt Rosina, as Miss Houston was called,

had been well acquainted with her nephew's earlier engagement,

and had approved of Imogene as his future wife. Then had come the

unexpected collapse in the uncle's affairs, by which Aunt Rosina as

well as others in the family had suffered,--and Frank, much to his

aunt's displeasure, had allowed himself to be separated from the lady

of his love on account of his comparative poverty. She had heard

of Gertrude Tringle and all her money, but from a high standing of

birth and social belongings had despised all the Tringles and all

their money. To her, as a maiden lady, truth in love was everything.

To her, as a well-born lady, good blood was everything. Therefore,

though there had been no quarrel between her and Frank, there had

been a cessation of sympathetic interest, and he had been thrown into

the hands of the Battledores and Shuttlecocks. Now again the old

sympathies were revived, and Frank found it convenient to drink tea

with his aunt when other engagements allowed it.

"I call that an infernal interference," he said to his aunt, showing

her Imogene's letters.

"My dear Frank, you need not curse and swear," said the old lady.

"Infernal is not cursing nor yet swearing." Then Miss Houston, having

liberated her mind by her remonstrance, proceeded to read the letter.

"I call that abominable," said Frank, alluding of course to the

allusions made in the letter to Mudbury Docimer.

"It is a beautiful letter;--just what I should have expected from

Imogene. My dear, I will tell you what I propose. Remain as you are

both of you for five years."

"Five years. That's sheer nonsense."

"Five years, my dear, will run by like a dream. Five years to look

back upon is as nothing."

"But these five years are five years to be looked forward to. It is

out of the question."

"But you say that you could not live as a married man."

"Live! I suppose we could live." Then he thought of the cabbages and

the cottage at Pau. "There would be seven hundred a-year I suppose."

"Couldn't you do something, Frank?"

"What, to earn money? No; I don't think I could. If I attempted to

break stones I shouldn't break enough to pay for the hammers."

"Couldn't you write a book?"

"That would be worse than the stones. I sometimes thought I could

paint a picture,--but, if I did, nobody would buy it. As to making

money that is hopeless. I could save some, by leaving off gloves and

allowing myself only three clean shirts a-week."

"That would be dreadful, Frank."

"It would be dreadful, but it is quite clear that I must do

something. An effort has to be made." This he said with a voice the

tone of which was almost heroic. Then they discussed the matter at

great length, in doing which Aunt Rosina thoroughly encouraged him

in his heroism. That idea of remaining unmarried for another short

period of five years was allowed to go by the board, and when they

parted on that night it was understood that steps were to be taken to

bring about a marriage as speedily as possible.

"Perhaps I can do a little to help," said Aunt Rosina, in a faint

whisper as Frank left the room.

Frank Houston, when he showed Imogene's letter to his aunt, had

already answered it. Then he waited a day or two, not very patiently,

for a further rejoinder from Imogene,--in which she of course was

to unsay all that she had said before. But when, after four or five

days, no rejoinder had come, and his fervour had been increased by

his expectation, then he told his aunt that he should immediately

take some serious step. The more ardent he was the better his aunt

loved him. Could he have gone down and carried off his bride, and

married her at once, in total disregard of the usual wedding-cake and

St.-George's-Hanover-Square ceremonies to which the Houston family

had always been accustomed, she could have found it in her heart to

forgive him. "Do not be rash, Frank," she said. He merely shook his

head, and as he again left her declared that he was not going to be

driven this way or that by such a fellow as Mudbury Docimer.

"As I live, there's Frank coming through the gate." This was said by

Imogene to her sister-in-law, as they were walking up and down the

road which led from the lodge to the Tregothnan house. The two ladies

were at that moment discussing Imogene's affairs. No rejoinder had

as yet been made to Frank's last letter, which, to Imogene's feeling,

was the most charming epistle which had ever come from the hands of

a true lover. There had been passion and sincerity in every word of

it;--even when he had been a little too strong in his language as he

denounced the hard-hearted counsels of her brother. But yet she had

not responded to all this sincerity, nor had she as yet withdrawn

the resolution which she had herself declared. Mrs. Docimer was of

opinion that that resolution should not be withdrawn, and had striven

to explain that the circumstances were now the same as when, after

full consideration, they had determined that the engagement should

come to an end. At this very moment she was speaking words of wisdom

to this effect, and as she did so Frank appeared, walking up from the

gate.

"What will Mudbury say?" was Mrs. Docimer's first ejaculation.

But Imogene, before she had considered how this danger might be

encountered, rushed forward and gave herself up,--I fear we must

confess,--into the arms of her lover. After that it was felt at once

that she had withdrawn all her last resolution and had vacillated

again. There was no ground left even for an argument now that she had

submitted herself to be embraced. Frank's words of affection need not

here be repeated, but they were of a nature to leave no doubt on the

minds of either of the ladies.

Mudbury had declared that he would not receive Houston in his

house as his sister's lover, and had expressed his opinion that

even Houston would not have the face to show his face there. But

Houston had come, and something must be done with him. It was soon

ascertained that he had walked over from Penzance, which was but

two miles off, and had left his portmanteau behind him. "I wouldn't

bring anything," said he. "Mudbury would find it easier to maltreat

my things than myself. It would look so foolish to tell the man with

a fly to carry them back at once. Is he in the house?"

"He is about the place," said Mrs. Docimer, almost trembling.

"Is he very fierce against me?"

"He thinks it had better be all over."

"I am of a different way of thinking, you see. I cannot acknowledge

that he has any right to dictate to Imogene."

"Nor can I," said Imogene.

"Of course he can turn me out."

"If he does I shall go with you," said Imogene.

"We have made up our minds to it," said Frank, "and he had better let

us do as we please. He can make himself disagreeable, of course; but

he has got no power to prevent us." Now they had reached the house,

and Frank was of course allowed to enter. Had he not entered neither

would Imogene, who was so much taken by this further instance of

her lover's ardour that she was determined now to be led by him

in everything. His explanation of that word "enticed" had been so

thoroughly satisfactory to her that she was no longer in the least

angry with herself because she had enticed him. She had quite come to

see that it is the duty of a young woman to entice a young man.

Frank and Imogene were soon left alone, not from any kindness of

feeling on the part of Mrs. Docimer, but because the wife felt it

necessary to find her husband. "Oh, Mudbury, who do you think has

come? He is here!"

"Houston!"

"Yes; Frank Houston!"

"In the house?"

"He is in the house. But he hasn't brought anything. He doesn't mean

to stay."

"What does that matter? He shall not be asked even to dine here."

"If he is turned out she will go with him! If she says so she will do

it. You cannot prevent her. That's what would come of it if she were

to insist on going up to London with him."

"He is a scoundrel!"

"No; Mudbury;--not a scoundrel. You cannot call him a scoundrel.

There is something firm about him; isn't there?"

"To come to my house when I told him not?"

"But he does really love her."

"Bother!"

"At any rate there they are in the breakfast-parlour, and something

must be done. I couldn't tell him not to come in. And she wouldn't

have come without him. There will be enough for them to live upon.

Don't you think you'd better?" Docimer, as he returned to the house,

declared that he "did not think he'd better." But he had to confess

to himself that, whether it were better or whether it were worse, he

could do very little to prevent it.

The greeting of the two men was anything but pleasant. "What I have

got to say I would rather say outside," said Docimer.

"Certainly," said Frank. "I suppose I'm to be allowed to return?"

"If he does not,"--said Imogene, who at her brother's request had

left the room, but still stood at the open door,--"if he does not

I shall go to him in Penzance. You will hardly attempt to keep me a

prisoner."

"Who says that he is not to return? I think that you are two idiots,

but I am quite aware that I cannot prevent you from being married if

you are both determined." Then he led the way out through the hall,

and Frank followed him. "I cannot understand that any man should be

so fickle," he said, when they were both out on the walk together.

"Constant, I should suppose you mean."

"I said fickle, and I meant it. It was at your own suggestion that

you and Imogene were to be separated."

"No doubt; it was at my suggestion, and with her consent. But you see

that we have changed our minds."

"And will change them again."

"We are steady enough in our purpose, now, at any rate. You hear

what she says. If I came down here to persuade her to alter her

purpose,--to talk her into doing something of which you disapproved,

and as to which she agreed with you,--then you might do something by

quarreling with me. But what's the use of it, when she and I are of

one mind? You know that you cannot talk her over."

"Where do you mean to live?"

"I'll tell you all about that if you'll allow me to send into

Penzance for my things. I cannot discuss matters with you if you

proclaim yourself to be my enemy. You say we are both idiots."

"I do."

"Very well. Then you had better put up with two idiots. You can't

cure their idiocy. Nor have you any authority to prevent them from

exhibiting it." The argument was efficacious though the idiocy was

acknowledged. The portmanteau was sent for, and before the evening

was over Frank had again been received at Tregothnan as Imogene's

accepted lover.

Then Frank had his story to tell and his new proposition to make.

Aunt Rosina had offered to join her means with his. The house in

Green Street, no doubt, was small, but room it was thought could be

made, at any rate till the necessity had come for various cribs and

various cradles. "I cannot imagine that you will endure to live with

Aunt Rosina," said the brother.

"Why on earth should I object to Aunt Rosina?" said Imogene. "She and

I have always been friends." In her present mood she would hardly

have objected to live with any old woman, however objectionable. "And

we shall be able to have a small cottage somewhere," said Frank. "She

will keep the house in London, and we shall keep the cottage."

"And what on earth will you do with yourself?"

"I have thought of that too," said Frank. "I shall take to painting

pictures in earnest;--portraits probably. I don't see why I shouldn't

do as well as anybody else."

"That head of yours of old Mrs. Jones," said Imogene, "was a great

deal better than dozens of things one sees every year in the

Academy."

"Bother!" exclaimed Docimer.

"I don't see why he should not succeed, if he really will work hard,"

said Mrs. Docimer.

"Bother!"

"Why should it be bother?" said Frank, put upon his mettle. "Ever so

many fellows have begun and have got on, older than I am. And, even

if I don't earn anything, I've got an employment."

"And is the painting-room to be in Green Street also?" asked Docimer.

"Just at present I shall begin by copying things at the National

Gallery," explained Houston, who was not as yet prepared with his

answer to that difficulty as to a studio in the little house in Green

Street.

When the matter had been carried as far as this it was manifest

enough that anything like opposition to Imogene's marriage was to be

withdrawn. Houston remained at Tregothnan for a couple of days and

then returned to London. A week afterwards the Docimers followed

him, and early in the following June the two lovers, after all their

troubles and many vacillations, were made one at St. George's church,

to the great delight of Aunt Rosina. It cannot be said that the

affair gave equal satisfaction to all the bridegroom's friends, as

may be learnt from the following narration of two conversations which

took place in London very shortly after the wedding.

"Fancy after all that fellow Houston going and marrying such a

girl as Imogene Docimer, without a single blessed shilling to keep

themselves alive." This was said in the smoking-room of Houston's

club by Lord John Battledore to Tom Shuttlecock; but it was said

quite aloud, so that Houston's various acquaintances might be enabled

to offer their remarks on so interesting a subject; and to express

their pity for the poor object of their commiseration.

"It's the most infernal piece of folly I ever heard in my life," said

Shuttlecock. "There was that Tringle girl with two hundred thousand

pounds to be had just for the taking;--Traffick's wife's sister, you

know."

"There was something wrong about that," said another. "Benjamin

Batsby, that stupid fellow who used to be in the twentieth, ran off

with her just when everything had been settled between Houston and

old Tringle."

"Not a bit of it," said Battledore. "Tringle had quarrelled with

Houston before that. Batsby did go with her, but the governor

wouldn't come down with the money. Then the girl was brought back

and there was no marriage." Upon that the condition of poor Gertrude

in reference to her lovers and her fortune was discussed by those

present with great warmth; but they all agreed that Houston had

proved himself to be a bigger fool than any of them had expected.

"By George, he's going to set up for painting portraits," said Lord

John, with great disgust.

In Queen's Gate the matter was discussed by the ladies there very

much in the same spirit. At this time Gertrude was engaged to Captain

Batsby, if not with the full approbation at any rate with the consent

both of her father and mother, and therefore she could speak of

Frank Houston and his bride, if with disdain, still without wounded

feelings. "Here it is in the papers, Francis Houston and Imogene

Docimer," said Mrs. Traffick.

"So she has really caught him at last!" said Gertrude.

"There was not much to catch," rejoined Mrs. Traffick. "I doubt

whether they have got Â£500 a year between them."

"It does seem so very sudden," said Lady Tringle.

"Sudden!" said Gertrude. "They have been about it for the last five

years. Of course he has tried to wriggle out of it all through. I am

glad that she has succeeded at last, if only because he deserves it."

"I wonder where they'll find a place to live in," said Augusta. This

took place in the bedroom which Mrs. Traffick still occupied in

Queen's Gate, when she had been just a month a mother.

Thus, with the kind assistance of Aunt Rosina, Frank Houston and

Imogene Docimer were married at last, and the chronicler hereby

expresses a hope that it may not be long before Frank may see a

picture of his own hanging on the walls of the Academy, and that he

may live to be afraid of the coming of no baby.

CHAPTER LXI.

TOM TRINGLE GOES UPON HIS TRAVELS.

We must again go back and pick up our threads to April, having rushed

forward to be present at the wedding of Frank Houston and Imogene

Docimer, which did not take place till near Midsummer. This we must

do at once in regard to Tom Tringle, who, if the matter be looked at

aright, should be regarded as the hero of this little history. Ayala

indeed, who is no doubt the real heroine among so many young ladies

who have been more or less heroic, did not find in him the angel of

whom she had dreamed, and whose personal appearance on earth was

necessary to her happiness. But he had been able very clearly to pick

out an angel for himself, and, though he had failed in his attempts

to take the angel home with him, had been constant in his endeavours

as long as there remained to him a chance of success. He had shown

himself to be foolish, vulgar, and ignorant. He had given way to

Bolivian champagne and Faddle intimacies. He had been silly enough

to think that he could bribe his Ayala with diamonds for herself,

and charm her with cheaper jewelry on his own person. He had thought

to soar high by challenging his rival to a duel, and had then been

tempted by pot courage to strike him in the streets. A very vulgar

and foolish young man! But a young man capable of a persistent

passion! Young men not foolish and not vulgar are, perhaps, common

enough. But the young men of constant heart and capable of such

persistency as Tom's are not to be found every day walking about the

streets of the metropolis. Jonathan Stubbs was constant, too; but it

may be doubted whether the Colonel ever really despaired. The merit

is to despair and yet to be constant. When a man has reason to be

assured that a young lady is very fond of him, he may always hope

that love will follow,--unless indeed the love which he seeks

has been already given away elsewhere. Moreover, Stubbs had many

substantial supports at his back; the relationship of the Marchesa,

the friendship of Lady Albury, the comforts of Stalham,--and not

least, if last, the capabilities and prowess of Croppy. Then, too,

he was neither vulgar nor foolish nor ignorant. Tom Tringle had

everything against him,--everything that would weigh with Ayala; and

yet he fought his battle out to the last gasp. Therefore, I desire my

hearers to regard Tom Tringle as the hero of the transactions with

which they have been concerned, and to throw their old shoes after

him as he starts away upon his grand tour.

"Tom, my boy, you have to go, you know, in four days," said his

father to him. At this time Tom had as yet given no positive consent

as to his departure. He had sunk into a low state of moaning and

groaning, in which he refused even to accede to the doctrine of the

expediency of a manly bearing. "What's the good of telling a lie

about it?" he would say to his mother. "What's the good of manliness

when a fellow would rather be drowned?" He had left his bed indeed,

and had once or twice sauntered out of the house. He had been

instigated by his sister to go down to his club, under the idea

that by such an effort he would shake off the despondency which

overwhelmed him. But he had failed in the attempts, and had walked by

the doors of the Mountaineers, finding himself unable to face the

hall-porter. But still the preparations for his departure were going

on. It was presumed that he was to leave London for Liverpool on the

Friday, and his father had now visited him in his own room on the

Tuesday evening with the intention of extorting from him his final

consent. Sir Thomas had on that morning expressed himself very freely

to his son-in-law Mr. Traffick, and on returning home had been glad

to find that his words had been of avail, at any rate as regarded the

dinner-hour. He was tender-hearted towards his son, and disposed to

tempt him rather than threaten him into obedience.

"I haven't ever said I would go," replied Tom.

"But you must, you know. Everything has been packed up, and I want to

make arrangements with you about money. I have got a cabin for you to

yourself, and Captain Merry says that you will have a very pleasant

passage. The equinoxes are over."

"I don't care about the equinoxes," said Tom. "I should like bad

weather if I am to go."

"Perhaps you may have a touch of that, too."

"If the ship could be dashed against a rock I should prefer it!"

exclaimed Tom.

"That's nonsense. The Cunard ships never are dashed against rocks.

By the time you've been three days at sea you'll be as hungry as a

hunter. Now, Tom, how about money?"

"I don't care about money," said Tom.

"Don't you? Then you're very unlike anybody else that I meet. I think

I had better give you power to draw at New York, San Francisco,

Yokohama, Pekin, and Calcutta."

"Am I to go to Pekin?" asked Tom, with renewed melancholy.

"Well, yes;--I think so. You had better see what the various houses

are doing in China. And then from Calcutta you can go up the country.

By that time I dare say we shall have possession of Cabul. With such

a government as we have now, thank God! the Russians will have been

turned pretty nearly out of Asia by this time next year."\*

[\*It has to be stated that this story was written in 1878.]

"Am I to be away more than a year?"

"If I were you," said the father, glad to catch the glimmer of assent

which was hereby implied,--"if I were you I would do it thoroughly

whilst I was about it. Had I seen so much when I was young I should

have been a better man of business."

"It's all the same to me," said Tom. "Say ten years, if you like it!

Say twenty! I shan't ever want to come back again. Where am I to go

after Cabul?"

"I didn't exactly fix it that you should go to Cabul. Of course you

will write home and give me your own opinion as you travel on. You

will stay two or three months probably in the States."

"Am I to go to Niagara?" he asked.

"Of course you will, if you wish it. The Falls of Niagara, I am told,

are very wonderful."

"If a man is to drown himself," said Tom, "it's the sort of place to

do it effectually."

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed his father. "Do you speak to me in that way when

I am doing everything in my power to help you in your trouble?"

"You cannot help me," said Tom.

"Circumstances will. Time will do it. Employment will do it. A sense

of your dignity as a man will do it, when you find yourself amongst

others who know nothing of what you have suffered. You revel in your

grief now because those around you know that you have failed. All

that will be changed when you are with strangers. You should not talk

to your father of drowning yourself!"

"That was wrong. I know it was wrong," said Tom, humbly. "I won't do

it if I can help it,--but perhaps I had better not go there. And how

long ought I to stay at Yokohama? Perhaps you had better put it all

down on a bit of paper." Then Sir Thomas endeavoured to explain to

him that all that he said now was in the way of advice. That it would

be in truth left to himself to go almost where he liked, and to stay

at each place almost as long as he liked;--that he would be his own

master, and that within some broad and undefined limits he would have

as much money as he pleased to spend. Surely no preparations for a

young man's tour were ever made with more alluring circumstances! But

Tom could not be tempted into any expression of satisfaction.

This, however, Sir Thomas did gain,--that before he left his son's

room it was definitely settled,--that Tom should take his departure

on the Friday, going down to Liverpool by an afternoon train on that

day. "I tell you what," said Sir Thomas; "I'll go down with you, see

you on board the ship, and introduce you to Captain Merry. I shall be

glad of an opportunity of paying a visit to Liverpool." And so the

question of Tom's departure was settled.

On the Wednesday and Thursday he seemed to take some interest in

his bags and portmanteaus, and began himself to look after those

assuagements of the toils of travel which are generally dear to young

men. He interested himself in a fur coat, in a well-arranged despatch

box, and in a very neat leathern case which was intended to hold two

brandy flasks. He consented to be told of the number of his shirts,

and absolutely expressed an opinion that he should want another pair

of dress-boots. When this occurred every female bosom in the house,

from Lady Tringle's down to the kitchenmaid's, rejoiced at the signs

of recovery which evinced themselves. But neither Lady Tringle nor

the kitchenmaid, nor did any of the intermediate female bosoms, know

how he employed himself when he left the house on that Thursday

afternoon. He walked across the Park, and, calling at Kingsbury

Crescent, left a note addressed to his aunt. It was as follows:--"I

start to-morrow afternoon,--I hardly know whither. It may be for

years or it may be for ever. I should wish to say a word to Ayala

before I go. Will she see me if I come at twelve o'clock exactly

to-morrow morning? I will call for an answer in half-an-hour. T. T.,

junior. Of course I am aware that Ayala is to become the bride of

Colonel Jonathan Stubbs." In half-an-hour he returned, and got his

answer. "Ayala will be glad to have an opportunity of saying good-bye

to you to-morrow morning."

From this it will be seen that Ayala had at that time returned from

Stalham to Kingsbury Crescent. She had come back joyful in heart,

thoroughly triumphant as to her angel, with everything in the world

sweet and happy before her,--desirous if possible to work her fingers

off in mending the family linen, if only she could do something for

somebody in return for all the joy that the world was giving her.

When she was told that Tom wished to see her for the last time,--for

the last time at any rate before her marriage,--she assented at once.

"I think you should see him as he asks it," said her aunt.

"Poor Tom! Of course I will see him." And so the note was written

which Tom received when he called the second time at the door.

At half-past eleven he skulked out of the house in Queen's Gate,

anxious to avoid his mother and sisters, who were on their side

anxious to devote every remaining minute of the time to his comfort

and welfare. I am afraid it must be acknowledged that he went with

all his jewelry. It could do no good. At last he was aware of that.

But still he thought that she would like him better with his jewelry

than without it. Stubbs wore no gems, not even a ring, and Ayala when

she saw her cousin enter the room could only assure herself that the

male angels certainly were never be-jewelled. She was alone in the

drawing-room, Mrs. Dosett having arranged that at the expiration of

ten minutes, which were to be allowed to Tom for his private adieux,

she would come down to say good-bye to her nephew. "Ayala!" said Tom.

"So you are going away,--for a very long journey, Tom."

"Yes, Ayala; for a very long journey; to Pekin and Cabul, if I live

through, to get to those sort of places."

"I hope you will live through, Tom."

"Thank you, Ayala. Thank you. I daresay I shall. They tell me I shall

get over it. I don't feel like getting over it now."

"You'll find some beautiful young lady at Pekin, perhaps."

"Beauty will never have any effect upon me again, Ayala. Beauty

indeed! Think what I have suffered from beauty! From the first moment

in which you came down to Glenbogie I have been a victim to it. It

has destroyed me,--destroyed me!"

"I am sure you will come back quite well," said Ayala, hardly knowing

how to answer the last appeal.

"Perhaps I may. If I can only get my heart to turn to stone, then I

shall. I don't know why I should have been made to care so much about

it. Other people don't."

"And now we must say, Good-bye, I suppose."

"Oh, yes;--good-bye! I did want to say one or two words if you ain't

in a hurry. Of course you'll be his bride now."

"I hope so," said Ayala.

"I take that for granted. Of course I hate him."

"Oh, Tom; you shan't say that."

"It's human nature! I can tell a lie if you want it. I'd do anything

for you. But you may tell him this: I'm very sorry I struck him."

"He knows that, Tom. He has said so to me."

"He behaved well to me,--very well,--as he always does to everybody."

"Now, Tom, that is good of you. I do like you so much for saying

that."

"But I hate him!"

"No!"

"The evil spirits always hate the good ones. I am conscious of an

evil spirit within my bosom. It is because my spirit is evil that you

would not love me. He is good, and you love him."

"Yes; I do," said Ayala.

"And now we will change the conversation. Ayala, I have got a little

present which you must take from me."

"Oh, no!" said Ayala, thinking of the diamond necklace.

"It's only a little thing,--and I hope you will." Then he brought out

from his pocket a small brooch which he had selected from his own

stock of jewelry for the occasion. "We are cousins, you know."

"Yes, we are cousins," said Ayala, accepting the brooch, but still

accepting it unwillingly.

"He must be very disdainful if he would object to such a little thing

as this," said Tom, referring to the Colonel.

"He is not at all disdainful. He will not object in the least. I am

sure of that, Tom. I will take it then, and I will wear it sometimes

as a memento that we have parted like friends,--as cousins should

do."

"Yes, as friends," said Tom, who thought that even that word was

softer to his ear than cousins. Then he took her by the hand and

looked into her face wistfully, thinking what might be the effect

if for the last and for the first time he should snatch a kiss. Had

he done so I think she would have let it pass without rebuke under

the guise of cousinship. It would have been very disagreeable;--but

then he was going away for so long a time, for so many miles! But at

the moment Mrs. Dosett came in, and Ayala was saved. "Good-bye," he

said; "good-bye," and without waiting to take the hand which his aunt

offered him he hurried out of the room, out of the house, and back

across the Gardens to Queen's Gate.

At Queen's Gate there was an early dinner, at three o'clock, at which

Sir Thomas did not appear, as he had arranged to come out of the

city and meet his son at the railway station. There were, therefore,

sitting at the board for the last time the mother and the two sisters

with the intending traveller. "Oh, Tom," said Lady Tringle, as

soon as the servant had left them together, "I do so hope you will

recover."

"Of course he will recover," said Augusta.

"Why shouldn't he recover?" asked Gertrude. "It's all in a person's

mind. If he'd only make up his mind not to think about her the thing

would be done, and there would be nothing the matter with him."

"There are twenty others, ever so much better than Ayala, would have

him to-morrow," said his mother.

"And be glad to catch him," said Gertrude. "He's not like one of

those who haven't got anything to make a wife comfortable with."

"As for Ayala," said Augusta, "she didn't deserve such good luck.

I am told that that Colonel Stubbs can't afford to keep any kind of

carriage for her. But then, to be sure, she has never been used to a

carriage."

"Oh, Tom, do look up," said his mother, "and say that you will try to

be happy."

"He'll be all right in New York," said Gertrude. "There's no place in

the world, they say, where the girls put themselves forward so much,

and make things so pleasant for the young men."

"He will soon find some one there," said Augusta, "with a deal more

to say for herself than Ayala, and a great deal better-looking."

"I hope he will find some one who will really love him," said his

mother.

Tom sat silent while he listened to all this encouragement, turning

his face from one speaker to the other. It was continued, with many

other similar promises of coming happiness, and assurances that

he had been a gainer in losing all that he lost, when he suddenly

turned sharply upon them, and strongly expressed his feelings to his

sisters. "I don't believe that either of you know anything about it,"

he said.

"Don't know anything about what?" said Augusta, who as a lady who

had been married over twelve months, and was soon about to become a

mother, felt that she certainly did know all about it.

"Why don't we know as well as you?" asked Gertrude, who had also had

her experiences.

"I don't believe you do know anything about it;--that's all," said

Tom. "And now there's the cab. Good-bye, mother! Good-bye, Augusta.

I hope you'll be all right." This alluded to the baby. "Good-bye,

Gertrude. I hope you'll get all right too some day." This alluded to

Gertrude's two lovers. Then he left them, and as he got into his cab

declared to himself that neither of them had ever, or would ever,

know anything of that special trouble which had so nearly overwhelmed

himself.

"Upon my word, Tom," said his father, walking about the vessel with

him, "I wish I were going to New York myself with you;--it all looks

so comfortable."

"Yes," said Tom, "it's very nice."

"You'll enjoy yourself amazingly. There is that Mrs. Thompson has two

as pretty daughters with her as ever a man wished to see." Tom shook

his head. "And you're fond of smoking. Did you see the smoking-room?

They've got everything on board these ships now. Upon my word I envy

you the voyage."

"It's as good as anything else, I daresay," said Tom. "Perhaps it's

better than London."

Then his father, who had been speaking aloud to him, whispered a word

in his ear. "Shake yourself, Tom;--shake yourself, and get over it."

"I am trying," said Tom.

"Love is a very good thing, Tom, when a man can enjoy it, and make

himself warm with it, and protect himself by it from selfishness and

hardness of heart. But when it knocks a man's courage out of him, and

makes him unfit for work, and leaves him to bemoan himself, there's

nothing good in it. It's as bad as drink. Don't you know that I am

doing the best I can for you, to make a man of you?"

"I suppose so."

"Then shake yourself, as I call it. It is to be done, if you set

about it in earnest. Now, God bless you, my boy." Then Sir Thomas

got into his boat, and left his son to go upon his travels and get

himself cured by a change of scene.

I have no doubt that Tom was cured, if not before he reached New

York, at any rate before he left that interesting city;--so that when

he reached Niagara, which he did do in company with Mrs. Thompson and

her charming daughters, he entertained no idea of throwing himself

down the Falls. We cannot follow him on that prolonged tour to Japan

and China, and thence to Calcutta and Bombay. I fancy that he did

not go on to Cabul, as before that time the Ministry in England was

unfortunately changed, and the Russians had not as yet been expelled

from Asia;--but I have little doubt that he obtained a great deal of

very useful mercantile information, and that he will live to have

a comfortable wife and a large family, and become in the course of

years the senior partner in the great house of Travers and Treason.

Let us, who have soft hearts, now throw our old shoes after him.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW VERY MUCH HE LOVED HER.

We have seen how Mr. Traffick was finally turned out of his

father-in-law's house;--or, rather, not quite finally when we last

saw him, as he continued to sleep at Queen's Gate for two or three

nights after that, until he had found shelter for his head. This he

did without encountering Sir Thomas, Sir Thomas pretending the while

to believe that he was gone; and then in very truth his last pair

of boots was removed. But his wife remained, awaiting the great

occurrence with all the paternal comforts around her, Mr. Traffick

having been quite right in surmising that the father would not expose

his daughter in her delicate condition to the inclemencies of the

weather.

But this no more than natural attention on the part of the father and

grandfather to the needs of his own daughter and grandchild did not

in the least mitigate in the bosom of the Member of Parliament the

wrath which he felt at his own expulsion. It was not, as he said to

himself, the fact that he was expelled, but the coarseness of the

language used. "The truth is," he said to a friend in the House,

"that, though it was arranged I should remain there till after my

wife's confinement, I could not bear his language." It will probably

be acknowledged that the language was of a nature not to be borne.

When, therefore, Captain Batsby went down to the House on the day

of Tom's departure to see his counsellor he found Mr. Traffick full

rather of anger than of counsel. "Oh, yes," said the Member, walking

with the Captain up and down some of the lobbies, "I spoke to him,

and told him my mind very freely. When I say I'll do a thing, I

always do it. And as for Tringle, nobody knows him better than I. It

does not do to be afraid of him. There is a little bit of the cur

about him."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't like it. The truth is--. You know I don't mind speaking to

you openly."

"Oh, no," said Batsby.

"He thinks he ought to do as well with the second girl as he has

done with the first." Captain Batsby at this opened his eyes, but

he said nothing. Having a good income of his own, he thought much

of it. Not being the younger son of a lord, and not being a Member

of Parliament, he thought less of the advantages of those high

privileges. It did not suit him, however, to argue the question at

the present moment. "He is proud of his connection with our family,

and looks perhaps even more than he ought to do to a seat in the

House."

"I could get in myself if I cared for it," said Batsby.

"Very likely. It is more difficult than ever to find a seat just now.

A family connection of course does help one. I had to trust to that a

good deal before I was known myself."

"But what did Sir Thomas say?"

"He made himself uncommonly disagreeable;--I can tell you that. He

couldn't very well abuse me, but he wasn't very particular in what he

said about you. Of course he was cut up about the elopement. We all

felt it. Augusta was very much hurt. In her precarious state it was

so likely to do a mischief."

"It can't be undone now."

"No;--it can't be undone. But it makes one feel that you can't make

a demand for money as though you set about it in the other way. When

I made up my mind to marry I stated what I thought I had a right

to demand, and I got it. He knew very well that I shouldn't take a

shilling less. It does make a difference when he knows very well that

you've got to marry the girl whether with or without money."

"I haven't got to marry the girl at all."

"Haven't you? I rather think you have, old fellow. It is generally

considered that when a gentleman has gone off with a girl he means to

marry her."

"Not if the father comes after her and brings her back."

"And when he has gone afterwards to the family house and proposed

himself again in the mother's presence." In all this Mr. Traffick

received an unfair advantage from the communications which were made

to him by his wife. "Of course you must marry her. Sir Thomas knows

that, and, knowing it, why should he be flush with his money? I never

allowed myself to say a single word they could use against me till

the ready-money-down had been all settled."

"What was it he did say?" Batsby was thoroughly sick of hearing his

counsellor tell so many things as to his own prudence and his own

success, and asked the question in an angry tone.

"He said that he would not consider the question of money at all till

the marriage had been solemnised. Of course he stands on his right.

Why shouldn't he? But, rough as he is, he isn't stingy. Give him his

due. He isn't stingy. The money's there all right; and the girl is

his own child. You'll have to wait his time;--that's all."

"And have nothing to begin with?"

"That'll be about it, I think. But what does it matter, Batsby? You

are always talking about your income."

"No, I aint; not half so much as you do of your seat in

Parliament,--which everybody says you are likely to lose at the next

election." Then, of course, there was a quarrel. Mr. Traffick took

his offended dignity back to the House,--almost doubting whether it

might not be his duty to bring Captain Batsby to the bar for contempt

of privilege; and the Captain took himself off in thorough disgust.

Nevertheless there was the fact that he had engaged himself to the

young lady a second time. He had run away with her with the object

of marrying her, and had then, according to his own theory in such

matters,--been relieved from his responsibility by the appearance of

the father and the re-abduction of the young lady. As the young lady

had been taken away from him it was to be supposed that the intended

marriage was negatived by a proper authority. When starting for

Brussels he was a free man; and had he been wise he would have

remained there, or at some equally safe distance from the lady's

charms. Then, from a distance, he might have made his demand for

money, and the elopement would have operated in his favour rather

than otherwise. But he had come back, and had foolishly allowed

himself to be persuaded to show himself at Queen's Gate. He had

obeyed Traffick's advice, and now Traffick had simply thrown him over

and quarrelled with him. He had too promised, in the presence both of

the mother and the married sister, that he would marry the young lady

without any regard to money. He felt it all and was very angry with

himself, consoling himself as best he might with the reflection that

Sir Thomas's money was certainly safe, and that Sir Thomas himself

was a liberal man. In his present condition it would be well for him,

he thought, to remain inactive and see what circumstances would do

for him.

But circumstances very quickly became active. On his return to his

lodgings, after leaving Mr. Traffick, he found a note from Queen's

Gate. "Dearest Ben,--Mamma wants you to come and lunch to-morrow.

Papa has taken poor Tom down to Liverpool, and won't be back till

dinner-time.--G." He did not do as he was bid, alleging some

engagement of business. But the persecution was continued in such

a manner as to show him that all opposition on his part would be

hopeless unless he were to proceed on some tour as prolonged as that

of his future brother-in-law. "Come and walk at three o'clock in

Kensington Gardens to-morrow." This was written on the Saturday after

his note had been received. What use would there be in continuing a

vain fight? He was in their hands, and the more gracefully he yielded

the more probable it would be that the father would evince his

generosity at an early date. He therefore met his lady-love on the

steps of the Albert Memorial, whither she had managed to take herself

all alone from the door of the family mansion.

"Ben," she said, as she greeted him, "why did you not come for me to

the house?"

"I thought you would like it best."

"Why should I like it best? Of course mamma knows all about it.

Augusta would have come with me just to see me here, only that she

cannot walk out just at present." Then he said something to her about

the Monument, expressed his admiration of the Prince's back, abused

the east wind, remarked that the buds were coming on some of the

trees, and suggested that the broad road along by the Round Pond

would be drier than the little paths. It was not interesting, as

Gertrude felt; but she had not expected him to be interesting. The

interest she knew must be contributed by herself. "Ben," she said,

"I was so happy to hear what you said to mamma the other day."

"What did I say?"

"Why, of course, that, as papa has given his consent, our engagement

is to go on just as if--"

"Just as if what?"

"As if we had found the clergyman at Ostend."

"If we had done that we should have been married now," suggested

Batsby.

"Exactly. And it's almost as good as being married;--isn't it?"

"I suppose it comes to the same thing."

"Hadn't you better go to papa again and have it all finished?"

"He makes himself so very unpleasant."

"That's only because he wants to punish us for running away. I

suppose it was wrong. I shall never be sorry, because it made me know

how very, very much you loved me. Didn't it make you feel how very,

very dearly I loved you,--to trust myself all alone with you in that

way?"

"Oh, yes; of course."

"And papa can't bite you, you know. You go to him, and tell him that

you hope to be received in the house as my,--my future husband, you

know."

"Shall I say nothing else?"

"You mean about the day?"

"I was meaning about money."

"I don't think I would. He is very generous, but he does not like to

be asked. When Augusta was to be married he arranged all that himself

after they were engaged."

"But Traffick demanded a certain sum?" This question Captain Batsby

asked with considerable surprise, remembering what Mr. Traffick had

said to him in reference to Augusta's fortune.

"Not at all. Septimus knew nothing about it till after the

engagement. He was only too glad to get papa's consent. You mustn't

believe all that Septimus says, you know. You may be sure of

this,--that you can trust papa's generosity." Then, before he landed

her at the door in Queen's Gate, he had promised that he would make

another journey to Lombard Street, with the express purpose of

obtaining Sir Thomas's sanction to the marriage,--either with or

without money.

"How are you again?" said Sir Thomas, when the Captain was for the

third time shown into the little back parlour. "Have you had another

trip to the continent since I saw you?" Sir Thomas was in a good

humour. Tom had gone upon his travels; Mr. Traffick had absolutely

taken himself out of the house; and the millions were accommodating

themselves comfortably.

"No, Sir Thomas; I haven't been abroad since then. I don't keep on

going abroad constantly in that way."

"And what can I do for you now?"

"Of course it's about your daughter. I want to have your permission

to consider ourselves engaged."

"I explained to you before that if you and Gertrude choose to marry

each other I shall not stand in your way."

"Thank you, Sir."

"I don't know that it is much to thank me for. Only that she made a

fool of herself by running away with you I should have preferred to

wait till some more sensible candidate had proposed himself for her

hand. I don't suppose you'll ever set the Thames on fire."

"I did very well in the army."

"It's a pity you did not remain there, and then, perhaps, you would

not have gone to Ostend with my daughter. As it is, there she is. I

think she might have done better with herself; but that is her fault.

She has made her bed and she must lie upon it."

"If we are to be married I hope you won't go on abusing me always,

Sir Thomas."

"That's as you behave. You didn't suppose that I should allow such a

piece of tomfoolery as that to be passed over without saying anything

about it! If you marry her and behave well to her I will--" Then he

paused.

"What will you do, Sir Thomas?"

"I'll say as little as possible about the Ostend journey."

"And as to money, Sir Thomas?"

"I think I have promised quite enough for you. You are not in a

position, Captain Batsby, to ask me as to money;--nor is she. You

shall marry her without a shilling,--or you shall not marry her at

all. Which is it to be? I must have an end put to all this. I won't

have you hanging about my house unless I know the reason why. Are you

two engaged to each other?"

"I suppose we are," said Batsby, lugubriously.

"Suppose is not enough."

"We are," said Batsby, courageously.

"Very well. Then, from this moment, Ostend shall be as though there

weren't such a seaport anywhere in Europe. I will never allude to the

place again,--unless, perhaps, you should come and stay with me too

long when I am particularly anxious to get rid of you. Now you had

better go and settle about the time and all that with Lady Tringle,

and tell her that you mean to come and dine to-morrow or next day,

or whenever it suits. Come and dine as often as you please, only do

not bring your wife to live with me pertinaciously when you're not

asked." All this Captain Batsby did not understand, but, as he left

Lombard Street, he made up his mind that of all the men he had ever

met, Sir Thomas Tringle, his future father-in-law, was the most

singular. "He's a better fellow than Traffick," said Sir Thomas to

himself when he was alone, "and as he has trusted me so far I'll not

throw him over."

The Captain now had no hesitation in taking himself to Queen's Gate.

As he was to be married he might as well make the best of such

delights as were to be found in the happy state of mutual affection.

"My dear, dearest Benjamin, I am so happy," said Lady Tringle,

dissolved in tears as she embraced her son-in-law that was to be.

"You will always be so dear to me!" In this she was quite true.

Traffick was not dear to her. She had at first thought much of Mr.

Traffick's position and noble blood, but, of late, she too had

become very tired of Mr. Traffick. Augusta took almost too much upon

herself, and Mr. Traffick's prolonged presence had been an eyesore.

Captain Batsby was softer, and would be much more pleasant as a

son-in-law. Even the journey to Ostend had had a good effect in

producing a certain humility.

"My dear Benjamin," said Augusta, "we shall always be so happy to

entertain you as a brother. Mr. Traffick has a great regard for

you, and said from the first that if you behaved as you ought to do

after that little journey he would arrange that everything should go

straight between you and papa. I was quite sure that you would come

forward at once as a man."

But Gertrude's delight was, of course, the strongest, and Gertrude's

welcoming the warmest,--as was proper. "When I think of it," she said

to him, "I don't know how I should ever have looked anybody in the

face again,--after our going away with our things mixed up in that

way."

"I am glad rather now that we didn't find the clergyman."

"Oh, certainly," said Gertrude. "I don't suppose anybody would have

given me anything. Now there'll be a regular wedding, and, of course,

there will be the presents."

"And, though nothing is to be settled, I suppose he will do

something."

"And it would have been very dreadful, not having a regular

trousseau," said Gertrude. "Mamma will, of course, do now just as she

did about Augusta. He allowed her Â£300! Only think;--if we had been

married at Ostend you would have had to buy things for me before

the first month was out. I hadn't more than half-a-dozen pair of

stockings with me."

"He can't but say now that we have done as he would have us," added

the Captain. "I do suppose that he will not be so unnatural as not to

give something when Augusta had Â£200,000."

"Indeed, she had not. But you'll see that sooner or later papa will

do for me quite as well as for Augusta." In this way they were happy

together, consoling each other for any little trouble which seemed

for a while to cloud their joys, and basking in the full sunshine of

their permitted engagement.

The day was soon fixed, but fixed not entirely in reference to the

wants of Gertrude and her wedding. Lucy had also to be married

from the same house, and the day for her marriage had already been

arranged. Sir Thomas had ordered that everything should be done for

Lucy as though she were a daughter of the house, and her wedding had

been arranged for the last week in May. When he heard that Ayala and

Colonel Stubbs were also engaged he was anxious that the two sisters

should be "buckled," as he called it, on the same occasion,--and he

magnanimously offered to take upon himself the entire expense of the

double arrangement, intimating that the people in Kingsbury Crescent

had hardly room enough for a wedding. But Ayala, acting probably

under Stalham influences, would not consent to this. Lady Albury, who

was now in London, was determined that Ayala's marriage should take

place from her own house; and, as Aunt Margaret and Uncle Reginald

had consented, that matter was considered as settled. But Sir Thomas,

having fixed his mind upon a double wedding, resolved that Gertrude

and Lucy should be the joint brides. Gertrude, who still suffered

perhaps a little in public estimation from the Ostend journey, was

glad enough to wipe out that stain as quickly as possible, and did

not therefore object to the arrangement. But to the Captain there was

something in it by which his more delicate feelings were revolted.

It was a matter of course that Ayala should be present at her

sister's wedding, and would naturally appear there in the guise

of a bridesmaid. She would also, now, act as a bridesmaid to

Gertrude,--her future position as Mrs. Colonel Stubbs giving her, as

was supposed, sufficient dignity for that honourable employment. But

Captain Batsby, not so very long ago, had appeared among the suitors

for Ayala's hand; and therefore, as he said to Gertrude, he felt a

little shamefaced about it. "What does that signify?" said Gertrude.

"If you say nothing to her about it, I'll be bound she'll say nothing

to you." And so it was on the day of the wedding. Ayala did not say

a word to Captain Batsby, nor did Captain Batsby say very much to

Ayala.

On the day before his marriage Captain Batsby paid a fourth visit to

Lombard Street in obedience to directions from Sir Thomas. "There,

my boy," said he, "though you and Gertrude did take a little journey

on the sly to a place which we will not mention, you shan't take her

altogether empty-handed." Then he explained certain arrangements

which he had made for endowing Gertrude with an allowance, which

under the circumstance the bridegroom could not but feel to be

liberal. It must be added, that, considering the shortness of time

allowed for getting them together, the amount of wedding presents

bestowed was considered by Gertrude to be satisfactory. As Lucy's

were exhibited at the same time the show was not altogether mean.

"No doubt I had twice as much as the two put together," said Mrs.

Traffick to Ayala up in her bedroom, "but then of course Lord

Boardotrade's rank would make people give."

CHAPTER LXIII.

AYALA AGAIN IN LONDON.

After that last walk in Gobblegoose Wood, after Lady Tringle's

unnecessary journey to Stalham on the Friday, and the last

day's hunting with Sir Harry's hounds,--which took place on the

Saturday,--Ayala again became anxious to go home. Her anxiety was in

its nature very different from that which had prompted her to leave

Stalham on an appointed day lest she should seem to be waiting for

the coming of Colonel Stubbs. "No; I don't want to run away from him

any more," she said to Lady Albury. "I want to be with him always,

and I hope he won't run away from me. But I've got to be somewhere

where I can think about it all for a little time."

"Can't you think about it here?"

"No;--one can never think about a thing where it has all taken place.

I must be up in my own little room in Kingsbury Crescent, and must

have Aunt Margaret's work around me,--so that I may realise what

is going to come. Not but what I mean to do a great deal of work

always."

"Mend his stockings?"

"Yes,--if he wears stockings. I know he doesn't. He always wears

socks. He told me so. Whatever he has, I'll mend,--or make if he

wants me.

'I can bake and I can brew,

And I can make an Irish stew;--

Wash a shirt, and iron it too.'"

Then, as she sang her little song, she clapped her hands together.

"Where did you get all your poetry?"

"He taught me that. We are not going to be fine people,--except

sometimes when we may be invited to Stalham. But I must go on

Thursday, Lady Albury. I came for a week, and I have been here ever

since the middle of February. It seems years since the old woman told

me I was perverse, and he said that she was right."

"Think how much you have done since that time."

"Yes, indeed. I very nearly destroyed myself;--didn't I?"

"Not very nearly."

"I thought I had. It was only when you showed me his letter on that

Sunday morning that I began to have any hopes. I wonder what Mr.

Greene preached about that morning. I didn't hear a word. I kept on

repeating what he said in the postscript."

"Was there a postscript?"

"Of course there was. Don't you remember?"

"No, indeed; not I."

"The letter would have been nothing without the postscript. He said

that Croppy was to come back for me. I knew he wouldn't say that

unless he meant to be good to me. And yet I wasn't quite sure of

it. I know it now; don't I? But I must go, Lady Albury. I ought to

let Aunt Margaret know all about it." Then it was settled that she

should go on the Thursday,--and on the Thursday she went. As it was

now considered quite wrong that she should travel by the railway

alone,--in dread, probably, lest the old lady should tell her again

how perverse she had been,--Colonel Stubbs accompanied her. It had

then been decided that the wedding must take place at Stalham, and

many messages were sent to Mr. and Mrs. Dosett assuring them that

they would be made very welcome on the occasion. "My own darling Lucy

will be away at that time with her own young man," said Ayala, in

answer to further invitations from Lady Albury.

"And so you've taken Colonel Stubbs at last," said her Aunt Margaret.

"He has taken me, aunt. I didn't take him."

"But you refused him ever so often."

"Well;--yes. I don't think I quite refused him."

"I thought you did."

"It was a dreadful muddle, Aunt Margaret;--but it has come right at

last, and we had better not talk about that part of it."

"I was so sure you didn't like him."

"Not like him? I always liked him better than anybody else in the

world that I ever saw."

"Dear me!"

"Of course I shouldn't say so if it hadn't come right at last. I may

say whatever I please about it now, and I declare that I always loved

him. A girl can be such a fool! I was, I know. I hope you are glad,

aunt."

"Of course I am. I am glad of anything that makes you happy. It

seemed such a pity that, when so many gentlemen were falling in love

with you all round, you couldn't like anybody."

"But I did like somebody, Aunt Margaret. And I did like the

best,--didn't I?" In answer to this Mrs. Dosett made no reply, having

always had an aunt's partiality for poor Tom, in spite of all his

chains.

Her uncle's congratulations were warmer even than her aunt's.

"My dear girl," he said, "I am rejoiced indeed that you should have

before you such a prospect of happiness. I always felt how sad for

you was your residence here, with two such homely persons as your

aunt and myself."

"I have always been happy with you," said Ayala,--perhaps straining

the truth a little in her anxiety to be courteous. "And I know," she

added, "how much Lucy and I have always owed you since poor papa's

death."

"Nevertheless, it has been dull for a young girl like you. Now you

will have your own duties, and if you endeavour to do them properly

the world will never be dull to you." And then there were some few

words about the wedding. "We have no feeling, my dear," said her

uncle, "except to do the best we can for you. We should have been

glad to see you married from here if that had suited. But, as this

lover of yours has grand friends of his own, I dare say their place

may be the better." Ayala could hardly explain to her uncle that she

had acceded to Lady Albury's proposal because, by doing so, she would

spare him the necessary expense of the wedding.

But Ayala's great delight was in meeting her sister. The two girls

had not seen each other since the engagement of either of them had

been ratified by their friends. The winter and spring, as passed by

Lucy at Merle Park, had been very unhappy for her. Things at Merle

Park had not been pleasant to any of the residents there, and Lucy

had certainly had her share of the unpleasantness. Her letters to

Ayala had not been triumphant when Aunt Emmeline had more than once

expressed her wish to be rid of her, and when the news reached her

that Uncle Tom and Hamel had failed to be gracious to each other.

Nor had Ayala written in a spirit of joy before she had been able to

recognise the Angel of Light in Jonathan Stubbs. But now they were to

meet after all their miseries, and each could be triumphant.

It was hard for them to know exactly how to begin. To Lucy, Isadore

Hamel was, at the present moment, the one hero walking the face of

this sublunary globe; and to Ayala, as we all know, Jonathan Stubbs

was an Angel of Light, and, therefore, more even than a hero. As each

spoke, the "He's" intended took a different personification; so that

to any one less interested than the young ladies themselves there

might be some confusion as to which "He" might at that moment be

under discussion. "It was bad," said Lucy, "when Uncle Tom told him

to sell those magnificent conceptions of his brain by auction!"

"I did feel for him certainly," said Ayala.

"And then when he was constrained to say that he would take me at

once without any preparation because Aunt Emmeline wanted me to go,

I don't suppose any man ever behaved more beautifully than he did."

"Yes indeed," said Ayala. And then she felt herself constrained to

change the subject by the introduction of an exaggerated superlative

in her sister's narrative. Hamel, no doubt, had acted beautifully,

but she was not disposed to agree that nothing could be more

beautiful. "Oh, Lucy," she said, "I was so miserable when he went

away after that walk in the wood. I thought he never would come back

again when I had behaved so badly. But he did. Was not that grand in

him?"

"I suppose he was very fond of you."

"I hope he was. I hope he is. But what should I have done if he had

not come back? No other man would have come back after that. You

never behaved unkindly to Isadore?"

"I think he would have come back a thousand times," said Lucy; "only

I cannot imagine that I should ever have given him the necessity of

coming back even a second. But then I had known him so much longer."

"It wasn't that I hadn't known him long enough," said Ayala. "I

seemed to know all about him almost all at once. I knew how good he

was, and how grand he was, long before I had left the Marchesa up in

London. But I think it astounded me that such a one as he should care

for me." And so it went on through an entire morning, each of the

sisters feeling that she was bound to listen with rapt attention to

the praises of the other's "him" if she wished to have an opportunity

of singing those of her own.

But Lucy's marriage was to come first by more than two months, and

therefore in that matter she was allowed precedence. And at her

marriage Ayala would be present, whereas with Ayala's Lucy would

have no personal concern. Though she did think that Uncle Tom had

been worse than any Vandal in that matter of selling her lover's

magnificent works, still she was ready to tell of his generosity. In

a manner of his own he had sent the money which Hamel had so greatly

needed, and had now come forward to provide, with a generous hand,

for the immediate necessities, and more than the necessities, of the

wedding. It was not only that she was to share the honours of the

two wedding-cakes with Gertrude, and that she was to be taken as a

bride from the gorgeous mansion in Queen's Gate, but that he had

provided for her bridal needs almost as fully as for those of his own

daughter. "Never mind what she'll be able to do afterwards," he said

to his wife, who ventured on some slight remonstrance with him as

to the unnecessary luxuries he was preparing for the wife of a poor

man. "She won't be the worse for having a dozen new petticoats in

her trunk, and, if she don't want to blow her nose with as many

handkerchiefs this year as Gertrude does, she'll be able to keep them

for next year." Then Aunt Emmeline obeyed without further hesitation

the orders which were given her.

Nor was his generosity confined to the niece who for the last twelve

months had been his property. Lucy was still living in Queen's Gate,

though at this time she spent much of each day in Kingsbury Crescent,

and on one occasion she brought with her a little note from Uncle

Tom. "Dear Ayala," said the little note,

As you are going to be married too, you, I suppose, will

want some new finery. I therefore send a cheque. Write

your name on the back of it, and give it to your uncle. He

will let you have the money as you want it.

Yours affectionately,

T. TRINGLE.

I hope your Colonel Stubbs will come and see me some day.

"You must go and see him," she said to her Colonel Stubbs, when he

called one day in Kingsbury Crescent. "Only for him I shouldn't have

any clothes to speak of at all, and I should have to be married in my

old brown morning frock."

"It would be just as good as any other for my purpose," said the

Colonel.

"But it wouldn't for mine, Sir. Fine feathers make fine birds, and

I mean to be as fine as Lady Albury's big peacock. So if you please

you'll go to Queen's Gate, and Lombard Street too, and show yourself.

Oh, Jonathan, I shall be so proud that everybody who knows me should

see what sort of a man has chosen to love me."

Then there was a joint visit paid by the two sisters to Mr. Hamel's

studio,--an expedition which was made somewhat on the sly. Aunt

Margaret in Kingsbury Crescent knew all about it, but Aunt

Emmeline was kept in the dark. Even now, though the marriage was

sanctioned and was so nearly at hand, Aunt Emmeline would not

have approved of such a visit. She still regarded the sculptor as

improper,--at any rate not sufficiently proper to be treated with

full familiarity,--partly on account of his father's manifest

improprieties, and partly because of his own relative poverty and

unauthorised position in the world. But Aunt Margaret was more

tolerant, and thought that the sister-in-law was entitled to visit

the workshop in which her sister's future bread was to be earned.

And then, starting from Kingsbury Crescent, they could go in a cab;

whereas any such proceeding emanating from Queen's Gate would have

required the carriage. There was a wickedness in this starting off in

a Hansom cab to call on an unmarried young man, doing it in a manner

successfully concealed from Aunt Emmeline, on which Ayala expatiated

with delight when she next saw Colonel Stubbs.

"You don't come and call on me," said the Colonel.

"What!--all the way down to Aldershot? I should like, but I don't

quite dare to do that."

The visit was very successful. Though it was expected, Hamel was

found in his artist's costume, with a blouse or loose linen tunic

fitted close round his throat, and fastened with a belt round his

waist. Lucy thought that in this apparel he was certainly as handsome

as could ever have been any Apollo,--and, so thinking, had contrived

her little plans in such a way that he should certainly be seen at

his best. To her thinking Colonel Stubbs was not a handsome man.

Hamel's hair was nearly black, and she preferred dark hair. Hamel's

features were regular, whereas the Colonel's hair was red, and he was

known for a large mouth and broad nose, which were not obliterated

though they were enlightened by the brightness of his eyes. "Yes,"

said Ayala to herself, as she looked at Hamel; "he is very good

looking, but nobody would take him for an Angel of Light."

"Ayala has come to see you at your work," said Lucy, as they entered

the studio.

"I am delighted to see her. Do you remember where we last met, Miss

Dormer?"

"Miss Dormer, indeed," said Ayala. "I am not going to call you Mr.

Hamel. Yes; it was high up among the seats of the Coliseum. There has

a great deal happened to us all since then."

"And I remember you at the bijou."

"I should think so. I knew then so well what was going to happen,"

said Ayala.

"What did you know?"

"That you and Lucy were to fall in love with each other."

"I had done my part of it already," said he.

"Hardly that, Isadore," said Lucy, "or you would not have passed me

in Kensington Gardens without speaking to me."

"But I did speak to you. It was then I learned where to find you."

"That was the second time. If I had remained away, as I ought to have

done, I suppose you never would have found me."

Ayala was then taken round to see all those magnificent groups and

figures which Sir Thomas would have disposed of at so many shillings

apiece under the auctioneer's hammer. "It was cruel,--was it not?"

said Lucy.

"He never saw them, you know," said Ayala, putting in a goodnatured

word for her uncle.

"If he had," said the sculptor, "he would have doubted the

auctioneer's getting anything. I have turned it all in my mind very

often since, and I think that Sir Thomas was right."

"I am sure he was wrong," said Lucy. "He is very goodnatured, and

nobody can be more grateful to another person than I am to him;--but

I won't agree that he was right about that."

"He never would have said it if he had seen them," again pleaded

Ayala.

"They will never fetch anything as they are," continued the sculptor,

"and I don't suppose that when I made them I thought they would. They

have served their purpose, and I sometimes feel inclined to break

them up and have them carted away."

"Isadore!" exclaimed Lucy.

"For what purpose?" asked Ayala.

"They were the lessons which I had to teach myself, and the play

which I gave to my imagination. Who wants a great figure of Beelzebub

like that in his house?"

"I call it magnificent," said Ayala.

"His name is Lucifer,--not Beelzebub," said Lucy. "You call him

Beelzebub merely to make little of him."

"It is difficult to do that, because he is nearly ten feet high. And

who wants a figure of Bacchus? The thing is, whether, having done

a figure of Bacchus, I may not be better able to do a likeness of

Mr. Jones, when he comes to sit for his bust at the request of his

admiring friends. For any further purpose that it will answer,

Bacchus might just as well be broken up and carted away in the

dust-cart." To this, however, the two girls expressed their vehement

opposition, and were of opinion that the time would come when

Beelzebub and Bacchus, transferred to marble, would occupy places

of honour in some well-proportioned hall built for the purpose of

receiving them. "I shall be quite content," said Hamel, "if the whole

family of the Jones's will have their busts done about the size

of life, and stand them up over their bookshelves. My period for

Beelzebubs has gone by." The visit, on the whole, was delightful.

Lucy was contented with the almost more than divine beauty of her

lover, and the two sisters, as they made their return journey to

Kingsbury Crescent in another Hansom, discussed questions of art in

a spirit that would have been delightful to any aspiring artist who

might have heard them.

Then came the wedding, of which some details were given at the close

of the last chapter, at which two brides who were very unlike to each

other were joined in matrimony to two bridegrooms as dissimilar. But

the Captain made himself gracious to the sculptor who was now to be

connected with him, and declared that he would always look upon Lucy

as a second sister to his dear Gertrude. And Gertrude was equally

gracious, protesting, when she was marshalled to walk up to the altar

first, that she did not like to go before her darling Lucy. But the

dimensions of the church admitted but of one couple at a time, and

Gertrude was compelled to go in advance. Colonel Stubbs was there

acting as best man to Hamel, while Lord John Battledore performed the

same service for Captain Batsby. Lord John was nearly broken-hearted

by the apostacy of a second chum, having heard that the girl whom

Frank Houston had not succeeded in marrying was now being taken by

Batsby without a shilling. "Somebody had to bottle-hold for him,"

said Lord John, defending himself at the club afterwards, "and I

didn't like to throw the fellow over, though he is such a fool!

And there was Stubbs, too," continued his Lordship, "going to take

the other girl without a shilling! There's Stubbs, and Houston,

and Batsby, all gone and drowned themselves. It's just the same as

though they'd drowned themselves!" Lord John was horrified,--nay,

disgusted,--by the folly of the world. Nevertheless, before the end

of the year, he was engaged to marry a very pretty girl as devoid of

fortune as our Ayala.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AYALA'S MARRIAGE.

Now we have come to our last chapter, and it may be doubted whether

any reader,--unless he be some one specially gifted with a genius

for statistics,--will have perceived how very many people have been

made happy by matrimony. If marriage be the proper ending for a

novel,--the only ending, as this writer takes it to be, which is not

discordant,--surely no tale was ever so properly ended, or with so

full a concord, as this one. Infinite trouble has been taken not only

in arranging these marriages but in joining like to like,--so that,

if not happiness, at any rate sympathetic unhappiness, might be

produced. Our two sisters will, it is trusted, be happy. They have

chosen men from their hearts, and have been chosen after the same

fashion. Those two other sisters have been so wedded that the one

will follow the idiosyncrasies of her husband, and the other bring

her husband to follow her idiosyncrasies, without much danger of

mutiny or revolt. As to Miss Docimer there must be room for fear. It

may be questioned whether she was not worthy of a better lot than

has been achieved for her by joining her fortunes to those of Frank

Houston. But I, speaking for myself, have my hopes of Frank Houston.

It is hard to rescue a man from the slough of luxury and idleness

combined. If anything can do it, it is a cradle filled annually. It

may be that he will yet learn that a broad back with a heavy weight

upon it gives the best chance of happiness here below. Of Lord John's

married prospects I could not say much as he came so very lately on

the scene; but even he may perhaps do something in the world when

he finds that his nursery is filling, For our special friend Tom

Tringle, no wife has been found. In making his effort,--which he

did manfully,--he certainly had not chosen the consort who would be

fit for him. He had not seen clearly, as had done his sisters and

cousins. He had fallen in love too young,--it being the nature of

young men to be much younger than young ladies, and, not knowing

himself, had been as might be a barn-door cock who had set his heart

upon some azure-plumaged, high-soaring lady of the woods. The lady

with the azure plumes had, too, her high-soaring tendencies, but she

was enabled by true insight to find the male who would be fit for

her. The barn-door cock, when we left him on board the steamer going

to New York, had not yet learned the nature of his own requirements.

The knowledge will come to him. There may be doubts as to Frank

Houston, but we think that there need be none as to Tom Tringle. The

proper wife will be forthcoming; and in future years, when he will

probably have a Glenbogie and a Merle Park of his own, he will own

that Fortune did well for him in making his cousin Ayala so stern to

his prayers.

But Ayala herself,--Ayala our pet heroine,--had not been yet married

when the last chapter was written, and now there remains a page or

two in which the reader must bid adieu to her as she stands at the

altar with her Angel of Light. She was at Stalham for a fortnight

before her marriage, in order, as Lady Albury said, that the buxom

ladysmaid might see that everything had been done rightly in

reference to the trousseau. "My dear," said Lady Albury, "it is

important, you know. I dare say you can bake and brew, because you

say so; but you don't know anything about clothes." Ayala, who by

this time was very intimate with her friend, pouted her lips, and

said that if "Jonathan did not like her things as she chose to have

them he might do the other thing." But Lady Albury had her way,

inducing Sir Harry to add something even to Uncle Tom's liberality,

and the buxom woman went about her task in such a fashion that

if Colonel Stubbs were not satisfied he must have been a very

unconscionable Colonel. He probably would know nothing about

it,--except that his bride in her bridal array had not looked so

well as in any other garments, which, I take it, is invariably the

case,--till at the end of the first year a glimmer of the truth as to

a lady's wardrobe would come upon him. "I told you there would be a

many new dresses before two years were over, Miss," said the buxom

female, as she spread all the frocks and all the worked petticoats

and all the collars and all the silk stockings and all the lace

handkerchiefs about the bedroom to be inspected by Lady Albury, Mrs.

Gosling, and one or two other friends, before they were finally

packed up.

Then came the day on which the Colonel was to reach Stalham, that day

being a Monday, whereas the wedding was to take place on Wednesday.

It was considered to be within the bounds of propriety that the

Colonel should sleep at Stalham on the Monday, under the same roof

with his bride; but on the Tuesday it was arranged that he should

satisfy the decorous feeling of the neighbourhood by removing himself

to the parsonage, which was distant about half-a-mile across the

park, and was contiguous to the church. Here lived Mr. Greene, the

bachelor curate, the rector of the parish being an invalid and absent

in Italy.

"I don't see why he is to be sent away after dinner to walk across

the park in the dark," said Ayala, when the matter was discussed

before the Colonel's coming.

"It is a law, my dear," said Lady Albury, "and has to be obeyed

whether you understand it or not, like other laws. Mr. Greene will be

with him, so that no one shall run away with him in the dark. Then he

will be able to go into church without dirtying his dress boots."

"But I thought there would be half-a-dozen carriages at least."

"But there won't be room in one of them for him. He is to be nobody

until he comes forth from the church as your husband. Then he is to

be everybody. That is the very theory of marriage."

\* \* \* \* \* \*

"I think we managed it all very well between us," said Lady Albury

afterwards, "but you really cannot guess the trouble we took."

"Why should there have been trouble?"

"Because you were such a perverse creature, as the old lady said.

I am not sure that you were not right, because a girl does so often

raise herself in her lover's estimation by refusing him half-a-dozen

times. But you were not up to that."

"Indeed I was not. I am sure I did not intend to give any trouble to

anybody."

"But you did. Only think of my going up to London to meet him, and of

him coming from Aldershot to meet me, simply that we might put our

heads together how to overcome the perversity of such a young woman

as you!" There then came a look almost of pain on Ayala's brow. "But

I do believe it was for the best. In this way he came to understand

how absolutely necessary you were to him."

"Am I necessary to him?"

"He thinks so."

"Oh, if I can only be necessary to him always! But there should have

been no going up to London. I should have rushed into his arms at

once."

"That would have been unusual."

"But so is he unusual," said Ayala.

It is probable that the Colonel did not enjoy his days at Stalham

before his marriage, except during the hour or two in which he was

allowed to take Ayala out for a last walk. Such days can hardly be

agreeable to the man of whom it is known by all around him that he

is on the eve of committing matrimony. There is always, on such

occasions, a feeling of weakness, as though the man had been subdued,

brought at length into a cage and tamed, so as to be made fit for

domestic purposes, and deprived of his ancient freedom amongst

the woods;--whereas the girl feels herself to be the triumphant

conqueror, who has successfully performed this great act of taming.

Such being the case, the man had perhaps better keep away till he is

forced to appear at the church-door.

Nevertheless our Colonel did enjoy his last walk. "Oh, yes," she

said, "of course we will go to the old wood. Where else? I am so glad

that poor fox went through Gobblegoose;--otherwise we should never

have gone there, and then who knows whether you and I would ever have

been friends again any more?"

"If one wood hadn't been there, I think another would have been

found."

"Ah, that's just it. You can know that you had a purpose, and perhaps

were determined to carry it out."

"Well, rather."

"But I couldn't be sure of that. I couldn't carry out my purpose,

even if I had one. I had to doubt, and to be unhappy, and to hate

myself, because I had been perverse. I declare, I do think you men

have so much the best of it. How glorious would it have been to be

able to walk straight up and say, Jonathan Stubbs, I love you better

than all the world. Will you be my husband?"

"But suppose the Jonathan Stubbs of the occasion were to decline the

honour. Where would you be then?"

"That would be disagreeable," said Ayala.

"It is disagreeable,--as you made me feel twice over."

"Oh, Jonathan, I am so sorry."

"Therefore it is possible that you may have the best of it."

\* \* \* \* \* \*

"And so you never will take another walk with Ayala Dormer?" she

said, as they were returning home.

"Never another," he replied.

"You cannot think how I regret it. Of course I am glad to become

your wife. I do not at all want to have it postponed. But there is

something so sweet in having a lover;--and you know that though I

shall have a husband I shall never have a lover again,--and I never

had one before, Jonathan. There has been very little of it. When a

thing has been so sweet it is sad to think that it must be gone for

ever!" Then she leaned upon him with both her hands, and looked up

at him and smiled, with her lips a little open,--as she knew that he

liked her to lean upon him and to look,--for she had caught by her

instinct the very nature of the man, and knew how to witch him with

her little charms. "Ah me! I wonder whether you'll like me to lean

upon you when a dozen years have gone by."

"That depends on how heavy you may be."

"I shall be a fat old woman, perhaps. But I shall lean upon

you,--always, always. What else shall I ever have to lean upon now?"

"What else should you want?"

"Nothing,--nothing,--nothing! I want nothing else. I wonder whether

there is anybody in all the world who has got so completely

everything that she ever dreamed of wanting as I have. But if you

could have been only my lover for a little longer--!" Then he assured

her that he would be her lover just the same, even though they were

husband and wife. Alas, no! There he had promised more than it is

given to a man to perform. Faith, honesty, steadiness of purpose,

joined to the warmest love and the truest heart, will not enable a

husband to maintain the sweetness of that aroma which has filled with

delight the senses of the girl who has leaned upon his arm as her

permitted lover.

"What a happy fellow you are!" said Mr. Greene, as, in the intimacy

of the moment, they walked across the park together.

"Why don't you get a wife for yourself?"

"Yes; with Â£120 a-year!"

"With a little money you might."

"I don't want to have to look for the money; and if I did I shouldn't

get it. I often think how very unfairly things are divided in this

world."

"That will all be made up in the next."

"Not if one covets one's neighbour's wife,--or even his ass," said

Mr. Greene.

On the return of the two lovers to the house from their walk there

were Mr. and Mrs. Dosett, who would much rather have stayed away had

they not been unwilling not to show their mark of affection to their

niece. I doubt whether they were very happy, but they were at any

rate received with every distinction. Sir Thomas and Aunt Emmeline

were asked, but they made some excuse. Sir Thomas knew very well that

he had nothing in common with Sir Harry Albury; and, as for Aunt

Emmeline, her one journey to Stalham had been enough for her. But Sir

Thomas was again very liberal, and sent down as his contribution to

the wedding presents the very necklace which Ayala had refused from

her cousin Tom. "Upon my word, your uncle is magnificent," said Lady

Albury, upon which the whole story was told to her. Lucy and her

husband were away on their tour, as were Gertrude and hers on theirs.

This was rather a comfort, as Captain Batsby's presence at the house

would have been a nuisance. But there was quite enough of guests to

make the wedding, as being a country wedding, very brilliant. Among

others, old Tony Tappett was there, mindful of the manner in which

Cranbury Brook had been ridden, and of Croppy's presence when the

hounds ran their fox into Dillsborough Wood. "I hope she be to ride

with us, off and on, Colonel," said Tony, when the ceremony had been

completed.

"Now and then, Tony, when we can get hold of Croppy."

"Because, when they come out like that, Colonel, it's a pity to lose

'em, just because they's got their husbands to attend to."

And Lord Rufford was there, with his wife, who on this occasion was

very pressing with her invitations. She had heard that Colonel Stubbs

was likely to rise high in his profession, and there were symptoms,

of which she was an excellent judge, that Mrs. Colonel Stubbs would

become known as a professional beauty. And Larry Twentyman was there,

who, being in the neighbourhood, was, to his great delight, invited

to the breakfast.

Thus, to her own intense satisfaction, Ayala was handed over to her

ANGEL OF LIGHT.

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